

Eviction Prevention Partnership among the Malden Housing Authority, Everett Housing Authority, and Housing Families Inc.

One Family Inc  
December 29, 2009

Since July 2008, Housing Families Inc. has been working in close partnership with Local Housing Authorities to prevent family evictions and provide personalized support for at-risk families to develop long term housing stabilization plans. The Eviction Prevention Partnership is driven by the fact that preventing families from entering shelter is both financially sound and ethically imperative, as the cost of emergency shelter and the trauma of further dislocation are burdens no one wants to bear. Targeting eviction prevention services to tenants in public housing and Section 8 is important because if a family is evicted from a LHA they are no longer eligible for EA shelter for 1 year and may have an extremely difficult time accessing subsidized housing again. Eviction prevention also benefits the Local Housing Authority by saving them a great deal of money on the legal costs associated with eviction.

In July 2008, a pilot project was initiated between Housing Families and the Malden Housing Authority that targeted MHA residents for eviction prevention in the form of financial assistance and planning and provision of services. With the support of United Way and private foundation funds, 8 families were served over the course of one year and were able to stabilize their housing situation. The program has recently expanded to include the Everett Housing Authority and Section 8 holders in the Malden Housing Authority. Since July 2009 22 families have received services from Housing Families, 12 of whom received financial assistance. ICHH (Metro Boston Network), HPRP, and Family to Family funding have allowed Housing Families to provide targeted assistance averaging \$725 for a period of 2-3 months for 11 of these families, while one household with a particularly difficult history of domestic violence and shelter use was able to secure \$4800 over the course of a year. Households not receiving financial assistance are supported through mediation services, budgeting help, referrals, and case management. **Of the 30 families served, none have become homeless.**

Families are referred to Housing Families' Prevention Case Manager by the MHA or EHA when they fall behind on rent payments. Families are also referred to Housing Families by word of mouth, with all referrals taken on a rolling basis without any form of tiering or targeting. Through a reciprocal partnership in which families visit the office and the providers visit the families at home, the case manager is able to provide a comfortable environment for a candid assessment of the household's needs, prospects, and immediate priorities.

Housing Families staff has encountered some challenges when the Housing Authority has chosen not to refer a family in need of services because the Housing Authority would prefer that the family left their housing rather than the tenancy is preserved. This is a rare situation but it has occurred especially for families with behavioral health and/or criminal challenges. Housing Families has chosen to respect the Housing Authorities' right not to refer a client, but if the client approaches Housing Families staff themselves for assistance (i.e., outside a referral from the Housing Authority), HFI has gone ahead and

supported the family to a limited extent, based on the agency's commitment to working with families in need who seek assistance.

Key to the program's success are the relationships Housing Families has built with the two housing authorities,, enhanced through frequent communication and displays of gratitude, which has eased the processes of referral and payment-plan negotiation.

Housing Families' approach to partnering with families to develop long-term strategies for increasing income prospects and stabilizing housing has been central to the program's success as well. Engaging with Housing Families gives households access to all its services, including an on-site children's program where children can receive tutoring, counseling, and participate in therapeutic art groups. Kids' involvement in this program often continues beyond the period of financial assistance.

Housing Families realizes that many families need some level of financial assistance in conjunction with supports and other families benefit from just one or the other. For families that do receive financial assistance, the money is often split over time rather than used in a lump sum. This is done in an attempt to collaborate with the family to create the solution. For example, Housing Families will pay a portion of the rental arrearage pending the family's consistent payment of rent. This approach has proven to be effective in building relationships with the family as well giving the family the opportunity to have "ownership" over the solution.

Housing Families does not yet have data on changes to eviction rates in either of these Housing Authorities but hopes are that by preventing these 30 evictions, eviction rates will decrease for both Housing Authorities.

\*\*Information for this article was provided via interview with Judy Perlman and Molly Hogan-Fowler of Housing Families Inc.