

## **Home Base Program**

### **Special Needs Housing: Housing for Persons with Special Needs**

#### **Program Summary**

*Home Base* is a collaborative effort between Rhode Island Housing, The Providence Center (Rhode Island's largest behavioral health care provider and only recovery services provider), homeless advocates and Providence Community Health Centers to end chronic homelessness. *Home Base* is a comprehensive system of care designed to outreach to and provide support to 200 chronically homeless individuals each year across the state. Of the 200 people outreached to each year, 10% will be veterans.

To date, over 180 people have been outreached through the program and 23 have been housed in permanent supportive housing.

#### **How it Began**

For many years Rhode Island Housing funded a rental assistance program out of its annual earnings. This program provided rental assistance to tenants living in mostly large developments with very little income diversity. The majority of these tenants were not receiving other services or supports. While the program was an important source of deeply subsidized housing, it was also extremely expensive and served relatively few new tenants each year since turn-over of units was infrequent.

In 2005, at the height of Rhode Island's housing price escalation, the agency undertook a strategic planning effort which resulted in *RoadHome*, a program designed to end homelessness in Rhode Island by providing rental assistance to homeless Rhode Islanders in service enriched apartments. In 2007, Rhode Island Housing launched *RoadHome* and gradually began to transition from its traditional rental assistance to this new permanent supportive housing model as units in assisted developments turned over.

The program is funded by Rhode Island Housing and administered in partnership with community partners such as mental health centers and other providers of housing and services to the homeless. These community providers identify apartments in the community which are then certified for use in the program. Rhode Island Housing provides rental assistance and a small stipend (\$90 per month per client) to support the services. Program participants must be homeless and the sponsor must provide supportive services. Since its establishment in 2007, Rhode Island Housing has invested \$8.5 million in the program, providing permanent supportive housing to 620 households. The program is targeted to the most vulnerable populations living on the streets or in shelters. Of the 304 currently participating in the program 28 % were chronically homeless upon entering the program. Rhode Island Housing also administers the Shelter + Care program for the State providing 186 vouchers annually to homeless disabled Rhode Islanders. Together these programs are key tools to achieve the goals set forth in the State's recently adopted plan to end homelessness, *Opening Doors Rhode Island*.

#### **Effective Partnerships**

While Rhode Island Housing has provided the rental assistance, these programs could not be successful without the partnership of service providers who were committed, not only to providing services to participating tenants, but also to helping those tenants become as independent as possible so that they can transition to other affordable housing options, freeing up the service enriched homes to new program participants. The *Home Base* program has provided the framework to marry the housing and service providers and resources and then targeting those resources to assist Rhode Island's chronically homeless population.

## **Program Description**

As part of the *Home Base* program, each person outreached to will receive:

- Individualized, co-occurring mental health and substance abuse treatment;
- case management;
- employment and education services;
- legal services and prioritized connection to benefits;
- connection to Community Support Teams for individuals who are seriously mentally ill;
- integrated primary care through Providence Community Health Centers;
- The Providence Center's recovery community center and recovery services;
- access to The Providence Center's full menu of services including groups, wellness services, nutrition counseling, crisis services and basic needs.

Of the 200 people outreached to, 50 per year will receive housing vouchers, most through Rhode Island Housing's *RoadHome* program and our Shelter + Care program for supported housing in addition to services. Supported Housing includes:

- a safe, high quality apartment placement;
- drastically reduced rent through a housing voucher;
- a housing specialist who works with the landlord and tenant to ensure positive relationships and long-term tenancy;
- furniture and home goods.

Comparable programs in Rhode Island that provide housing and services for the chronically homeless have shown to save an average of \$8,000 per person in unnecessary emergency room and inpatient care.

