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Silos to Systems: Connecting Vulnerable Families to Work and Incomes to Prevent and End Homelessness

Paper prepared by Building Changes for “Silos to Systems:
Solutions for Vulnerable Families” meeting, October 6, 2011.

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Acknowledgments

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Building Changes is a non-profit organization that works with government entities, private philanthropy and community-based service providers to ensure that housing and vital public services are available to people experiencing homelessness in Washington State. Building Changes fosters collaborative partnerships and harnesses innovative, evidence-based strategies to collectively address barriers to housing stability and reduce homelessness.

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Preface

Two background papers—“Preserving and Strengthening Families and Children Experiencing Recurring Child Welfare System Encounters and Housing Crises” and “Connecting Vulnerable Families to Work and Incomes to Prevent and End Homelessness”—have been prepared for “Silos to Systems: Solutions for Vulnerable Families,” a meeting to be convened on October 6, 2011, at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The meeting will focus on new approaches and policy and systems change solutions that help to stabilize the most vulnerable unstably housed and homeless families.

The “Silos to Systems” meeting sponsors and co-hosts include:

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	Building Changes
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation	Corporation for Supportive Housing
Hilton Foundation	National Alliance to End Homelessness
Casey Family Programs	

The purpose of this meeting is to develop a shared agenda for policy and systems change that is informed by the most innovative thinking and promising practices in the fields of child welfare and income and work supports for vulnerable families, with particular attention to housing needs and solutions for the most vulnerable and homeless families with children. Among these families, there is a need for a differentiated response to varying forms of housing instability and homelessness as well as varying levels of vulnerability and service needs. Linking housing and service interventions helps to achieve the goals of all of the systems that provide housing, human services, training, and work supports for vulnerable parents and children.

At this critical time, policymakers, leaders in philanthropy, and their partners at the national, state, and local levels face the challenge of responding to extraordinarily high levels of need among vulnerable families, while constrained by revenue shortfalls and pressures to control public spending. Integrated strategies and new approaches across existing systems can provide the greatest impact from public and private investments, and produce better outcomes for vulnerable families and their communities.



These background papers seek to provide a knowledge base for a group of innovative leaders who have diverse roles. These leaders come from different systems in the public and private sectors, including representatives from federal, state, and local government, philanthropy, researchers, policy experts, and organizations that deliver housing and services to vulnerable families. The systems that impact the lives of vulnerable families often operate in silos, each with its own language, programs, and culture. To accompany these two papers, there is also a “Silos to Systems” Glossary, which explains some of the key terminology used in the background papers in an effort to provide a common language that can be used to support discussions during the meeting and collaborative efforts across systems.

In order to allow us all to start with a shared level of knowledge and understanding of the issues, it is anticipated that participants will come to the convening having read these papers.

Silos To Systems:

Connecting Vulnerable Families to Work and Incomes to Prevent and End Homelessness

The number of families with children who are living in poverty and at risk of homelessness or housing-related hardships has risen significantly during the recent economic downturn. More than one in five children live in poverty, and one in ten children live in families with incomes below half of the federal poverty level (FPL).¹ In 2010, 31 percent of American children were living in families where no parent had full-time, year-round employment and 11 percent of American children had at least one unemployed parent.²

Growing numbers of these vulnerable families have turned to the homeless assistance system for help. The number of homeless persons in families increased by 20 percent from 2007 to 2010, and families now make up a much larger share of the total sheltered homeless population than ever before.³ Many Americans are concerned about the number of people who are out of work and struggling to provide the basic necessities for their families—including a safe and stable place to live. A chorus of voices is asking policymakers to do more to help mothers and fathers in the most vulnerable families get and keep jobs so that families can provide homes that offer dignity, safety, and access to opportunity for their children.

Poverty, Housing Hardships, and Homelessness

Among vulnerable families,⁴ including families who are experiencing or are most-at-risk of homelessness and housing instability, poverty is nearly universal. Many of these families live in deep poverty with incomes at or below 50 percent of the FPL.⁵ The majority of these families do not live in subsidized housing, and many find themselves without enough income from work or benefits to pay rent, mortgage, or utility bills some months.

As a result, many parents and children who live in poverty face evictions or find themselves moving frequently, staying temporarily in hotels, or doubled-up with friends or family members, or seeking help from shelters and other programs

that serve homeless families. For families who become homeless, the experience is often part of a longer period of residential instability that includes multiple moves and short stays before—and sometimes after—families are literally homeless.

For most families who become homeless and enter shelters or live unsheltered in cars, abandoned buildings, or other places not meant for human habitation, these episodes of “literal homelessness” last only a few days or weeks. Half of all families who entered a homeless shelter over the last year stayed for less than one month. Families may move from unstable housing situations into homelessness, and may return to unstable living arrangements if they do not receive rental assistance or have access to affordable housing.

Many studies have found that there are few differences among families who experience homelessness and other extremely low-income families or families that enter the welfare-to-work system.⁶ Parents in these families (mostly single mothers) are unemployed or under-employed, sometimes working part-time in jobs that pay very low wages and offer little job security. Most parents, however, have some history of employment. The adults in families that experience homelessness have barriers to employment that are similar to those found among TANF applicants or participants in training and workforce development programs that are designed to serve low-income parents who are “hard to employ.” These barriers include low levels of education, low levels of skills, limited work experience, young children and unmet childcare needs, and challenges including mental health or substance use problems, and/or exposure to violence. (see BOX) While these barriers or problems may be significant for some families, they have little relationship to patterns of homelessness, including how long families stay in homeless shelters or programs.

Among homeless parents, other vulnerable parents, and young adults who are living in deep poverty, barriers to employment may include:^{6a}

- Low levels of education and literacy and the lack of high school diploma or GED.
- Limited work experience and low level of skills.
- Chronic health conditions and disabilities, including learning disabilities, mental health (particularly depression), and substance use problems.
- Need to care for a disabled child.
- Lack of reliable and affordable childcare or transportation.
- A criminal record.
- Poor credit record.



- The majority of families who become homeless are headed by a single mother who is caring for young children.⁷ Compared to other low-income and vulnerable families, those who experience homelessness tend to have younger adults and smaller household size, their incomes are even lower, and they have fewer resources and supports. Homeless families are less likely than other poor families to include another adult in the household and less likely to be receiving housing subsidies or other forms of welfare benefits.
- Family housing crises are often invisible. The number of families who are doubled-up is between two to three times the number of families who are literally homeless (in shelter or transitional housing or unsheltered and living in a place not meant for human habitation).⁸
- Long periods of family homelessness are not the norm. A relatively small number of families stay longer in homeless shelters and transitional housing programs or have repeated episodes of homelessness and housing instability, but most families who enter shelters have relatively short stays.⁹ Families with relatively long stays in the homeless assistance system are not more likely to have the most serious problems. In fact, personal characteristics do not accurately predict how long families remain in shelters or transitional housing programs, and some transitional housing programs are fairly selective about serving relatively “low-risk” families who are not using alcohol or drugs and do not have serious mental health problems.

Community leaders in some parts of the country, including policymakers and funders, are re-examining the role of transitional housing programs, which often cost more than a permanent housing subsidy, and taking steps to re-focus these programs to serve families with more complex service needs or re-allocating these resources to provide other forms of housing assistance to families.

