

Memphis Strong Families (MSFI)



Lead Organization:

Community Alliance for the Homeless, Tennessee (CAFTH)

Location:

Memphis, TN

Number of families to serve:

100 families

Family Selection Criteria:

Income: Less than 30 percent of the Area Median Income by household size

Child welfare involvement: Families have a current substantiated abuse/neglect case, child in foster care (maximum of 90 days), services recommended post-assessment

Housing status: Presentation of homelessness (staying in a shelter, hotel paid by a 3rd party, transitional housing program, or unsheltered,) a score of 2 or higher on Housing Barrier Screen.

Household composition/residency: at least one child in their legal custody and a resident of Shelby County.

Multiple high needs: high scores on SDM and Housing Barrier Screen; at least one member of the household has a disability of long duration that could be improved with permanent housing including a mental illness or substance abuse disorder.

Partner Organizations

TN Department of Children's Services
Alliance Health Care Network
Promise Development Corporation
Christ Community Health Services
LeBonheur Children's Hospital
LeBonheur Community Health and Wellbeing

KnowledgeQuest
Early Success Coalition
Shelby County Schools
Tennessee Urban Child Institute
University of Tennessee, Health Science Center
Metropolitan Inter-faith Association (MIFA)
Community Alliance for the Homeless

The Need

Homelessness in Memphis is all too often a pathway to foster care, as more than 22 percent of all substantiated maltreatment cases cite housing as the primary concern. Memphis has the highest number of children in foster care in the state. The Department of Children's Services routinely struggles to find affordable housing for families, enabling them to reunify with their children or to prevent family dissolution. Similarly, data from the homeless system shows that 25 percent of the children who received emergency housing assistance are at high and very high risk of child maltreatment based on a research-based instrument known as Structured Decision Making®.

The Local Solution

Based on a preliminary review of data gathered through the Memphis central homeless intake system, the families at the highest risk levels are those most likely to have child welfare involvement. This subset of the homeless population are primarily single female head of household with two children and with significant barriers to self-sufficiency, such as active substance abuse and mental health diagnosis. Memphis has historically relied on the foster care system as an approach to protect children's safety and well-being; however, evidence has demonstrated that the separation of a family creates its own intense trauma often times greater than what a child would experience by remaining in the home. In order to prevent families from unnecessarily dissolving and to prevent the lasting legacy of foster care and homelessness, MSFI will connect the housing and child welfare systems with the goal of addressing a family's need for permanent, stable housing along with intensive customized services.

Overview of MSFI Demonstration

MSFI will connect 100 of Memphis's most vulnerable families to permanent, stable, affordable housing coupled with intensive wraparound services. Housing for families will be concentrated in 69 apartment and duplex housing units managed by Promise Development Corporation. An interdisciplinary team with representatives from all partners will work together to coordinate services. Service delivery to families will be guided by evidence-based models that specifically address trauma experienced by the adults and children while addressing other barriers impeding the achievement of family stability and self-sufficiency. Other key strategies include:

- Promise Development Corporation's Social Services team will use the Housing First Philosophy, Wraparound Process Model, and Motivational Interviewing in order to help families realize, develop and cultivate their hopes, dreams and aspirations for the future. The Wraparound Model and its components (strength based, family focused, family driven, and future oriented) encompass the guiding principles and values that MSFI is dedicated to achieving with the help of families and community stakeholders.
- Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy will be provided through Alliance Health Care and other trauma-informed behavioral health interventions through Promise Development's Social Services case managers.
- MSFI will have ongoing domestic violence training for staff with the cultivation of a stronger partnership with the Family Safety Center, a local domestic violence service provider.
- MSFI will utilize an interdisciplinary team for the purpose of sharing information across disciplines in order to develop the best plan of action.
- MSFI will continue to cultivate a strong relationship with the Department of Children's Services (DCS) by placing liaisons within each agency, coordinating on Child and Family Team Meetings, and looking for innovative ways to improve the coordination between housing and child welfare.
- Promotion of child well-being through early identification/interventions around child development, resiliency/protective factors offered through youth programming, and collaboration with the school system.
- Physical health will be promoted by a partnership with Christ Community Health Services.

Local Evaluation

MSFI is part of a larger national demonstration designed to test an intensive approach to serving families that come to the attention of the child welfare system because of problems with chronic or recurring homelessness and other serious, persistent issues such as mental illness, chemical abuse and domestic violence. The MSFI evaluation and cost study is being conducted by the University of Tennessee Health Science Center. The evaluation will examine changes in child maltreatment and improved safety, improved housing stability, child well-being and caregiver outcomes.

What is Supportive Housing?

Supportive housing is a proven solution to some of communities' toughest problems, serving as the scaffolding for the delivery of more effective and responsive services and public systems. It combines affordable housing with services to help people who face the most complex challenges live with stability, autonomy and dignity. Supportive housing is affordable housing where service providers actively engage tenants in flexible, voluntary and comprehensive supports, and work with property and housing management to enhance tenant stability and ensure that housing remains a positive community asset for the long-term.

What is Partnerships to Demonstrate the Effectiveness of Supportive Housing for Families in the Child Welfare System?

An innovative public-private partnership among the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs and the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. This initiative is testing an intensive approach to providing vulnerable families with safe, affordable housing with the other services and supports they need in order to stay together. Over five years grantees in five sites - Broward County, Fla.; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Memphis, Tenn.; San Francisco; and the state of Connecticut - will bring supportive housing to more families to keep them together as a family.