

NCSHA 2016 Annual Awards Entry Form

(Complete one form for each entry)

Deadline: Wednesday, June 15, 2016

Visit ncsha.org/awards to view the Annual Awards Call for Entries.

Instructions: Type entry information into the form and save it as a PDF. Do not write on or scan the form. If you have any questions contact awards@ncsha.org or 202-624-7710.

Fill out the entry name *exactly* as you want it listed in the program.

Entry Name: _____

HFA: _____

Submission Contact: (Must be HFA Staff Member) _____ **Email:** _____

Please provide a 15-word (maximum) description of your nomination to appear on the NCSHA website.

Use this header on the upper right corner of each page:

HFA: _____

Entry Name: _____

Select the appropriate subcategory of your entry and indicate if you are providing visual aids.

Communications	Homeownership	Legislative Advocacy	Management Innovation
Annual Report	Empowering New Buyers	Federal Advocacy	Financial
Creative Media	Encouraging New Production	State Advocacy	Human Resources
Promotional Materials and Newsletters	Home Improvement and Rehabilitation		Operations
			Technology
Rental Housing	Special Needs Housing	Special Achievement	Are you providing visual aids?
Encouraging New Production	Combating Homelessness	Special Achievement	Yes
Multifamily Management	Housing for Persons with Special Needs		No
Preservation and Rehabilitation			



Innovative

Schools are frequently a first point of contact for families experiencing homelessness. In the 2014-2015 school year, 4,300 students in Delaware schools experienced homelessness. Literature describes the impact of an unstable housing situation on a child's education. Beyond the detriment to the student, the McKinney Vento Act requires that students who are in homeless situations have the same access to educational services and opportunities as other students. This includes a requirement that a homeless student be given the opportunity to stay in his or her school of origin without burdening the student's family with the task of arranging special—and often costly—transportation to and from school.

With that in mind, the Delaware State Housing Authority partnered with the Christina School District (CSD) to establish a pilot program that would offer new rental assistance to families with students in the district who are experiencing homelessness. DSHA's partnership with the Christina School District builds on the foundation of the State Rental Assistance Program to serve a new population with the assistance of new partners.

The state-funded Delaware State Rental Assistance Program (SRAP), launched in 2011, provides rental assistance to particularly vulnerable populations – people exiting or at risk of admission to state or privately-run long-term care institutions, youth exiting foster care, and families for whom the lack of affordable housing is a barrier to reunification. This program has been extremely successful, with an annual budget authority of almost \$6 million and over 700 leased vouchers.

Recognizing the success of this program, we saw other opportunities where the housing/services partnership structure might also be able to improve outcomes, enhance quality of life, and avoid or reduce costs. A partnership with school districts was a sensible next step to take. The Delaware Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families (DSCYF), one of the original SRAP partnering agencies, agreed: they saw SRAP-DOE as a natural extension of the work they already do to promote the safety and well-being of children and their families through prevention, protection, and permanency. Families with school-age children living outside their established geographic areas rely on transportation funded jointly by the Delaware Department of Education (DOE) and the school district to continue sending their children to their home schools. According to data from the past three school years, this has cost DOE approximately \$6.2 million annually.

Replicable

DSHA's pilot program with the Christina School District is highly replicable, both in Delaware and other states. In Delaware, all schools have a homeless liaison and districts have a homeless services coordinator. The case management services are the same services provided to any families experiencing homelessness, similar to the HUD rapid rehousing model.

Indeed, we are working now to expand the program in Delaware to additional districts. Thanks to very strong support in the community, \$2.5 million in Settlement funds from a recent Settlement related to the foreclosure crisis were allocated to the SRAP program. DSHA intends to use these funds to expand



the SRAP-DOE to additional districts in Delaware. We are working with program leaders from Christina School District and from Family Promise of New Castle County, a nonprofit organization and Rapid Rehousing provider, to document the model and the critical pieces that must be in place for the program to be successful in other districts. We will be identifying 1-2 additional districts in the summer of 2016 to launch in the 2016-2017 school year.

Effectively Employ Partnerships

The HomeWorks pilot program is a collaboration between Christina School District, which refers applications on behalf of families seeking assistance; DSHA, which administers the rental assistance; and Family Promise of Northern New Castle County, which provides case management and related services to ensure families are successful in the long-term. Applications for housing assistance are completed by the family in cooperation with homeless service coordinators within the schools and reviewed by an Application Review Panel facilitated by the District. DSHA processes applications, inspects the units, and processes rent subsidy payments to the participating landlords. Family Promise of Northern New Castle County assists the families in locating housing and services to maintain stability. Each entity is able to focus on their core competency to best serve the family experiencing homelessness.

Respond to an Important Housing Need

On average, about 800 students experience homelessness in Christina School District each year, the most of any district in the state. Transportation for homeless students in CSD accounts for 20-25% of these costs in the entire State. DSHA set aside \$1 million to fund a pilot project to serve homeless families in the CSD. We estimated this could assist 100 families with 12 months of rental assistance in the school year ending June 2015.