New approaches are helping some families rebound more quickly from homelessness. Recently, many communities have implemented rapid re-housing program models that emphasize moving some families out of homeless shelters as quickly as possible with time-limited assistance to pay rent and move-in costs for apartments, which are usually rented from private landlords. Support services are also temporary and focus on helping families get stabilized in housing and make connections to community resources and employment opportunities, so that families will be able to maintain their housing after program services and financial assistance end.

People who work in programs serving homeless families often describe the impacts of generational poverty, and the challenges facing parents who grew up in poverty and may have experienced housing instability, homelessness, or placement in foster care before becoming a parent. The implications of generational poverty and other adverse childhood experiences are complex and may include shame, stigma, few role models or connections to people who have steady employment, limited support from family members who can help out in an emergency, and feelings of hopelessness or discouragement about the value of education or the potential for success in school.

What do we know about the connections between poverty, income and employment/workforce development and patterns of homelessness and housing instability?

Efforts to prevent and end family homelessness cannot succeed without addressing the needs of female-headed families, but also need to include other types of vulnerable families. Families headed by single mothers are particularly likely to experience poverty and housing-related hardships—47 percent of all children, and 58 percent of children under age six, who live in female-headed households, live in families with incomes below the poverty level.¹⁰ There are diverse characteristics, strengths, and needs among vulnerable families, and these families also include single fathers, two-parent families, and families that include a grandparent, other extended family member, partner or caregiver, or a teen parent living independently.

Much like what we know from research about poverty and welfare, there are high levels of turnover among families who experience homelessness. Similarly, some families experience relatively short spells of poverty—which may be a result of job loss or a change in family composition—while others live in poverty for years.¹¹ Among families with incomes below the poverty level, a small minority will experience homelessness in any one year, but among families who continue to live in deep poverty, a significant number will experience homelessness or housing-related hardships at some time over a period of three to five years, often during the first few years of a child’s life.

- Among children living in poverty, 1 in 38 entered a shelter or transitional housing program for homeless families during a one-year period.¹²
- One study of TANF applicants in Milwaukee found that about one in four families became homeless at some time during three waves of interviews conducted over three years, but nearly all of these families were not homeless during more than one year. Almost half of all families in the study “doubled-up” at some time, while most (79 percent) reported that they did not have enough money to pay rent or mortgage, and almost half had utilities shut off at some time during the study.¹³

Work, Income and Skill-Building

Because housing status is not generally collected in workforce development programs supported by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) or other federal programs, and very rarely considered in program evaluations, we do not have good information about how homelessness or housing instability impacts levels of engagement, successful job placement, job retention or advancement, or other important outcomes.

Although national data is not available on sources of income, rates of employment, or enrollment in school or training for families who enter shelters or other homeless assistance programs, we know that a significant number of families who enter the homeless assistance system do not have income from TANF or employment. In part, this is a reflection of larger trends, with fewer families receiving assistance from some programs that make up the safety net for low-income parents and children.



- Nationally, TANF assists only 28 families for every 100 families living in poverty.¹⁴ State maximum TANF benefit levels vary, but in 2010 (before some of the most recent reductions were enacted) maximum benefits were below half of the FPL in all states, and below 30 percent FPL in over half of states.¹⁵
- In data collected by HUD from programs funded through the Supportive Housing Program (SHP), which is often used to pay for support services and transitional housing for homeless families, fewer than one in five families received TANF cash assistance at program entry or exit¹⁶ and more than one in four families had no financial resources when they entered these programs.
- Among homeless families headed by mothers with substance abuse and/or mental health problems who were served in programs that received grant funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Substance and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), about half received cash benefits from TANF or General Assistance, while 73 percent received food stamps. Only 17 percent of families were currently employed at baseline, and 32 percent of all families reported that food stamps were the only source of income or benefits they received.¹⁷
- Among homeless families entering supportive housing programs as part of Building Changes' Washington Families Fund (WFF) High-Needs Family (HNF) model,¹⁸ only 12 percent of parents were currently employed at baseline, while 96 percent had been employed at some time. Median income for high-needs families was \$453 in the previous month. Among families who were served by the WFF Moderate Needs Family (MNF) model, median monthly income at intake was \$987,¹⁹ and 23 percent of the parents were employed. Approximately two-thirds of the families in both groups received TANF cash assistance at intake.

A significant number of low-income single parents participate in post-secondary education and job training programs and are likely to be at risk of homelessness or a housing crisis that can make it difficult to complete education and training.

- More than a third of African American single female undergraduates nationwide are unmarried parents. Unmarried parents are more likely to enroll in short-term, vocational, post-secondary education programs. Most are working, but they earn less than \$10,000 a year; 38 percent earn less than \$5,000 a year. Working while in school can make it difficult to succeed academically and may reduce a student's eligibility for financial aid.²⁰
- A recent HUD study also provides some important clues about the overlap between family homelessness and a parent's participation in post-secondary education or training. As many as one in five parents in transitional housing programs included in the study completed a post-secondary education or training program while they were staying in transitional housing.²¹
- Among families participating in programs based on the WFF HNF model, 16 percent of parents were enrolled in GED, post-secondary education, or vocational training programs at baseline. Among the parents participating in programs based on the WFF MNF model, 25 percent were participating in school, job training, or job-search programs at intake.²²

What do we need to do to help vulnerable families increase employment and incomes? What works? What seems to be most promising?

In summary, many adults in vulnerable, unstably housed families struggle to take steps out of poverty and toward greater stability and access to opportunity for themselves and their children. Programs serving these families frequently have not worked in alignment to offer cohesive solutions to families' barriers and needs. And yet there are some examples of effective programs that address the full range of needs facing vulnerable families. Some of the most promising programs and cross-system partnerships work to package services, housing, and workforce development to support families to not only stabilize their lives but improve them over the long-term.

There is strong evidence about the effectiveness of housing subsidies in preventing returns to homelessness among families who receive assistance through HUD's Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) Program or similar types of housing subsidies. These subsidies provide many families with much-needed assistance and stability. Yet these programs currently reach only about one out of every four eligible households. While efforts to increase the supply of affordable housing are critical, to achieve the goal of preventing and ending family homelessness, it will also be essential to invest in strategies that increase employment opportunities and incomes so that more families can afford to pay for housing costs. Programs and partnerships that align housing assistance with services that build skills and help people find and keep jobs are needed. Systems and strategies that are better aligned can have the effect of not only ending homelessness for these families today, but also keeping them, or their children, from returning to homelessness in the future.

1. Pay attention to BOTH housing and income/workforce development when serving extremely low-income parents and use data to get the whole picture.

Better data is needed to more fully understand the connections and overlaps among work, training, benefits and work supports, housing instability, and homelessness among parents who are caring for young children. We need to ask questions when people enter and participate in workforce and housing programs, and continue by collecting and analyzing data across programs and systems.

- Workforce systems should begin tracking the housing status of their participants. Workforce development, job training, and post-secondary education programs that serve parents with the lowest incomes (particularly those with incomes below 50–100 percent of the FPL), welfare-to-work programs, and agencies that administer SNAP benefits (food stamps) should ask questions and analyze data regarding participants' housing status, including homelessness and other indicators of housing vulnerability. These programs should have the capacity to identify participants who have frequent and involuntary moves and gather information from all



participants about current housing status, including identification of those who are staying in shelters or transitional housing programs, doubled-up in a temporary living situation, living in hotels or motels, facing eviction or utility shutoff, or recently homeless and receiving temporary housing assistance.

