

ARLINGTON COUNTY, VA, HPRP-FUNDED PREVENTION PROGRAM

Arlington County's homelessness prevention program, funded by HUD's Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP), provided short-term assistance, case management, and housing stabilization and search services to 78 households (a mix of families and single adults) through September 2010. Households accessed prevention through a coordinated entry point at one of the county's four subgrantees, staying in the program for an average 104 days (and a median 90 days). Participants were required to exhibit one of HUD's 18 risk factors and be likely to sustain housing after HPRP-funded prevention ended to qualify.

Community Description

An estimated 565 people are homeless in Arlington County, an affluent suburb of Washington, D.C. According to the local point-in-time count, the county identified 223 unsheltered homeless people, 169 people in emergency shelter, and 143 in transitional housing.⁶⁴ In 2011, the county counted 111 formerly homeless people living in a permanent supportive housing program.⁶⁵ The Arlington County Continuum of Care (CoC) is embedded within the Department of Human Services (DHS), Economic Independence Division, and the Housing Assistance Bureau (HAB). The CoC administered funding for 147 transitional housing beds, 12 rapid re-housing beds, 115 emergency shelter beds, 5 safe haven beds, and 69 permanent supportive housing (PSH) beds.

Arlington County adopted its ten-year plan (TYP) to end homelessness, "A Passageway Home: A Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Arlington County, Virginia," in April 2006. The plan resulted from collaboration among "a range of homeless shelter and service providers, the community, and County staff." To assemble enough political will to meet the plan's goals, Arlington gained significant backing from a wide variety of community organizations. Leadership consortium members included businesses and business associations, citizens and civic leaders, county government, the courts, education representatives, faith groups, foundations, health service providers, law enforcement, nonprofits, veterans, developers, and landlords, among others.⁶⁶

DESIGN AND SETUP OF HPRP PREVENTION

In 2009, Arlington County received \$728,367 in federal funds and \$363,631 in state funds for HPRP, for a total of \$1,091,998. The ten-year planning committee designed the HPRP program. The Arlington County Community Assistance Bureau had an established homelessness prevention program long before 2009. This experience helped the design and implementation of HPRP. County staff noticed that some clients in their program returned for assistance after receiving a one-time "emergency" check from the prevention program. As a result, Arlington focused on providing housing-focused case management services to its HPRP clients in order to prevent recidivism. As of May 31, 2010, 74 percent of the funds spent had been for prevention and 26 percent had been for rapid re-housing.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ http://hudhre.info/CoC_Reports/2010_va_600_pops_sub.pdf.

⁶⁵ <http://arlingtonva10yp.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/annual-point-in-time-report-jan-2011.pdf>.

⁶⁶ <http://www.arlingtonva.us/departments/HumanServices/Xtend/pdf/file64492.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Arlington County, Virginia Homelessness and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) June 3, 2010 Report.

The committee also recognized that to serve as many people as possible, it would need to devote as much funding as possible toward financial assistance without compromising case management. As a result, the county funded several positions, including the homeless program coordinator, management specialist, HMIS consultant, and a housing locator, from alternative sources. At the subgrantee level, four case management agencies received funding for services and HMIS entry. Other than funds for financial assistance, the only HPRP money Arlington kept for the grantee was for data management and evaluation. The county used data management and evaluation funds to pay a portion of its HMIS contractor, Bowman Systems, which provided technical assistance and ran training sessions.

IMPLEMENTATION

Arlington County contracted with four subgrantees to provide HPRP services: Northern Virginia Family Services (NVFS), Arlington Street People's Assistance Network (A-SPAN), Doorways for Women and Children (Doorways), and Arlington and Alexandria Coalition for the Homeless (AACH). Every subgrantee served a mix of families and singles. The county's Housing Assistance Bureau processed financial assistance, and the subgrantees were responsible for case management services, client prescreening and intake, and HMIS entry. Subgrantee case managers presented all prescreened client cases with complete applications to the Housing Services Team (which comprised the homeless program coordinator, the management specialist, case manager representatives from each subgrantee organization, representatives from the Community Assistance Bureau, and the housing locator) for ultimate determination of eligibility and service packages. In addition to the subgrantees, the county funded a housing locator position that helped households remain in housing or find new housing.

