State & Local Models for Sustaining Funding for Supportive Housing for Child Welfare Involved Families Experiencing Homelessness

Across the country the demand continues to grow for affordable housing as well as the body of research showing that housing stability is linked to better outcomes for people. Federal resources are currently insufficient to meet the affordable housing need nationally requiring state and local jurisdictions to work to stretch their housing and service dollars to pay for proven interventions that demonstrate better outcomes. For the subset of families, those who are homeless or unstably housed and are child welfare involved, the need for safe, stable, affordable housing and access to support services to is even more important. For these families, supportive housing interventions are being used to solve some of our most challenging problems, keeping families together instead of exposing them to foster care placement and long-term trauma resulting from family separation. Local jurisdictions are beginning to look at data to understand the scope and the need for housing interventions for vulnerable families, youth and individuals experiencing homelessness who are also involved in other public systems like health, justice and child welfare. A growing body of research is indicating that supportive housing interventions are achieving better outcomes for children and families involved in the child welfare system. With the growing understanding of the need for housing and the growing body of evidence about the outcomes that housing stability creates, government agencies and nonprofits are looking for opportunities to leverage funding to create supportive housing.

This paper will highlight strategies being implemented in three jurisdictions around the country to leverage funding to support supportive housing services for child welfare involved families. Two examples are supportive housing partnerships initiated thru grants created Partnerships to Demonstrate the Effectiveness of Supportive Housing for Families in the Child Welfare System, Connecticut and Shelby County, Tennessee. The third example is from New Jersey and each jurisdiction is utilizing continuous learning and outcome data to continue implementing strategies to sustain service funding.

Example Funding Models for Supportive Housing Services

Shelby County, Tennessee
Shelby County Department of Children’s Services (DCS) in Memphis, Tennessee is a key partner in Memphis Strong Families Initiative (MSFI), an ACYF funded, supportive housing partnership.

MSFI is connecting Memphis’ most vulnerable families to permanent, stable, affordable housing coupled with intensive wraparound services. The affordable housing is managed by a nonprofit owner/operator and rents are made affordable thru an operating grant from the Memphis/Shelby County Homeless Consortium or Continuum of Care. The supportive services are delivered by an interdisciplinary team with representatives from key partners who work together to coordinate services. Service delivery to families is guided by evidence-based practices that specifically address trauma experienced by the adults.

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1 Integrating Housing & Health: A Health-Focused Evaluation of the Apartments at Bud Clark. The Center for Outcomes Research & Education (CORE) (2014)
and children while addressing other barriers impeding the achievement of family stability and self-sufficiency.

A central partner of the MSFI interdisciplinary team is a full-time, Shelby County DCS staff person dedicated to coordinating DCS services with families and partners of Memphis Strong Families Initiative. This staff person is the integral bridge between DCS and the community and is funded thru state dollars. The DCS liaison works to connect the assigned DCS case worker and supportive housing case manager thru a Child and Family Team meeting. The DCS liaison’s role has proven valuable to the outcomes for vulnerable families with housing needs and DCS is committed to finding ways to continue to support all DCS families with housing needs. Shelby County Department of Children’s Services is working towards institutionalizing resource shifts and partnerships that will provide housing solutions to vulnerable families with open child welfare cases that are homeless and unstably housed, especially children who are at risk of state custody or to reduce length of state for children in state custody.

**Connecticut**

The Connecticut Supportive Housing for Families (SHF) program, is a partnership launched in 1998 between the State of Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF), the statewide Connecticut Housing Authority (currently the State of Connecticut Department of Housing, DOH) and The Connection, Inc., the lead contracted service provider. This partnership provides scattered site housing coupled with supportive services to keep families together that are at risk of separation and or to reunify families that have already been separated. Through the ACYF funded supportive housing partnerships demonstration, Connecticut DCF targeted higher need families and created a more intensive case management model, Intensive Supportive Housing for Families (ISHF) that added a strong vocational component to the array of customizable services for the families. DCF is currently exploring a two-tiered model to match higher need families to the ISHF case management track.

DCF uses a variety of funding streams to support child welfare operations and services, with the majority of support coming from the state. When the Supportive Housing program was initiated, DCF used their state funds for supportive services and leveraged federal Section 8 Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers for the permanent housing. The demand and need for this supportive housing program grew and vulnerable families experienced positive child welfare outcomes, and were able to remain together instead of in expense foster care so DCF looked for ways to expand the number of families served. Additional Section 8 federal housing subsidies were not available and DCF relied upon state funds through Connecticut’s DOH to allocate permanent rental subsidies.