- Homeless housing and services systems should collect better data from their participants about income and work. For families who are seeking or receiving help from the homeless assistance system, programs should ask questions and analyze data regarding income, sources of income (including TANF and other benefits), employment, and participation in post-secondary education and workforce development programs. This data should be analyzed and reported at the community and national levels.²³

The use of common data elements and shared approaches to examining data collected upon entry and during ongoing participation in programs offered by each system will help to accomplish several goals.

- Identify shared populations. For example: parents enrolled in post-secondary education or workforce development programs who become homeless or experience a housing crisis.
- Identify gaps or limits of current programs and unmet needs. For example: how many of the families who enter the homeless assistance system without any income are eligible for TANF cash assistance but not enrolled? Are homeless families receiving cash assistance at levels that do not cover housing costs?
- Better understand the needs of homeless and vulnerable families for workforce development, work supports, and/or cash assistance to boost their incomes. For example: Do most families who are homeless or experiencing a housing crisis need help to enter or re-enter the job market, or to get better jobs? Are parents who are working or participating in education or training more likely to have short stays in homeless assistance system or longer stays? Do the high levels of enrollment in post-secondary programs among residents in transitional housing programs suggest a more efficient and less expensive use of this housing model or other types of housing assistance as a way to keep “student parents” stably housed while they attain important educational and training goals?
- Recognize the impact of housing vulnerability and homelessness on participation and success in education and workforce development programs.
- Recognize opportunities to align resources across systems.

Collecting and examining data on housing vulnerability and its connection to participation may also help to push education and workforce development programs to make changes in practice to recognize and mitigate risks to housing stability when planning for and providing wraparound supports. Attending to the housing status of vulnerable families may facilitate continued participation and success for low-income parents who are enrolled in post-secondary education, welfare-to-work, and workforce development programs.

2. Use the most effective tools and strategies to connect parents to employment opportunities and better incomes.

Efforts to prevent and end family homelessness and improve housing stability for vulnerable families need to use workforce development strategies that have demonstrated effectiveness or shown significant promise in increasing incomes for low-income single parents and other unemployed adults with barriers to employment. While most parents in families that become homeless are unemployed, a job that offers low wages or limited hours and no job security is not enough to protect a family from housing-related hardships.

Fifteen years after the enactment of welfare reform, there is a growing body of evidence and lessons learned about what works to increase incomes among parents who often have low levels of education and skills and other barriers to self-sufficiency. Yet federal incentives for welfare caseload reductions and work participation requirements have pushed many states to implement approaches that have not proven to be the most effective at increasing incomes and moving families out of poverty. For example, TANF programs have focused on “work first” approaches that mandate rapid entry into the labor force for many parents. Findings from rigorous evaluations have shown that these types of programs often result in increased employment but little or no increase in family incomes because gains from earnings are offset by reduced benefits and higher taxes and work-related expenses.²⁴ Program rules and eligibility criteria often create “cliffs” that result in the loss of cash assistance or other essential work supports such as subsidized childcare, leaving families no better off (and sometimes worse off) when they have small increases in earnings from work.

Meanwhile, many workforce development programs, including the “One-Stop” programs that receive federal funding under WIA, are not tailored to the needs of parents or other adults who have the lowest incomes and face the most significant barriers to employment. WIA performance standards do not create incentives for programs to offer the level of support or types of assistance that would meet these needs. As a result, the services or employment opportunities that are available may not be within reach for adults in the most vulnerable families.

Instead of relying only on “work first” approaches that have characterized many welfare-to-work programs, experts recommend using a range of approaches that match a range of needs.²⁵ Some of the most promising of these are described here. Generally, these approaches offer some combination of work opportunities, training or coaching, and wraparound support services to address barriers to participation and success.

Transitional jobs²⁶ are usually subsidized and time-limited employment opportunities for people who have barriers to employment in the job market. Transitional jobs provide opportunities for participants to learn and get paid while gaining experience with both the customs and routines of work (“soft skills”) and the specific skills needed to perform a job. Jobs may be in the public or non-profit sector, or in “social enterprises,” which are social-purpose businesses created with the goal of employing people with barriers to employment while providing goods or services to customers and generating income to pay for wages and other costs.²⁷ Workers in transitional jobs build confidence and establish an employment record,



job skills, and references that can help with obtaining permanent employment. Employment-focused support services assist with life skills and problem-solving to build skills needed for work success and address family support needs. Peer support may be provided through work crews, mentoring, or support groups.

Transitional jobs programs can be funded through TANF, and several states implemented or expanded transitional jobs programs with TANF Emergency Fund resources that were provided by the 2009 Recovery Act.²⁸ This funding expired on September 30, 2010. The American Jobs Act, proposed by President Obama in September 2011, would create the *Pathways Back to Work Fund* to build upon the successes of these subsidized transitional jobs programs.

Evaluations of transitional jobs programs have shown significant increases in employment, with the greatest impacts for participants who had little or no recent work experience and long-term welfare dependency, and reductions in recidivism for a prison re-entry population. Transitional jobs programs have demonstrated greater impacts on employment than program models that combine assessment, services to address barriers, and help from job coaches or job developers to find jobs. However, poverty rates for workers often remain high because reductions in welfare assistance offset increased earnings.²⁹

Sector partnerships³⁰ engage multiple employers and other industry leaders in the development of industry-specific training programs linked to employment opportunities and workforce needs in a sector. Well-implemented, sector-focused training programs use a range of strategies to organize employers, provide training to help workers develop the range of skills needed for on-the-job success—including basic skills instruction aligned with technical skills needed for job requirements—and provide access to higher-skilled jobs. An evaluation³¹ found that participants in sector-focused training programs earned significantly more than control group members. Most earnings gains took place in the second year, when earnings were 29 percent higher for participants in the sector-focused training programs, and they were working more hours, earning higher hourly wages, and more likely to be working consistently than control group members.

Career pathways and related strategies encourage and support the combination of earning and learning by integrating and aligning basic education with occupational training and higher education that leads to attainment of a credential. Key practices may include integrating instruction in basic skills and work readiness with industry-specific skills training, and providing on-the-job training and internship opportunities. Career pathways are designed to ease transitions between programs and across institutions to provide pathways to meaningful credentials at successively higher levels, particularly for “non-traditional” students who are working and have family responsibilities. The focus is often on “middle-skill” jobs in fields such as health care, accounting, computers, office work, or culinary arts, based on a growing recognition that some post-secondary education or training is essential to jobs that pay enough to support a family.

Sector strategies and career pathways must be diverse enough to offer a range of options that match the interests and strengths of parents in vulnerable families.

Education and employment navigators are specialized case managers who facilitate connections between the homeless assistance and post-secondary education or workforce systems, or expand the capacity of those systems to assist people who might otherwise face barriers to successful participation because of disability or other challenges. For example, several organizations that receive support from Building Changes' Washington Families Fund have established employment navigators who work with families who are receiving housing assistance. These navigators offer individualized and flexible support to help parents use the services available from WorkSource locations (the One-Stop Career Center for WIA-funded employment services), WorkFirst services for TANF recipients, and other options for education and training, jobs, and workforce development services. Navigators are often mobile, meeting with clients in their housing to facilitate access and success for people with disabilities or other complex barriers. They also may be based in community colleges or One-Stop Career Centers. Navigators are familiar with the resources and requirements of workforce development and training programs, as well as financial aid or other work supports that can support client participation. They are sensitive to challenges that may be related to disability, trauma, or the experience of generational poverty. They can offer individualized assessment and planning, coaching and service coordination, facilitating connections to counseling, mentorship, and other services as needed to address personal challenges and facilitate retention, while also helping clients to understand and meet the rules and expectations of training programs or employers.