Outreach

Before implementing HPRP, Arlington County identified three Zip Codes from which they received most of their client requests for emergency prevention assistance. Based on this analysis, the county sent letters to landlords notifying them of the program and suggesting they refer potential clients to the HPRP subgrantees for assistance. Flyers were posted in county offices and nonprofits throughout the county, and property managers and landlords were given additional flyers to hand to clients receiving eviction notices. In addition, staff spoke directly with landlords to inform them of the program. The Housing Assistance Bureau met with departments in DHS to educate all county services agencies about HPRP. Although the flyers remained posted and the county continued to stay in touch with landlords throughout the county, word of mouth was very effective at spreading the message after the initial outreach and marketing.

Point of Entry

Arlington County designed a coordinated intake, with all subgrantees using similar forms. The county had a "no wrong door" policy for HPRP-funded prevention services: a household could phone or walk in to any of the subgrantees to apply for HPRP.

Intake: Eligibility and Assessment

The HPRP subgrantees conducted intake, which included the following steps:

1. *Prescreening.* Typically, subgrantees do a phone screening before seeing a client. The standard initial prescreening included the following questions:
 - Where does the household live? Arlington residents were given preference.
 - Is the head of household a legal citizen? The answer had to be “Yes.”
 - What is the household’s total monthly income? The answer had to be below 50 percent of area median income (AMI).
 - How much does the household have in assets? The answer had to be less than \$2,500, excluding the value of the first car owned.
 - What risk factors exist in the current housing situation? The client had to have at least one high-risk factor to qualify. High-risk factors included the following: eviction within 2 weeks from private dwelling (including family/friends); discharge within 2 weeks from an institutional stay of at least 180 days; residency in housing that had been condemned; sudden or significant loss of income; sleeping in an emergency shelter; sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation; and an institutional stay for up to 180 days with a previous stay in shelter or place not meant for human habitation. Moderate risk factors included the following: sudden and significant increase in utility costs; mental health and substance abuse issues; physical disabilities; severe housing costs (more than 50 percent of income); homeless in last 12 months; young head of household (under 25 with children or pregnant); current or past involvement with child welfare; pending loss of rental housing; extremely low income (30 percent of AMI or below); high overcrowding; past institutional care; recent traumatic life event; credit problem; and a significant amount of medical debt.
At prescreening, the case manager informed the client of the case management requirements, collection of personal information, and documentation required to put together a complete application.
2. *Screening.* If the client met the prescreening criteria, the case manager scheduled a meeting to complete the full screening process, which involved completing an application. The complete application included income, assets, and housing status verification forms; information on risk factors; a program agreement; a consent form; expense information; a housing barriers form; and an HMIS release form.
3. *Housing services team (HST) eligibility and service package determination.* The case manager who completed the client’s application presented the case to the housing services team for final acceptance into HPRP. If a case was deferred, the team requested additional information for the following meeting. In addition to deciding on final eligibility, the team looked at current services received along with client income, savings, and spending habits. The team determined how much the client could afford to contribute toward housing-related expenses and the amount the team believed was necessary, based on the client’s records, for the client to resolve the current crisis and return to sustainability. If a case was denied, the case manager notified the client, and

the HPRP coordinator reviewed any requests for appeal. The housing services team referred clients denied assistance to other programs that might better fit their needs. In most cases, the HST cited lack of sustainability as the main reason for denial.

“But For” and “Sustainability” Rules

As required by HUD, Arlington County screened HPRP applicants to make sure that they were at imminent risk of homelessness; in other words, that they would be homeless “but for this assistance.” To operationalize this rule, the county looked at the risk factors described above. In addition to the “but for” rule, early guidance from HUD required that sites make sure that the household would be able to sustain assistance after the time limit for HPRP services expired. To meet this rule, the housing services team required almost all HPRP applicants to be employed or have a secure stream of income before it approved an application, with few exceptions. The team looked at benefits income and income from family living in the household as well to determine if the client had enough income to sustain housing in the long term. The client would not be accepted without documentation to prove active receipt of sufficient income to sustain housing. As a result, most households accepted had a reliable source of income, usually Supplemental Security Income or regular employment; the team needed to see sufficient income for the sustainability component for a household.

