



PHA Profile: Houston Housing Authority Housing Choice Voucher Preferences for People Experiencing Homelessness

Basic PHA Stats

Location: Houston, Texas

Housing Choice Vouchers: 17,191

Public Housing Apartments: 3,495

Program Description

In 2012, Houston Housing Authority (HHA) began working with the local Continuums of Care (homeless system coordinating entities) to create a homeless preference for 1,000 project-based voucher units, 200 Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV), and 50 Public Housing units per year. HHA expands this preference as needed in different projects throughout the community.

Motivation

Motivation for this work came from many different areas. The President and CEO of HHA had experience with homeless. There was community need, which was illustrated with data showing how vouchers could make an incredible dent in the problem. Strong community partners were present, as well as political will and community-wide homeless goals.

Resources Required

HHA does not have MTW status. This project required additional staffing resources to accommodate the special needs of the target population, including more frequent briefings vs. “mass briefings”, the creation of a Special Program department that handles all homeless programs, hiring a Homeless Program manager to insure that HHA is connected and accessible to community partners and the community need, longer lease-up times which equate to unpaid Administrative dollars, and increased inspection costs due to poor rent histories and/or criminal backgrounds that force clients to rent units that fail housing quality standards.

Challenges

The program required a new level of partnership with community partners. At times, it was a longer lease-up process, which equates to uncompensated work, increased inspections, and requires designated staff to run smoothly, additional HMIS training and support, and an increased time commitment (many meetings, smaller briefings, more time gathering required documents, etc.)

Rewards

The additional effort paid off. As a result of HHA’s participation in coordinated efforts to address homelessness, Houston reached functional zero for veteran’s homelessness. This means that Veterans are no longer homeless in Houston, and if someone becomes homeless, there is an immediate plan and resource to rehouse them. The community has also decreased chronic homelessness by 70%! Houston is the first major city to accomplish these outcomes. Other rewards are finally having the support of partner agencies and case managers to help participants when dealing with landlord relations or property issues, lease-up processes (documentation, housing location services, returning paperwork), and the annual recertification process. HHA is now seen as a leader in the City and in the effort to end homelessness. This work has also enabled HHA to operate new lines of funding, including Emergency Solutions Grants, HOME Tenant-Based Rental Assistance, Continuum of Care, and state dollars.

Outcomes

These programs are working extremely well and HHA will continue to expand to meet the community need as allowed by funding. An example of this success is the Houston 1115 Medicaid Waiver program that pairs HCV

Project Based Assistance (PBV) with 1115 Medicaid waiver services administered by social service agencies and local Federally Qualified Health Centers. Assistance is targeted to chronically homeless individuals with severe mental illness who are frequent users of the ER/hospital system. During the first two years of operation, participants experienced over a 60% decrease in ER visits. The properties themselves have experienced increased retention and have expanded their partnerships throughout the homeless community.

Partners

Partner Name	Type of Organization/ Roll in Program
Coalition for the Homeless	CoC
Search Homeless Services	Social Service Agency- Case Management
Ave360	Social Service Agency- Case Management
Harris County Community Service Department	Social Service Agency- Case Management
The Salvation Army	Social Service Agency- Case Management
The Montrose Center	Social Service Agency- Case Management
The HAY Center- CPS	Social Service Agency- Case Management
Covenant House Texas	Social Service Agency- Case Management
AIDS Foundation Houston	Social Service Agency- Case Management
MHMRA (Harris Health Systems)	Social Service Agency- Case Management
Humble Assistance Ministries	Social Service Agency- Case Management
Healthcare for the Homeless	Provide Clinical Services for 1115 project

Documentation Changes Made

Document	Document Changes
Admin Plan	http://www.housingforhouston.com/media/49126/fy%202017%20admin%20plan.pdf
Procedure Documents	Specifically had to create Policies and Procedures for new Rapid Re-housing (RRH) programs. http://houstontx.gov/housing/RRH%20Business%20Rules%20as%20of%20November%202014.pdf

Words of Wisdom from Housing Authority

“You don’t have to reinvent the wheel. Other PHAs have done the administrative work for you and are willing to share their experiences of how homeless preference can be effectively administered. A PHA will never end poverty but they can help to effectively END homelessness. A homeless preference serves the folk that may make it on to your waitlists but who are never housed or have a lower success rate because: they don’t have a constant mailing address to receive PHA correspondence, have a difficult time securing a unit without assistance, may not recertify without assistance. All of these items mentioned are work that can be uncompensated to a PHA. Housing homeless households who receive case management services from a social service partner with whom the PHA has a MOU are more likely to lease and remain housed. Ask your community partners to (or homeless governmental funders) to help fund PHA staff positions to create lower caseloads for PHA housing specialists who will work on the homeless preference as it can make more time.”

Contact Person for PHAs Interested in Implementing a Similar Program

Name	Title	Phone	Email
Mark Thiele	VP of HCVP	713-260-0605	mthiele@housingforhouston.com