Important program elements included with each of these strategies and program models anticipate, recognize, and provide support to help vulnerable parents participate and succeed. These may include:

- **Wraparound services and supports to address barriers** to success and stability. Ideally these are *integrated* into work and training programs rather than provided through referrals to services that may not be well-aligned with the schedules and expectations of those programs. For many parents in vulnerable families, the most critical services and supports include:
 - Services that connect participants to homelessness prevention and housing assistance.
 - Help to get and keep benefits and earnings, including work supports such as work-related tax credits and childcare subsidies, SNAP (food stamps), and other benefits.
 - Access to reliable childcare and transportation.
 - Help to level the playing field and remove barriers by obtaining or restoring licenses, providing work-appropriate clothing, expunging criminal records, removing tattoos, etc.
 - Trouble-shooting family and wellness challenges and helping to address situations that threaten ongoing employment or participation in training, including housing-related hardships, family violence, and substance abuse.
 - Peer support, including mentoring from experienced participants or alumni.



- Job placement, job coaching, and job-retention assistance.
- Support to facilitate connections to better jobs and opportunities to build toward a better future through access to additional training and credentials.
- **Opportunities to try again (without starting over)** if a job doesn't work or if a participant isn't initially successful. Instead of terminating participants who are unsuccessful in a job or unable to complete a training program, flexible approaches anticipate that personal challenges or family problems may result in setbacks or gaps in participation, in spite of the best efforts of retention support services. Programs that are effective for adults who have multiple barriers to employment often support participants to get back on track with classes or training programs, or use feedback about work performance to learn from a job that didn't pan out. Some programs may provide opportunities for participants to learn from mistakes and correct behaviors, or offer progressive reprimands, while also gradually increasing expectations for skills and behaviors. Other programs may allow participants to return multiple times, facilitate transferring credits for training or education completed in multiple settings, or provide flexibility in the length of time participants are engaged in training or transitional jobs.
- **Incentives and work supports to help “make work pay”³²** and fill the gap between low earnings and costs for housing and caring for a family. Even when parents are successful in moving from welfare to work, their incomes often do not increase enough to protect their families from poverty and housing instability. Even before the recession, participants in many welfare-to-work programs had high rates of job loss, and income from employment was often largely offset by reductions in benefits, leaving participants with little or no net increase in family income. Work supports, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and childcare assistance, or access to benefits to help pay for food or utilities, are important but not enough for many families. There is promising evidence that earnings supplements or conditional cash assistance can encourage employment or participation in education and training, while increasing incomes for vulnerable families. Well-implemented programs ensure that people understand how the programs work so that benefits provide meaningful incentives. Earnings supplements or work incentives may be offered in the form of monthly payments, or structured to reward progress in educational or training programs or participation in services (such as tutoring support) that are associated with successful participation. For families who are receiving housing assistance, including those living in public housing or other subsidized housing, changes in rules that determine family rent contributions can help to “make work pay” by allowing families to keep a larger portion of increased earnings or setting aside a portion of rent payments in an escrow fund that can be used to pay for education or other costs associated with achieving goals for family self-sufficiency.³³

3. Align housing and workforce interventions and coordinate with ongoing supports to facilitate access and success for parents who experience or are most at risk of homelessness.

To make the best use of limited resources and respond to the needs of a growing number of vulnerable families, it is necessary to reduce the fragmentation and gaps that currently exist between the programs and systems that respond to homelessness and housing crises and those that work to build skills and connect people to jobs and better incomes.

One approach is to “*vocationalize*” housing and service interventions for vulnerable families by embedding the expectations, practice, and service delivery of employment in all facets of housing program operations and in the roles of service providers. *Vocationalizing* means establishing a culture that expects and supports work within programs and services, training staff, and designing programs to prepare and support homeless and vulnerable families while they participate in the training, education, and employment offered within the workforce system. *Vocationalizing* offers great potential to better align housing services with the workforce system by identifying the unique strengths and expertise that housing services bring to services for vulnerable families and by increasing their participation in training, education, and employment.

There is a critical need and there are significant opportunities to create more effective linkages, particularly between rapid re-housing programs and other time-limited housing assistance for homeless families and the systems and programs that offer cash assistance, post-secondary education, and workforce development that help families increase incomes and maintain housing. There are several ways this can be accomplished:

- Create linkages at the systems level instead of expecting families in crisis to put the pieces together as a condition for receiving assistance.
- Prioritize and/or streamline access to training and work supports for families who are receiving time-limited housing assistance.
- Use navigators to help families access the help they need to participate and succeed in training and work.
- Increase the capacity of organizations or public agencies to provide both housing assistance and workforce development/work supports, with funding from both the homeless assistance and mainstream workforce systems.³⁴

It is also critical to recognize the housing hardships and risks facing vulnerable families and provide assistance to prevent homelessness. Temporary rental assistance should be made available as one of the wraparound supports provided in conjunction with other work supports and benefits available in welfare-to-work, post-secondary education, and workforce development programs that are designed to serve parents with the lowest incomes and those with low skills or other barriers to employment. Other wraparound supports that should be coordinated with rental assistance include student financial aid and other sources of funding available to promote student success (e.g., funds available for other family needs such as childcare or transportation). These programs can be most effective if they establish stronger linkages to homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing programs.



4. Provide a safety net for families with the greatest barriers to self-sufficiency, including complex and disabling health conditions.

Among vulnerable families with the lowest incomes, including those who are receiving TANF cash assistance and those who have reached time limits for assistance, rates of chronic health problems and untreated or poorly managed mental health conditions are high.³⁵ Depression or anxiety disorders are more prevalent among parents than psychotic disorders, and, in many communities, there are few services available from the publicly funded mental health system to address the needs of adults who are not severely mentally ill, making it difficult for parents to access care or document problems that may create barriers to employment. Other barriers may include substance use problems and the need to care for a child or other family member who has a significant health problem or disability. TANF participants with substance use problems have high rates of co-occurring problems and are significantly more likely than other TANF families to experience a housing crisis.³⁶

Current TANF work participation rules impose significant administrative burdens on states and welfare-to-work programs while offering very little flexibility regarding the activities that can satisfy work participation requirements. Some of the most promising “mixed strategies” that combine work with education and training and/or support services to alleviate barriers do not meet rigid work participation requirements. Much greater flexibility is needed to allow and encourage participation in effective services that address and reduce barriers to employment, including changes that would allow more weeks of services, such as mental health or substance use counseling, and stronger incentives to combine work and activities that alleviate barriers.

Some parents are unable to work; for others, part-time work may be the most realistic expectation. Access to disability benefits or other forms of ongoing financial assistance and accommodations may be needed for these families. Parents with disabling health conditions who are unable to work need assistance to establish eligibility for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI). Promising strategies for improving access to disability benefits have been established through the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) Initiative, which has primarily served single adults who are homeless. The training, procedures, programs and systems partnerships that have been established by SOAR should be adapted and expanded to reach vulnerable families and coupled with meaningful work incentives, access to vocational rehabilitation (VR) supports, and opportunities for supported employment.