**Evolving Housing Subsidies**

Housing subsidy funding for Connecticut’s Supportive Housing for Families Program (SHF) has evolved from being a combination of federal and state vouchers to being a majority of state-funds from DCF’s budget. In the State Fiscal Years 2016-2017, DCF transferred funding from its budget to DOH to create a specific number of dedicated Rental Assistance Program (RAP) certificates for DCF involved families. To make this transfer DCF used state funds it no longer needed to support out-of-home care for families who were in the foster care system due to homelessness. DCF hopes to continue reinvesting state cost savings into housing interventions through this type of transfer to DOH.
Key to the continued state financial support and understanding of the positive outcomes for families is the regular testimony by families, providers, and evaluators to the legislature and to the executive branch. This testimony is reinforced by evaluation reports conducted by University of Connecticut researchers. Evidence has shown that supportive housing is leading to client successes and pointing towards the potential for additional cost savings for the state.

**New Jersey**

Like Connecticut and the jurisdictions described earlier, New Jersey competed for a federal grant to participate in the ACYF supportive housing demonstration. Though they were not selected as a grantee, New Jersey committed to using state funding to proceed with a small pilot based on the *Keeping Families Together (KFT)* model of supportive housing. Led by the state’s Department of Children and Families (DCF), New Jersey launched their first KFT program with 10 vouchers in 2014. Through partnerships and collaborations, the program has since expanded to 73 units in seven counties, with plans to add additional KFT units in 2017 in partnership with the state housing authority.

NJ DCF’s *Keeping Families Together* program provides supportive housing and services for a subset of child welfare-involved families whose children are at risk for out-of-home placement or are in placement with a goal of reunification and who are facing a number of other co-occurring challenges. Once enrolled in the program, families have access to housing vouchers as well as an array of supportive services including case planning with a team of clinical and case management staff and coordination of services.

The NJ KFT program includes both single and scattered site housing models supported by a range of federal and state-funded housing vouchers provided by the NJ Department of Community Affairs, NJ Department of Human Services, and NJ DCF as well as affordable housing in the community. Along with housing subsidies, each program contracts with DCF for funding to provide supportive services and case management.

**Data Driven**

Several factors including leadership, data-driven decision making, and good timing contributed to the state-level decision to reallocate savings from other service reductions to initiate the pilot and sustain KFT programming thus far. Child welfare leadership in New Jersey is committed to modernizing the service array available to families based on the needs identified from state data, best practice, and research evidence. New Jersey also exemplifies data-driven decision-making at the system level. It has a well-developed data analytics capability and robust quality review process which enables the agency to evaluate its performance on both a systems and individual family level. Data from multiple sources, not just a single system, suggested to leadership that a portion of families served by child welfare could be better served and achieve better outcomes through supportive housing. As the program continues to expand, NJ DCF is committed to ensuring quality implementation of the KFT model statewide and is also undertaking an internal evaluation of the impact of KFT on specific outcomes to ensure DCF’s investment in KFT is resulting in positive outcomes for the children and families being served.

**More Resources**

Because there is no single funding model for delivering supportive housing and because the body of evidence is growing that shows how housing stability leads better outcomes for families and smarter use
of public money, agencies and systems are pushing for new ways to partner and leverage resources to create supportive housing. Below is a collection of resources and existing programs to draw upon as communities explore ways to create a multi-system approach to housing stability and better outcomes for vulnerable families.

- HUD Family Unification Program
- HUD Housing Choice Voucher
- New Jersey Keeping Families Together
- Connecticut’s Intensive Supportive Housing for Families
- Memphis Strong Families Initiative
- CSH Keeping Families Together
- Keeping Families Together, An evaluation of the implementation and outcomes of a pilot supportive housing model for families involved in the child welfare system
- One Roof Campaign
- Child Welfare Supportive Housing Resource Center
- Evolution in Programs Offering Supportive Housing to Child Welfare Involved Families: Services Integration and Systems Change at the Half-Way Point
- Supportive Housing for High-Need Families in the Child Welfare System
- National Center on Housing and Child Welfare

i Source: [http://www.childwelfarepolicy.org/maps/state?id=7](http://www.childwelfarepolicy.org/maps/state?id=7)
The CSH Child Welfare and Supportive Housing Resource Center is supported by federal agencies and philanthropic partners to provide tailored one on-one expertise and services to help meet the needs of grantees taking part in Partnerships to Demonstrate the Effectiveness of Supportive Housing for Families in the Child Welfare System. Learn more at: www.csh.org/childwelfaresupportivehousingresourcecenter

In addition, CSH has launched the One Roof campaign elevating the visibility of families who are at the intersection of homelessness and child welfare involvement. We are helping communities develop partnerships between housing and child welfare systems to improve outcomes for vulnerable families. Our goal is to ensure a better future for children by: breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty and despair; promoting an improved, integrated policy and systems response for this population; replicating supportive housing tailored to their unique needs; and increasing investment in housing solutions for at-risk children and their families. Learn more at: www.1RoofFamilies.org

Through our efforts to help vulnerable families at the intersection of homelessness and child welfare involvement, the CSH Child Welfare and Supportive Housing Resource Center and One Roof campaign embrace the Keeping Families Together (KFT) model of supportive housing. Learn more about KFT at: www.csh.org/KeepingFamiliesTogether