Demonstrate Measurable Benefits to HFA Targeted Customers

Developing a new pilot of the SRAP program to serve homeless families with students in the school system is consistent with the two original pillars of the program – to offer a better quality of life to the people receiving housing assistance, and to provide housing services in a way that allows the state to offset the costs of the program through cost savings or cost avoidance.

The maximum income for the program is 40% of State Median Income or less; for a family of four, this is about \$30,000 per year. The reality is that most families served by the program have much lower income, with the majority of households at \$10,000 per year or less at program entry. Early on, this raised concerns when considering these households' longer-term prospects to regain economic stability. We realized the rental assistance must be coupled with skilled, robust case management to help them achieve their goals and be able to access other mainstream resources, increase their income, and afford housing at the end of the rental assistance.



Proven Track Record

As of April 2016, the pilot program had served 107 families, including 234 school-aged children. The average age of a child helped by the program is 9-years-old.

We also hoped to reduce transportation costs for homeless families, savings that could be used to offset housing costs. That goal has been realized. Families served by HomeWorks, who have high transportation expenses, used transportation for an average of 56 days per family at a total cost of \$119,740.

Benefits Outweigh the Costs

The costs of extended homelessness, especially for families, are high. Cycling in and out of shelters, limited access to motel vouchers, missed school days, and instability all take a huge toll on families, even before considering the financial burden on our public systems. Research on homelessness increasingly shows, and our experience in Delaware reflects, that a relatively small amount of assistance can change this trajectory for a family experiencing homelessness. The average annual cost of the rental assistance for families is about \$10,500. When a family is able to use that year to secure other benefits, develop secure employment, and address other obstacles, that cost is small compared to extended or additional periods of homelessness.

Demonstrate Effective Use of Resources

Serving homeless families via the school system helps identify and connect families to needed resources more quickly. HomeWorks relies on an existing structure of homeless liaisons as the first point of contact, and was able to use the existing SRAP program infrastructure for delivery of rental assistance. Assistance provided by Family Promise of Northern New Castle County was built onto an existing grant with DSHA through our state housing trust fund to provide rapid rehousing.

Achieve Strategic Objectives

Our ultimate goal was to help families with children experiencing homelessness to regain permanent housing and stability. To quantify the success of the program, one needs only to listen to the families served:

“My son is graduating high school this year and if it wasn't for the program I'm not sure he would be. Being homeless is a very stressful thing for the parents, but for the children as well. I thank God for this program and think so many could benefit from it as well.” - **Diane**

“The program gave me the shelter support I needed to stabilize my children, allowed my daughter to attend her prom, graduate from high school, and get accepted and attend Georgia State University. “
– **Antoinette**

“For my children, this program gave them a normal childhood. For me, I was reminded people cared and helped in a rough time.” - **Lerone**

"Kids don't come to school prepared to learn when they're thinking about food, when they're thinking about shelter."

DONALD PATTON, SUPERVISOR OF STUDENT SERVICES FOR CHRISTINA SCHOOL DISTRICT



RIGHT: Six-year-old Sadiyah Feaster-Muhammad does her homework as her brother, Shatir Butler, 11, plays a video game in their home in Wilmington's East Side on Monday evening.

PHOTOS BY KYLE GRANTHAM/THE NEWS JOURNAL

NOT HOMELESS ANYMORE



State, school district provide housing help for kids, families

MATTHEW ALBRIGHT THE NEWS JOURNAL

Last year, Sonja Douglas was in a rough place. The single mother of three could not make rent, so she was forced to move to her father's place near 10th and Pine streets in Wilmington — a no man's land in the city's drug and shooting woes.

"It was tough. There wasn't enough room for us,"

See **HOMELESS**, Page 7A



TOP: Sonja Douglas poses with her children, Sadiyah and Shatir, in their home in Wilmington's East Side on Monday evening. ABOVE: Sadiyah and Shatir prepare a prayer rug for evening prayers.

Homeless

Continued from Page 1A

Douglas said. "The area was so bad, I couldn't even let the kids outside and play."

Douglas found a lifeline when she went to a meeting at Stubbs Elementary School, where her children go. She learned about a pilot within the State Rental Assistance Program designed to help homeless families get on their feet.

It didn't take long before Douglas had a voucher in hand that would help her pay for her own place, across the river from the violence and by a park her children could play in. And when her father fell ill, she was able to help him move in with her so she could take care of him.

"It's the first time that it's me being stable without the help of my father, and I'm able to help him now," she said. "It is an awesome feeling, knowing that."

The state is struggling with a growing number of homeless students. In 2010, there were 3,056 school-age kids whose families did not have "fixed, regular, safe and adequate residence," according to state data gathered by the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count project. By 2014, there were 3,847 homeless kids, an increase of about one-fourth.