5. Invest enough to make an impact on incomes and employment for vulnerable families.

There is significant evidence that modest investments in workforce development or poverty reduction produce modest results. Funding levels for cash assistance, welfare-to-work programs, and workforce development have not grown to respond to either rising levels of need among low-income families during the recession and current economic crisis, or increasing demands for a work-

force with skills that match available employment opportunities. Given the very large number of families facing unemployment or work that doesn't provide consistent and adequate earnings to pay for housing, there is clearly a need for greater investments in workforce development and work supports with a focus on protecting and expanding opportunities for the most vulnerable families. In an environment in which many Americans have experienced prolonged periods of unemployment, there is a critical need to re-think time limits, rigid rules, and incentives attached to federal funding, and program models that do not fit the needs of those who have the most complex barriers to employment, as well as others who could benefit from more sustained support for job search, training, subsidized employment, and other interventions that can lead to better jobs with opportunities for greater stability, wage progression, and career advancement .

Now is the time to make a substantial investment in putting Americans back to work—and making sure that these efforts reach and expand opportunity for parents with young children. With a focus on the most vulnerable families, community leaders, funders and policymakers should commit themselves to achieving bold but attainable goals such as reducing the number of children who are living in deep poverty and at risk of homelessness.

Where are the most significant opportunities for innovation?

There are several significant opportunities to learn more about what works, through rigorous evaluations. There are also opportunities to expand and replicate promising approaches to increasing opportunities and incomes for parents in vulnerable families, with support from coordinated investments by philanthropy and federal programs. Many of these initiatives do not include an explicit focus on families who experience or are at risk of homelessness, but the families, students, and workers they serve are likely to include many who are at risk of housing crises, and it may not be too late to include an explicit focus on housing stability in the design of interventions and data collection. A few of these opportunities are highlighted here.

- Two large-scale federal research projects focused on transitional jobs and other forms of subsidized employment have been launched by the HHS and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). The first³⁷ focuses on programs serving parents who are directly or indirectly connected to TANF. The second concentrates on programs targeting disadvantaged noncustodial parents and/or former prisoners.³⁸
- Several major philanthropic investments and partnerships are focused on strengthening post-secondary education and skill-development systems to “widen the doorways of opportunity.”³⁹ These initiatives include a focus on creating and strengthening academic pathways for at-risk students and improving success rates for students in community college and other post-secondary education and training programs, particularly for students of color and low-income, “non-traditional” students. Investments focus on reforms in policies and practices at several levels, including instructional



techniques and models, colleges and college systems, financial aid, data systems, and state-funding models and incentives. Philanthropic leaders in this area include the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Lumina Foundation for Education, and the Ford, Charles Stewart Mott, Joyce, and Annie E. Casey foundations.

- The Working Poor Families Project—supported by the Annie E. Casey, Ford, Joyce, and Mott foundations—is a national initiative that partners with state non-profit organizations to focus on strengthening state policies for America’s working poor families.⁴⁰ The initiative includes a focus on strengthening policies that expand opportunities for higher-skill levels, better-paying jobs, and streamlining the delivery of work supports and benefits to improve access for families who don’t earn enough from low-wage jobs to meet family needs.
- The Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency (ISIS) project, sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the HHS,⁴¹ is a major, “next-generation” evaluation of promising programs and policies for improving employment and self-sufficiency outcomes for low-income families. The project will use a rigorous design to test promising strategies in nine sites across the country using a Career Pathways framework, including I-BEST (a program model developed in Washington State). In King County, Washington, a partnership of public, private, and philanthropic organizations known as Skill Up Washington is working to help low-income working adults participate in and complete post-secondary education and other forms of “second-chance” education and training services and to strengthen the quality and effectiveness of those programs to improve outcomes. Skill Up Washington is one of several regional initiatives supported by the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, a partnership of nearly 300 funders working to bring to national scale, and to evaluate, new ways to prepare workers who don’t have the needed skills for careers that can support themselves and their families.⁴²

Opportunities for policy reform and systems change

The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness calls for increasing meaningful and sustainable employment for people experiencing or most at risk of homelessness and improving access to mainstream programs and services to reduce people’s financial vulnerability to homelessness. In the coming months (and beyond), there are several opportunities for significant policy reform and systems change to achieve these objectives. A few of these are highlighted below.

American Jobs Act

In September 2011, President Obama proposed a multi-faceted strategy to expand employment opportunities and put people back to work. Included in the proposal are provisions that are targeted to the needs of low-income families, including

support for a subsidized jobs program that builds on the models implemented in many states when funding was available through the TANF Emergency Fund. The proposed *Pathways Back to Opportunity Fund* would provide state funding for similar programs, and support local efforts to implement promising training and work-based strategies, such as sector-based training programs, career academies, and other models that link immediate work opportunities, skills training, and other supports. While the outlook for Congressional action on this proposal is uncertain, there are opportunities to ensure that federal policymakers recognize and address the needs of the nation's most vulnerable families as they take action to help Americans get back to work.

WIA reauthorization and/or systems change

WIA was due to be reauthorized nearly a decade ago, and draft legislation has been developed by the U.S. Senate. Whether through the enactment of reauthorizing legislation, or through other policy reforms and systems changes supported by the federal government and local leaders within the framework of current law, there are opportunities to:

- Strengthen and expand promising approaches that include transitional jobs, sector partnerships, *career* pathways, and navigators.
- Remove disincentives in performance measures to encourage services to people with barriers to employment.
- Recognize homelessness and housing instability as a barrier to participation and success.
- Strengthen cross-system partnerships to better engage and serve vulnerable families.

TANF reauthorization and/or systems change

Fifteen years since the enactment of welfare reform, there is growing concern that TANF has become less effective in providing a safety net for the most vulnerable families or offering temporary assistance to families who have lost jobs and income during the economic downturn. TANF's block grant structure has limited the program's capacity to respond to increasing numbers of unemployed parents. Reauthorization of the federal law that governs the program appears unlikely at this time, but there may be opportunities to provide greater flexibility in the application of work requirements, and stronger support for parents to combine work and education or training, including changes that would allow parents more time to participate in post-secondary education and job training. A renewed investment in emergency funding for transitional jobs and assistance to states seeking to maintain benefits in the face of rising caseloads and declining revenues would reduce hardship for families and provide a pathway to opportunity for many. Stronger partnerships between TANF agencies and local welfare-to-work programs and the family homeless assistance system could better align the resources available to assist vulnerable families.



Other opportunities include:

- Implementation of the HEARTH Act will create opportunities and incentives for communities to review the performance of the current homeless assistance programs and re-focus or realign programs and investments to better achieve the goals of preventing and ending homelessness and shortening stays in the homeless assistance system for vulnerable families.
- Some Public Housing Authorities (particularly those with Moving to Work status) have flexibility to adjust rules and approaches to providing housing assistance and/or rental subsidies to strengthen incentives and make work pay. Work incentives and rent rules that make work pay should be more widely available to vulnerable families.
- Other policy changes could remove obstacles to providing affordable housing or rental assistance to extremely low-income parents who are pursuing post-secondary education or job training and provide incentives in the form of conditional cash assistance for participation in activities that can lead to greater stability for vulnerable families.
- With a significant commitment to ending homelessness among veterans, and strengthening programs that serve veterans who have families, there may also be opportunities to use new or existing programs for homeless veterans differently and to test or replicate promising models that link housing assistance, training, support services, and work.