Prevention Activities

The County provided short-term assistance with ongoing case management. A housing search locator helped stabilize the client or, if needed, provided assistance searching for new housing. The HPRP-funded prevention program served 189 people (74 households) as of September 30, 2010.

Financial Assistance. Arlington County provided short-term assistance—4 months on average. This help was usually in the form of a one-time subsidy, though financial assistance sometimes included ongoing rental assistance, rental arrears, hotel and motel costs, moving costs, utility payments and arrears, and security deposits. The county capped its financial assistance at \$1,500 for prevention and \$3,000 for re-housing to ensure that clients were actively involved in retaining their housing. As of May 31, 2010, the county had spent the vast majority of prevention funds on rental assistance and a small amount on utility payments, security deposits, and utility deposits.⁶⁸

Case Management. Very few clients receiving assistance received financial assistance alone. The vast majority received case management and some assistance from the housing locator. Case managers at the subgrantee organizations met with clients twice a month, coordinated a service plan, provided monthly budget assistance, and referred clients to any additional services. During the first month, case managers met with clients weekly. Case managers focused on ensuring clients paid rent on time, developed a budget, kept their unit clean, and were seen as good tenants by the landlord.

Supportive Services. One unique element of Arlington County’s HPRP funded prevention program was the housing locator, who helped clients stay in their housing, receive relief for fees (and, occasionally, rent), and maintain relationships with landlords. Most clients receiving assistance received some assistance from the housing locator, who provided a range of important services:

⁶⁸ Arlington County, Virginia Homelessness and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) June 3, 2010, report.

- Reached out to Arlington landlords, property management companies, and apartment communities, with an emphasis on face-to-face contacts.
- Recruited and marketed to landlords to participate in HPRP and other Arlington County housing programs.
- Maintained a directory of housing providers, contacts, and vacancies.
- Negotiated with landlords for acceptance of participants who may have substantial housing barriers.
- Attended and participated in housing services team meetings and trainings.
- Maintained consistent and open communication with landlords, case managers, and other HPRP stakeholders, and mediated between landlords and tenants on lease violations.
- Coordinated with case managers and HPRP program participants to view properties, complete leasing applications, coordinate document retrieval, and coordinate payment for fees and rent as required by the landlord.
- Provided housing information to case managers in a timely manner. Ensured that all information pertaining to clients' housing status was provided to all staff.
- Developed and maintained outcome measures using best practices.
- Conducted all habitability and lead-based paint inspections for HPRP assisted units in accordance with federal habitability standards.
- Researched housing topics and collected and organized housing information for case managers and other interested parties.⁶⁹

When a case was presented to the housing services team, the housing locator discussed the client's barriers with the landlord to determine what property management was willing to forgive. The housing locator might also negotiate for rent relief or a stay of eviction to allow the HST to reconvene and decide on the client's case. In addition, the housing locator personally delivered HPRP checks for financial assistance to landlords weekly. This exchange gave the housing locator an opportunity to speak with the landlord, build a relationship, and inquire about currently available units. While some landlords required this regular personal interaction, others called the housing locator when units became available. Up-to-date information on unit availability is extremely valuable in Arlington, where landlords are often able to lease up a vacant apartment in a week. The most difficult placements were clients with a record of felonies, whom landlords often rejected outright, even if the felony occurred in the distant past. Landlords were, however, very willing to work with smaller households with credit issues, as long as the client had not had a previous eviction or bank foreclosure. In general, the landlord overlooked certain barriers for clients with minor issues because of the housing locator and the case management assistance offered by HPRP. This saved clients with barriers valuable time searching for an apartment in a low-vacancy market.

The housing services team referred clients to employment and training services through the Arlington Employment Center, which was funded by ARRA Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) funds to assist HPRP households. In addition, ARRA CSBG funds were set aside for HPRP clients to attend culinary training and a summer youth job training program, and to pay for client employment expenses.

⁶⁹ Arlington Street People's Assistance Network, Inc. (A-SPAN) Job Description, April 2011: Housing Locator.