In no place is this trend more obvious than in the state's public schools, which in some cases have become as vital for the food, clothing and safety they provide as they are for academics.

"Kids don't come to school prepared to learn when they're thinking about food, when they're thinking about shelter," said Donald Patton, supervisor of student services for Christina. "Learning becomes a secondary or a third or a fourth priority for them. When they don't have a place to go home to study, learning becomes very secondary."

Not only is child homelessness heart-breaking, it is expensive. Federal law requires districts to provide transportation and other services to students whose families lose their homes, which cost the state about \$3 million in 2012.

Hoping to test a possible solution to the problem, state leaders set aside \$1 million in the last fiscal year for a pilot program with the Christina School District. That district reported 840 homeless families in the 2012 school year, the most in Delaware.

Here's how the program works: school staff pick out families who need help. Then the State Housing Authority processes applications, inspects potential housing and makes subsidy payments to landlords who participate for one year.

Family Promise of Northern New Castle County, a small nonprofit organization, then helps families pick the right



PHOTOS BY KYLE GRANTHAM/THE NEWS JOURNAL
Sonja Douglas prepares a frozen pizza with her daughter, Sadiyah Feaster-Muhammad, as her son, Shatir Butler, washes his hands in the bathroom in their home on Wilmington's East Side.



Douglas pulls out a pizza as Sadiyah does a dance in their home.

place and provides continued services to help them stay stable.

About 100 families got help through the pilot program. To be eligible, families had to make no more than 40 percent of the median income, or \$29,000 a year for a family of four. On average, families made \$10,000 a year.

"We do everything through this lens of empowerment," said Carolyn Gordon, Family Promise's executive director. "We'll walk alongside of you, but you're the one who is going to do this."

Gordon says she's seen lots of different reasons why families end up struggling

Assistance for families

What: The State Rental Assistance Program pilot with the Christina School District

Availability: Families who make 40 percent or less than the median income and do not have a permanent home. For a family of four, that's \$29,000 a year.

Selection: The school district selects eligible families, then the state Housing Authority provides vouchers that help those families pay rent. A nonprofit organization, Family Promise, then keeps in touch with the families to help them with things like transportation, utilities and other services.

to keep a steady home, but laziness is seldom one of them.

"That's still a misconception we battle with, that there's just these women with a lot of children and they're just using the system to get by," Gordon said. "There's a lot of people, moms and dads, who are trying to do the hard thing, and it's hard for them to ask for help."

Take people like Antoinette Capri Thomas.

When Thomas had a second child, she decided to quit her job as a motivational speaker because it would have kept her away from her children too often. But the small business she had started did not get off the ground fast enough, and she soon had to move out of her apartment.

Thomas and her children bounced between a shelter, friends and family. At one point, she had to escort her son through three different bus connections to get him to school, until Family Promise provided her a donated car she still drives today.

"I didn't want somebody to just do ev-

erything for me," Thomas said. "But I needed something to get me through this temporary place I was in."

The rental assistance program gave Thomas the stability she needed to get her business off the ground while staying an active parent. Her son was able to keep perfect attendance at school despite the crazy commute, and her daughter was able to graduate Hodgson Vocational-Technical with a good enough academic record to earn scholarships to college.

"I still cry about it," Thomas said. "They have been a blessing."

Anas Ben Addi, director of the State Housing Authority, says rental assistance programs are both a better solution for the people they serve and a smarter way to spend taxpayer dollars.

Rental assistance in Delaware started with helping youth who were leaving foster care after age 18 and with those who otherwise might be in some form of institutional care with the state, he said.

State officials figured it was better to spend some money helping people get their own homes than it was to pick up the full tab of caring for them in a medical facility or shelter—or, worse, in prison.

"There's a social side to this, in that this is what our clients want, but there's also an economic side," Ben Addi said.

The housing authority and Christina were able to shuffle funds to sustain the pilot through the current year, but the district and housing departments say they will run out of money soon.

"If we get a rush of people, we're not going to be able to help them," Pattor said.

Gov. Jack Markell has set aside \$500,000 in his recommended budget for the initiative, but it's the General Assembly that will make the ultimate decision on whether to continue it.

When the housing department had its hearing before the budget-writing Joint Finance Committee last week, both Ben Addi and Gordon urged legislators to fund the program.

Ben Addi argues it's a smart investment financially for the state because the program only gives housing support for a year.

"These are not people we're bringing into the system for the very long run," Ben Addi said.

But, more personally, he says stories like those of Douglas and Thomas make a powerful emotional argument.

"We have so many stories of families who have been stabilized because of this," Ben Addi said. "The list is long."

Ideally Gordon hopes the program could be expanded to other districts, too. "Christina School District isn't the only place where this is an issue," Gordon said. "There is a much larger conversation we need to be having."

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