In the current fiscal and political environment, new or significantly expanded resources are likely to be scarce, and there will be significant pressure to demonstrate better results or reduce spending for many current programs. In this context, philanthropy will be an important partner, while bold and innovative leaders will be challenged to realign and reinvest resources to produce better results. Catalytic investments and strong cross-system leadership will be needed to:

- Invest in building capacity of current programs to do things differently.
- Facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges and highlight best practices.
- Change incentives for performance.
- Hold programs and systems accountable for results.

Conclusion

Across the nation, housing, support services, and workforce, education, and training systems are realizing that collaborative efforts that integrate the resources, talents, and energies of multiple systems will be necessary to end the crisis of family homelessness. Housing alone is not a solution; it will not be possible—at least in the foreseeable future—to create a sufficient supply of affordable housing to meet existing demands. In addition, workforce development and education programs that do not address the housing stability issues that complicate the lives of so many vulnerable families will not be able to effectively meet the needs of a growing group of low-income workers and job seekers who continue to fall short of wage levels that can sustain family housing costs.



Clearly, no one system can—on its own—resolve the issues and complex needs of families struggling with housing stability and homelessness. Only a multi-variable, cross-systems approach that tailors the response to levels of need and capacity at the individual, organizational, and systems level will create a significant impact on this problem.

An integrated approach may, ultimately provide the best and only hope of ending homelessness for children and their families. If we do not expect to create a sufficient supply of affordable housing in this country to meet ongoing demands, the solution to homelessness will require that we create additional capacity in our existing affordable housing array to meet ongoing demand. If we can succeed in increasing the incomes of workers who have been stabilized in subsidized units to the point that they can survive in the open housing market, this “throughput” will create significant new affordable housing capacity within the existing stock of subsidized units.

This approach does not mean that we should reduce our efforts to promote more affordable housing. That said, with the knowledge that a finite supply of affordable units will never be sufficient to the needs of all of the families who experience housing crises that put them at risk of homelessness, we must develop new and innovative approaches that maximize the use of the affordable housing and housing assistance resources that do exist. Increasing the incomes of families who receive time-limited housing assistance, as well as those who are currently dependent on housing subsidies must be prioritized as one of many tactics deployed in a comprehensive strategy that can actually end, rather than simply manage, homelessness in America.

Notes

- ¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010*. Available online: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p60-239.pdf>. In 2009, 20.1 percent of all children lived in poverty, and this increased to 21.5 percent in 2010. 9.9 percent of children (7.4 million) lived in families with incomes below 50 percent of the poverty level (FPL). The child poverty rate in 2010 is the highest since 1993. Children make up 36 percent of the people living in households with incomes below 50 percent FPL. Citation here is from the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics: www.childstats.gov America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being 2011. Also see http://datacenter.kidscount.org/Databook/2011/OnlineBooks/ForMedia/StateProfiles/KCDB2011_profiles_USA_FINAL-rev.pdf
- ² Ibid 2011 Kids Count Data Book.
- ³ HUD's 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (AHAR). Available online: <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/5thHomelessAssessmentReport.pdf>
- ⁴ For more information about our use of the term "vulnerable families," which refers to families who experience homelessness or are at risk of homelessness, please refer to the Silos to Systems Glossary.
- ⁵ Fifty percent FPL = less than \$9,265 annually for a family of three or \$11,175 for a family of four in 2011.
- ⁶ In 2010 168,227 households with children (567,334 people) stayed in shelters or transitional housing programs for homeless families at some time during the 12-month period. The typical family served in the homeless assistance system is a mother with two children, and the majority of adults in homeless families are age 30 or younger. African Americans are significantly over-represented relative to their share of population. For more information about the characteristics of homeless families, see: Debra Rog and John Buckner. "Homeless Families and Children." Paper developed for the National Symposium on Homelessness Research, March 1-2, 2007. Available online: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/homelessness/symposium07/rog/index.htm>
- Welfare to work programs often report that substance use is a significant barrier to employment for some participants, but relatively few parents applying for TANF report problems with alcohol or other drugs in some studies (5 percent in Milwaukee).
- ^{6a} Some of the barriers to employment that have been frequently identified among homeless and other very low-income families are summarized in the text box, and there are few differences between homeless families and other fragile or low-income families who receive welfare assistance. For example:

- Testimony provided by Gordon Berlin, President of MDRC, before the Senate Finance Committee in September 2010 describes some of the barriers faced by women participating in welfare-to-work programs. These barriers, which he described as “limited work history, low education levels, domestic violence, depression, or the responsibility of caring for a sick child or adult” are quite similar to the characteristics and barriers described in data from programs that serve homeless families.
- Adults in both homeless and other poor families often have low levels of education. In studies of homeless families, the rates of high school graduation or GED range from 35 to 61 percent. In the multi-city Fragile Families study, 43 percent of unmarried mothers have less education than a high school diploma. Another study found that 57 percent of TANF applicants in Milwaukee had no high school diploma or GED, and among families reaching time limits for cash assistance, the percentage with less education than a high school diploma is even higher.
- Relatively few parents in homeless families—only about 15 percent of the adults in families who stayed in shelters or transitional housing programs during 2010—are identified as having disabilities. A study of families who exited emergency family shelters in Worcester, Massachusetts found higher rates of mental health indicators: about one in four parents reported a past suicide attempt (23 percent) or hospitalization for a mental health condition (24 percent), more than a third had moderate or high scores for severe depression (36 percent) or severe anxiety (37 percent), and more than a third had a positive screen for alcohol or drug abuse (36 percent). Other studies found similar rates of suicide attempts and hospitalizations (often for suicide attempts) among women in homeless families. High rates of mental health problems (52 percent) were also reported among TANF applicants in Milwaukee, and in the same study, one in four persons reported poor or fair health and more than one in five reported that their ability to work was limited by a disability. Even higher rates of depression, anxiety, and trauma were found among parents in families reaching time limits for cash assistance.

⁷ As reported in HUD’s 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (AHAR) 78 percent of the adults in families served in shelters or transitional housing programs last year were women, while the proportion of men in homeless families increased from 18 percent in 2007 to 22 percent in 2010. People in female-headed households are 14 percent of the population but more than 25 percent of those with a spell of poverty, and almost half of the households that were chronically poor for 36 months or more in a Census study of patterns of poverty between 2004-2006. Because the majority of homeless families are headed by single mothers, the primary focus of this paper is on strategies that are expected to improve incomes of families headed by single mothers, although many of these strategies are also effective for fathers who are living with their children or non-custodial parents. Among families included in the Fragile Families study, having a live-in father significantly lowered the risk that children would be homeless or doubled-up. 78 percent of the adults in families served in shelters or transitional housing programs last year were women, while the proportion of men in homeless families increased from 18 percent in 2007 to 22 percent in 2010.

⁸ For example, see findings from the Fragile Families study: among families in the study with incomes below 50 percent FPL, 9 percent reported that they were homeless at least once (in interviews at year 1 or year 3) while 28 percent had been doubled-up at least once, and only 22 percent were residentially stable. Rates of homelessness could have been higher among families who were not found for follow-up interviews.