## **Statewide Support and Guidance**

A unique aspect of the *Home Base* program is the steering committee that guides this effort. The committee is made up of representatives of 14 organizations representing providers of housing and services to the homeless, advocates, state agencies and leadership of the General Assembly. The purpose of the committee is to bridge different funding structures and resources to create a permanent system to support the chronically homeless. The committee is focused on:

- establishing political will, clear leadership, and community involvement and
- the creation of a coordinated, effective accessible service system and linkage to housing as priorities to end homelessness in Rhode Island.

## **Targeted Assistance**

While currently the services provided through the program are being funded through a SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) grant, part of the focus of the Steering Committee is to quickly transition program participants to mainstream programs such as Medicaid that will provide supports long after the SAMHSA grant is gone. To achieve the greatest savings to the state and the greatest impact on the state's homeless population, the program is focused on the chronically homeless, particularly the highest users of Medicaid. To achieve that focus, participants in the program are drawn from the state's Universal Waitlist, a waitlist drawn from HMIS identifying the chronically homeless. That list has further been refined by comparing it to the records of the State's Medicaid office to identify the highest users of Medicaid. Together this information is used to target this important program to those homeless

Rhode Islanders who are absorbing the highest proportion of state and federal resources and who clearly need intensive case management and services to remain stably housed.

**How does it respond to the judging criteria:**

*Innovative:* Few supportive housing programs give housing and supportive service in scattered site, low poverty areas. Also, the program is designed to create systems change by bringing together state agency and homeless housing and service providers to find permanent supportive housing solutions for those chronically homeless Rhode Islanders who are absorbing the greatest amount of state and federal resources in the homeless system.

*Replicable:* Rhode Island Housing and its community partners are using state and federal resources that are available in many areas in a new way to target the most intensive users of the state homelessness and Medicaid systems. By combining Rhode Island Housing financed rental assistance with federally supported rental assistance and service dollars we have more flexibility in housing the population, especially those with histories which preclude them from federal housing programs.

*Responds to an important state housing need:* Our overcrowded and under-funded shelters are bursting at the seams, with more and more individuals and families entering them as the number of foreclosures and unemployment figures rise. This program allows for a quick resolution to many housing crises of our families and individuals.

*Demonstrates measurable benefits to HFA targeted customers:* *RoadHome* participants continue to sustain their housing. Of those currently participating in the program, 40% have sustained housing for over 2 years and 63% have remained stably housed for more than a year. Research in Rhode Island has shown that this approach to addressing chronic homelessness saves the state about \$8,000 annually per person in emergency and institutional service costs.

*Has a proven track record of success in the marketplace:* Housing First programs have proven to lessen the use of emergency rooms, ambulance services, and institutions such as mental health hospitals and prisons. Already *Home Base* has outreached to over 180 people and housed 23 in permanent supportive housing.

*Provides benefits that outweigh costs:* The benefits of having someone finally feel secure that they will have a place to call home cannot be measured in dollars. However, for each person housed, the State has saved on average \$8,000. The current practice of matching the highest users of Medicaid and chronically homeless will save even more. In addition, Rhode Island Housing is making more effective use of our limited rental assistance dollars by linking rental assistance with supportive services so that participants are more likely to increase income over time and transition to other subsidized housing, freeing up resources to direct to new families.

*Demonstrates effective use of resources:* While saving costs to institutions, program costs have also decreased on a per participant basis. Between 2008 and 2009 the cost to house participants fell from \$573.87 to \$537.55 per month, while increasing participation from 182 to 230.

*Effectively employs partnerships:* *Home Base* seeks to have the various systems within the State work together to help this population become healthy and productive through services already provided in the State. With a steering committee which includes public departments, private agencies and consumers, the strategies being developed will not only save the State dollars, but lessen the years people remain homeless. It is this systemic change which will end homelessness in Rhode Island.

*Achieves strategic objectives:* The strategic objective was to End Homelessness. By engaging the service systems with *RoadHome*, Rhode Island will end homelessness in the timeline outlined in the recently published Opening Doors Rhode Island.