

Lessons Learned from a Federal Supportive Housing Demonstration

Overview

Traditional human services agencies typically focus on eligibility for a set of prescribed services administered by a specific program (like child welfare, employment, mental health, etc.). Further, public systems often look at outputs like number of services provided rather than outcomes or the impact services had on families. Thus most of us don't know whether problems facing families are getting solved by any particular service they have received. For instance, data do not typically tell providers or policy makers if the medical care a child received allowed them to attend school or whether or not a parent was able to become employed because they received child care.

Supportive Housing is unlike other any other human services because providers can be nimble and work with public systems and community based organizations to ensure families obtain the individualized care they need to solve problems to reach their goals. In that vein, Supportive Housing providers are well-positioned to look at families holistically and can use a variety of data sources to understand whether individualized services are meeting families' needs.

On-going use of data packaged in a user-friendly way can be a powerful tool for case managers, supervisors and administrators to understand whether programs are working, to work with partners to make changes as needed, and ultimately help communities use resources more effectively and efficiently.

Purpose

This brief is intended to provide guidance to supportive housing providers and human services partners on how to use data to ensure housing and services are coordinated and effectively helping families transform their lives. It provides examples from a federally funded demonstration that requires partnerships across child welfare, homelessness, domestic violence, and housing systems. Sample data "dashboards" are included which can be easily adapted for supportive housing programs anywhere.

Supportive housing providers and their partners should work together to identify common goals and indicators that can be used to understand the impact services are having on families. In fact, using data for continuous quality improvement should be built into any collaboration from the onset. Partnerships should identify data that can be used for performance feedback and periodic assessment of program progress that can be used to modify the program, as necessary. In most cases, partners will need to develop data sharing agreements protocols for information sharing and obtaining informed consent from family members.

Supportive housing providers may collect a lot of programmatic data but these data do not necessarily translate into information needed to understand impact. Getting administrative data on a monthly basis can be riddled by administrative hurdles. Systems do not communicate – especially not the Statewide and Automated Child Welfare Information Systems (SACWIS) and Housing Management Information System (HMIS). A data dashboard can serve as the receptacle for bigger systems to “dump” their data into an accessible format that can be reviewed regularly. Each agency can share its data in the dashboard so that program directors and staff can monitor the impact of program with a fuller picture of the family.

Data in Action: Memphis, Tennessee

In Memphis, Tennessee the lead agency in the supportive housing collaboration was Community Alliance of the Homeless, the Continuum of Care (CoC) lead agency. Because the goal of the CoC is to prevent and end homelessness, their Homeless Information Management System (HMIS) was designed to collect information on shelter stays and receipt of housing resources. In addition to HMS data, the supportive housing program, Memphis Strong Families Initiative (MSFI) also routinely captured data on family exits from housing to understand whether or not the programs were successful in keeping families stably housed. They did not however have access to data that would inform them about a family’s child welfare case—an important indicator of whether or not the program was keeping families together and safe, reducing child neglect and increasing rates of reunification.

The Tennessee Department of Children Services (DCS) was interested in children being safe and having permanent families. To ensure shared goals were getting met, MSFI worked with DCF to understand which data elements would be useful indicators of success in these areas. The next step was to determine what data would be accessible to the partnership for regular review.

This process allowed them to narrow down the data collected to a few variables:

- the number and percent of families being referred to child protective services because of suspected child maltreatment,
- the number and percent of families with substantiated reports
- the number and percent of families who had a child welfare case opened

For measures of permanency, DCS was interested in the stability of family preservation and/or family reunification. Through their DCS liaison, MSFI obtained data once per month that they could then upload into their dashboard so that they could easily review any new activities and follow-up as needed.

Collecting and Managing Data: The Data Dashboard

Administrative together with programmatic and assessment data can be used to measure and track impact on family and children across a number of different domains. The dashboard format can be useful in conducting periodic reviews and affording partners the opportunity to explore the “story behind the numbers.” A dashboard can be organized into four or five main parts that track outcomes relevant to child welfare and supportive housing partners.

Below is a list of outcomes and indicators that supportive housing providers can use to ensure they are meeting the needs of families and supporting holistic care:

- **Housing stability** domains could track successful housing inspections, timely rent payment, lease violations, evictions, and transitions as well as:
 - Time to housing
 - Days homeless/unstable housing
 - Days in permanent housing
- **Family well-being** domains could track immunization status, identified developmental needs addressed, school attendance, school performance, income increases, and increased parental capacities. School attendance can be tracked with systems data while other well-being domains can be measured via evidence-based assessment tools. Below are some examples:
 - Child outcomes
 - **Developmental Milestones** measured by the [Ages and Stages Questionnaires](#)
 - **Social-Emotional-Behavior Status**-can be measured by the Child Behavioral Checklist (CBCL)
 - **School Performance**-can be measured by school attendance and performance data obtained from school records
 - Family/caregiver outcomes
 - **Parenting Skills/Family Functioning** can be measured by the Parenting Stress Index, which can be found by [clicking here](#).
 - **Parental Functioning** - mental health symptoms, trauma, substance use, domestic violence, skill acquisition, employment, financial management, physical health, etc., can be measured by the North Carolina Family Assessments (NCFAS), [which can be found here](#).
- **Child safety and permanency** domains could track referrals to Child Protective Services, findings of maltreatment, opened cases, stable family preservations, and stable family reunifications. Use administrative data to track:
 - Reunifications
 - Placement preventions
 - Child welfare case closures
 - Child welfare involvement patterns
 - Child safety - child maltreatment reports/substantiated findings
- **Service engagement** domains could track contact frequency/intensity of important services, like mental health, substance use, parenting and service participation
- **Community safety** domains could track policy calls and incidents of domestic violence

[This tracking sheet can be adapted and used](#) to feed up into a monthly dashboard that aligns with your project goals.

Summary

Supportive housing is a unique intervention because its broad mission to keep families stable and housed empowers case managers serve as a “one-stop shop” for families. Program directors and administrators can leverage their position to ensure systems that families are involved in are working effectively. Supportive housing providers and administrators should obtain and track data from public and non-profit organizations to gain a better understanding of the whole picture of families, their service needs and track impact on families’ lives. Collecting and assembling data in a dashboard can be used to strengthen communication with other systems, bolster partnerships and streamline services for families. Data collected can also be used to educate decision makers and policy makers about service impact and resource distribution.

**The Partnerships to Demonstrate the Effectiveness of Supportive Housing for Families in the Child Welfare System is a \$25 million, five-year, five-site demonstration funded by the U.S. Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF). The national demonstration is examining not just the provision of housing, but a resource-rich approach using housing as a platform for providing families involved in child welfare systems with affordable homes along with intensive services and supports to safely stay together or be reunified. The federal demonstration is unique in that it requires a deliberate and purposeful partnership between housing agencies, service providers and child welfare organizations. The demonstration is piloting supportive housing as a service option for families with child-welfare involvement with the most complex needs. The five sites housing families under the demonstration are in Broward County, Florida; Memphis, Tennessee; San Francisco, California; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; and the State of Connecticut.*