⁹ Families who experience multiple episodes of homelessness are more likely to also have complex needs and face other challenges, including involvement in the criminal justice or child welfare systems. For more information about the different characteristics and needs of families with multiple episodes of homelessness or extended stays in shelters



and transitional housing programs, see: Abt Associates, Inc., Jill Khadduri, Josh Leopold, Brian Sokol, and Brooke Spellman. *Costs Associated With First-Time Homelessness for Families and Individuals*. March 2010. Available online: http://www.huduser.org/portal/publications/povsoc/cost_homelessness.html

Also see:

Dennis Culhane, et al. "Testing a Typology of Family Homelessness Based on Patterns of Public Shelter Utilization in Four U.S. Jurisdictions: Implications for Policy and Program Planning," *Housing Policy Debate*, Volume 18, Issue 1, May 2007. Available online: http://works.bepress.com/dennis_culhane/1/

Linda Weinreb, Debra Rog, and Kathryn Henderson. "Exiting Shelter: An Epidemiological Analysis of Barriers and Facilitators for Families," *Social Sciences Review*, December 2010.

- ¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010*. Available online: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p60-239.pdf>
- ¹¹ For example, the U.S. Census Bureau (source *Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010*) reports that chronic poverty is relatively uncommon, with only 2.2 percent of the population living in poverty for all 48 months from 2004 to 2007, although 31.6 percent of the population had at least one spell of poverty lasting two or more months during the same period. More recent data show that 23.1 percent of the population experienced a spell of poverty lasting at least two months during 2009, while 7.3 percent of the population was in poverty *every* month in 2009.
- ¹² HUD's 2009 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (AHAR). Available online: <http://www.hudhre.info/documents/5thHomelessAssessmentReport.pdf>
- ¹³ Mark Courtney and Amy Dworsky. *Economic Hardships and Food Insecurity: Findings from the Milwaukee TANF Applicant Study*. Chapin Hall working paper, 2006. Available online: http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/old_reports/293.pdf
- ¹⁴ LaDonna Pavetti and Liz Schott. *TANF'S Inadequate Response to Recession Highlights Weakness of Block-Grant Structure*, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, July 14, 2011. Available online: <http://www.cbpp.org/files/7-14-11tanf.pdf> In contrast, far more families receive benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as food stamps), and SNAP enrollment has been much more responsive to the rise in unemployment and financial hardship among American families, rising by 45 percent between December 2007 and December 2009. In 1995, AFDC (which was later replaced by TANF) assisted 75 families with children for every 100 families living in poverty.
- ¹⁵ LaDonna Pavetti. *TANF at 15, Part I: How Well Does It Provide Income Support for Poor Families?* Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, August 22, 2011. Available online: <http://www.offthechartsblog.org/tanf-at-15-part-i-how-well-does-it-provide-income-support-for-poor-families/> and Liz Schott and Ife Finch. *TANF Benefits are Low and Have Not Kept Pace with Inflation*, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, October 14, 2010. Available online: <http://www.cbpp.org/files/10-14-10tanf.pdf>
- ¹⁶ There are several possible explanations for relatively low levels of TANF participation reported by families who are served in the homeless assistance system. Because many states have created unique names for their TANF programs (such as WorkFirst or CalWorks), it is possible that some families may be receiving cash assistance but don't recognize that these are TANF benefits. It is likely that some homeless parents have been unable or unwilling to comply with various requirements related to TANF eligibility or they may have reached the time limits for receiving assistance. And in many states,



TANF cash welfare benefits are very low, and often significantly less than the amount needed to pay rent. As a result a family with some income from work or other sources may have too much income to qualify for TANF cash assistance, while still having too little income to pay for housing costs.

- ¹⁷ General Assistance benefits, which are provided by some states or local governments, are usually significantly lower than TANF cash assistance. See Chapter 7 in the HUD report “Strategies for Improving Homeless People’s Access to Mainstream Benefits and Services.” Available online: <http://www.huduser.org/publications/pdf/StrategiesAccessBenefitsServices.pdf>
- ¹⁸ The HNF model programs serves families with children under 18 who are currently homeless and at-risk for chronic homelessness. More specifically, it is designed to serve families that are experiencing co-occurring barriers including: serious and persistent mental illness, chemical dependency, domestic violence/trauma from violence and dislocation, HIV/AIDS or other chronic illness, Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement, and/or serious criminal histories.
- ¹⁹ Washington Families Fund Five-Year Report 2004-2009. Additional data provided by Building Changes September 15, 2011. Available online: <http://www.buildingchanges.org/results/data-and-evaluation>
- ²⁰ Sara Goldreick-Rab and Kia Sorensen. *Unmarried Parents in College*, 2010. Available online: http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/20_02_09.pdf
- ²¹ Urban Institute, Martha Burt, and Planmatics, Inc. *Life After Transitional Housing for Homeless Families*, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. March 2010. Sites included in this study included Seattle, Washington.
- ²² Data provided by Building Changes, September 15, 2011. At intake, 15 percent of parents were participating in school and 16 percent were participating in job training or job search programs (meaning that some of the parents in this group may not have been receiving any vocational training other than support for job search). About 5 percent of parents responded “yes” to both questions.
- ²³ In many cases, this information is being gathered from families through the intake process for purposes of screening and selecting families for programs or planning services, but this information may not be collected consistently, and it is not compiled at the local, state, or national level or analyzed to better describe and understand rates and patterns of employment, incomes, or participation in workforce development and post-secondary education or training among families who enter the homeless assistance system.
- ²⁴ For example, several evaluations of welfare-to-work programs have found net gains of only about \$500 a year, and while some effective programs have produced more substantial and sustained gains, family incomes remain quite low. For example, in one study of a welfare-to-work program that focused on rapid entry into the labor force, participants earned on average \$2,459 more than control group members over a five-year period. (see: Kyleen Hashim and Kristin A. Moore. “What Works for Increasing Family Income and Parental Employment: Lessons from Experimental Evaluations of Programs and Interventions,” Child Trends Fact Sheet, May 2008. Available online: http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2008_05_01_FS_WWFamilyIncome.pdf
- The estimated impact of the Jobs-Plus initiative, which provided employment services for public housing residents, on residents’ earnings averaged \$498 per person per year after the roll-out period, and average gains for non-disabled working-age residents were about \$1,300 a year. (see: Howard S. Bloom, James A. Riccio, Nandita Verma, with Johanna Walter. “Promoting Work in Public Housing: The Effectiveness of Jobs-