DATA AND MONITORING

The Housing Assistance Bureau (HAB), as both the CoC lead and grantee under HPRP, managed and maintained the HMIS for the county. Before HPRP, three of the four subgrantees were using HMIS for other programs. The county held an initial training with all subgrantees before HPRP began, as HPRP required a slightly different workflow than normal HMIS activity. In addition to the HMIS universal and program data elements, follow-up data were entered 3, 6, and 12 months after the case was closed. The purpose of these assessments was to determine the level of housing stability for HPRP-assisted households. Questions on the assessment included these five: Is the household housed? Is the household in the same housing? If not, what happened? Is the household paying its rent on time? Has the household gone to the Community Assistance Bureau for assistance? All this information was entered into HMIS. Case managers at most subgrantees reported that they were able to contact most of their clients after 3 months; this became more difficult as time went on. The next step for the county is to quantify the different services provided by case managers to understand client-case manager interactions more clearly. Additionally, the county is looking into a relational database that can score a client's risk factors in a "vulnerability index" so less of the burden of the screening process is on the case manager.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

With funds from the state of Virginia (\$303,000), general funds from the county (\$200,000), funds from an Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) (\$27,000), and funds from the local housing fund (\$75,000), Arlington County is continuing HPRP under a new name, HPRP 2.0. The funding for case management, however, will decrease by half in the second year and disappear by the third, leaving the county and nonprofits to search for additional options. Advocates are lobbying the county to provide money for case management services connected to the Housing Assistance Bureau's HPRP financial assistance program in order to create a more sustainable and effective homelessness prevention program. Because of the limited funding under the new program, the Ten-Year Planning Committee met in November 2010 to compile a list of priorities for HPRP 2.0, as the committee is unsure how much ESG money the county will be able to access from state grants. In setting the priorities for HPRP 2.0, the committee tried to align its goals with those of the recently passed HEARTH legislation. HPRP 2.0 is focused on shortening the average length of stay for families in shelters, and HAB is currently analyzing local data to set benchmarks based on this goal. Another priority is to ensure that those who have received Section 8, Housing Choice Vouchers, and other vouchers retain their housing subsidy.

Exhibit E.2: Arlington County, Virginia, Prevention Overview, Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program

	Persons		Households	
	#	%	#	%
Total served Year 1 ^a	189	100	78	100
Persons in families	150	79	—	—
Adults without children	39	21	—	—
Total served Year 2 ^a	128	100	58	100
Persons in families	91	71	—	—
Adults without children	38	30	—	—
HPRP services				
Rental assistance	—	—	87	69
Case management	—	—	126	100
Security/utility deposits	—	—	26	21
Outreach and engagement	—	—	6	5
Utility payments	—	—	26	21
Housing search/placement	—	—	3	2
Legal services	—	—	0	0
Credit repair	—	—	0	0
Motel and hotel vouchers	—	—	1	<1
Moving cost assistance	—	—	2	1
Destination ^b				
Total leavers	283	100	—	—
Homeless	9	3	—	—
Institutional setting	0	0	—	—
Permanent housing with subsidy	146	52	—	—
Permanent housing without subsidy	122	43	—	—
Family or friends	6	2	—	—

Source: Arlington County Annual Performance Report Data, 2009 program start through September 30, 2011.

— not applicable

^aTotal served numbers may not add to 100 percent because the “children only” and “unknown” categories are not included in this table. Numbers may add to greater than 100 percent due to data reporting errors.

^bDestination numbers may not add to total leavers because the “other,” “hotel/motel,” “unknown,” and “deceased” categories are not included in this table.

“Homeless” includes the following destinations: emergency shelter, TH for homeless persons, staying with friends (temporary tenure), staying with family (temporary tenure), place not meant for human habitation, safe haven, and hotel or motel paid by client.

“Institutional setting” includes foster care, psychiatric facility, substance abuse or detox facility, hospital (non-psychiatric), and jail or prison.

“Permanent housing” with subsidy includes housing owned by client with ongoing subsidy, rental by client with VASH subsidy, rental by client with other ongoing subsidy, and Permanent Supportive Housing for Homeless Persons.

“Permanent housing” without subsidy includes housing owned by client without ongoing subsidy and rental by client with no ongoing subsidy.

“Family or friends” includes living with family, permanent tenure or living with friends, permanent tenure.