- Plus,” MDRC. Available online: <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/405/execsum.pdf> and James A. Riccio. “Sustained Earnings Gains for Residents in a Public Housing Jobs Program,” MDRC, 2010. Available online: <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/542/policybrief.pdf>
- ²⁵ Gordon L. Berlin. “Rethinking Welfare in the Great Recession” MDRC, 2010. Available online: <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/566/testimony.html>
- ²⁶ For more information about transitional jobs, see the National Transitional Jobs Network: <http://www.heartlandalliance.org/ntjn/> and MDRC: <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/553/abstract.html>
- ²⁷ Jobs in social enterprises may be transitional jobs, or social enterprises may provide long-term employment opportunities without time limits for workers. Some social enterprises use supported employment models, an evidence-based practice for providing jobs with support services for people with disabilities. For more information about social enterprise models and programs see www.redf.org
- ²⁸ LaDonna Pavetti, et al. “Creating Subsidized Employment Opportunities for Low-Income Parents: The Legacy of the TANF Emergency Fund,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, February 16, 2011. Available online: <http://www.cbpp.org/files/2-16-11tanf.pdf>
- ²⁹ Dan Bloom, et al. “Alternative Work Strategies for the Hard-to-Employ,” MDRC, 2009. Available online: <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/537/overview.html> and Dan Bloom. “Transitional Jobs: Background, Program Models, and Evidence,” MDRC 2010.
- ³⁰ Sheila Maguire, et al. “Job Training that Works: Findings from the Sectoral Impact Study,” Public/Private Ventures, 2009. Available online: http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/federal-policies/sector-partnerships/sectors-documents/ppv_sectorbrief_2009-05.pdf and Maureen Conway, et al. “Sectoral Strategies for Low-Income Workers: Lessons from the Field,” Aspen Institute, 2007. Available online: http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/federal-policies/sector-partnerships/sectors-documents/aspen_sectorsreport_2007.pdf
- ³¹ The evaluation was completed by Public/Private Ventures with funding from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. See http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/294_publication.pdf and http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/325_publication.pdf
- ³² Karin Martinson and Gayle Hamilton. “Providing Earnings Supplements to Encourage and Sustain Employment,” MDRC, 2011. Available online: <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/600/policybrief.pdf>
- ³³ Jobs-Plus was a demonstration program focused on public housing residents and implemented in six cities, with support from HUD and a consortium of funders led by the Rockefeller Foundation. The model included employment-related services and activities, financial incentives to work, and community support for work. Jobs-Plus was evaluated by MDRC. For more information, see <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/405/execsum.html>
- ³⁴ For example, in Salt Lake City Utah, the Road Home, a family homeless service provider, also receives funding to offer services as a TANF welfare-to-work agency and a WIA One-Stop Career Center. The Road Home can offer families time-limited rental assistance combined with concentrated employment support to help families return to stable housing quickly and then transition off of rental assistance as their income increases while they achieve housing stability.
- ³⁵ Mark Courtney and Amy Dworsky. “Barriers to Employment: Findings from the Milwaukee TANF Applicant Study,” Chapin Hall, 2006; and Sheila Zedlewski, et al. “Hard-to-Employ Parents,” Urban Institute, 2007. Available online: http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411504_employ_parents.pdf

(citation for Rachel Kirzner & Jodi Houlon presentation: *Untreated Mental Illness in Long-Term TANF Recipients* presented at the National Association for Welfare Research and Statistics (July 2009). Available on-line at http://www.rockinst.org/nawrs/papers/NAWRS_PHMC_PowerPoint_09.pdf

- ³⁶ Jon Morgenstern and Kimberly Blanchard. "Welfare Reform and Substance Abuse Treatment for Welfare Recipients," NIAAA. Available online: <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh291/63-67.htm>
- ³⁷ *Subsidized and Transitional Job Demonstration*, MDRC, 2011. Available online: http://www.mdrc.org/project_25_111.html
- ³⁸ *Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration (ETJD)*, MDRC, 2011. Available online: http://www.mdrc.org/project_25_106.html
- ³⁹ For a more comprehensive summary, see *Widening the Doorways of Opportunity: Philanthropic Efforts to Strengthen Postsecondary Education and Skill Development Systems*, 2010. Available online: <http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/pdfs/policybrief-summer2010.pdf>
- ⁴⁰ More information is available online: www.workingpoorfamilies.org
- ⁴¹ ISIS is also supported by philanthropic partners, including Open Society Foundation and is being implemented in coordination with similar initiatives sponsored by other philanthropic partners including Casey, Joyce, Gates, and Ford Foundations.
- ⁴² More information about Skill Up Washington is available online: <http://www.skillupwa.org/>
More information about the National Fund for Workforce Solutions is available online: <http://nfwfsolutions.org/>

Glossary

Vulnerable families

We use the term **vulnerable families** to refer to families who experience homelessness or are at risk of homelessness because they have extremely low incomes, with family earnings less than 30 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI), or below the federal poverty level (FPL), and because they also spend more than half of their income on housing costs or do not have stable housing. This includes many families who experience significant housing hardships, such as being “on the brink” of losing housing, experiencing frequent and involuntary moves, or being “doubled-up.” Some, but not all, of these families may be defined as “homeless” for purposes of eligibility for some federal programs. Examples of vulnerable families include:

- Families who experience “literal” homelessness, meaning they are staying in emergency shelter or transitional housing programs for homeless families, or living in places not meant for human habitation (outdoors, in cars, abandoned buildings, etc.).
- Families who are doubled-up temporarily or living in hotels/motels because they lack housing of their own.
- Families fleeing domestic violence and lacking the resources needed to secure other housing.
- Families who have recently experienced an episode of homelessness and are currently living in housing with time-limited rental assistance.
- Families living in or near poverty (particularly families living in deep poverty with incomes below 50 percent of FPL) who do not have stable housing and who have experienced high rates of mobility, often due to involuntary moves.
- Families at risk of (“on the brink of”) homelessness because they have received an eviction notice, or because they are leaving a residential treatment program, hospital, or jail and lack the resources needed to secure other housing.
- Extremely low-income families (with incomes below 30 percent of AMI) who have “worst-case housing needs” because they pay more than half their income for rent or live in severely substandard housing.

- All kinds of families that include at least one adult and at least one child, including single parents, two-parent families, and families in which the adult is a grandparent, other extended family member, partner or caregiver, or a teen parent living independently.

As described in a policy paper published by Building Changes in 2011,¹ housing and services are two related but distinct domains of need, and services needs and vulnerabilities may be low, moderate, or high among vulnerable and homeless families.

Rapid re-housing is a relatively new program model used to assist families and individuals to quickly end episodes of homelessness by providing time-limited rental assistance, often combined with help to find rental housing and pay move-in expenses, case management, and other support services that help people stabilize in their own housing and make connections to community resources they can use to avoid returning to homelessness. Rental assistance may be short-term (one-time or up to three months) or may be provided for up to a year or longer, and most households must increase their incomes in order to pay rent on their own after time-limited assistance ends.

Permanent supportive housing is affordable housing linked to flexible support services for individuals and families with special needs, including people with mental health and/or substance use problems and those who have been homeless repeatedly or for a long time. Housing may be in an apartment building created for supportive housing (site-based), an affordable housing development which contains a few units set aside as supportive housing, or in scattered-site apartments, which are often rented from private owners. Subsidies (from federal, state, or local government programs) make the housing affordable to people with little or no income, who usually pay about 30 percent of their income for rent. Housing is permanent (meaning that there is no limit on how long people can live there) and subject to normal rights and obligations of landlord-tenant law. Support services focus on helping people achieve housing stability, and often address personal goals related to health and recovery. In family supportive housing, some services are often provided for the children.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) was created in 1997 to replace the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. Federal funding for TANF programs is provided to states in the form of block grants, and states have significant flexibility in using these funds for a wide range of services and for cash assistance to families within the overall framework of federal law. TANF has four purposes, which are described in federal law, and are as follows:

1. Provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives.
2. End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage.
3. Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies.
4. Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.



The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is a federal law enacted in 1998 and is also the name given to the main federal funding stream for employment and training services. WIA is administered by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), and local programs are implemented under the leadership of statewide and local Workforce Investment Boards (WIB).

Transitional jobs are time-limited, wage-paying jobs that combine real work, skill development, and support services to help participants overcome barriers, build work-related skills, and transition successfully into the labor market.²

¹ Ending Family Homelessness in Washington State: An Emerging Approach (2011) is available online: <http://www.buildingchanges.org/our-work/advocacy/58-advocacy-and-policy-sidebar/300-family-homelessness-strategy-for-washington-state>

² This definition is adapted from information provided by the Transitional Jobs Network.



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