

# Unlocking doors to homelessness prevention

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Solutions for preventing homelessness and eviction



March 2018

**Eviction and Homelessness  
Prevention Research Project**

Your Way Home Montgomery  
County and HealthSpark  
Foundation



This report was made possible through support from HealthSpark Foundation. The author is solely responsible for the content and information contained in this report. Findings, opinions and conclusions are solely those of the author of this report.



**Eviction and Homelessness  
Prevention Research Project**

Your Way Home  
Montgomery County  
and HealthSpark Foundation

March 2018

Dear Community Leader:

In January 2014, Your Way Home was launched with the goal of making homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring in Montgomery County, PA. After years of gathering input from our local partners, learning from peer communities across the country, evaluating the best practice research, piloting a few promising service models, and establishing a philanthropic pool of funders to support unmet consumer and system development needs, our community adopted a homeless crisis response system that quickly moves literally homeless residents directly to permanent housing. Since 2014, our system has evolved to include a single call center, diversion from shelter for those that have alternative housing options, housing-focused emergency shelters, a robust rapid re-housing program, and prioritization for permanent supportive housing for those that need more support to maintain housing stability. As a result of these system transformations, Montgomery County has reduced homelessness by 37% in four years.

However, our work is not done. While our system is positioned to more effectively respond to the crisis of homelessness, we haven't yet tackled the monumental effort of preventing more vulnerable families and individuals from losing their housing in the first place. If we are to truly meet our goal of making homelessness a rare event, we must start to work "upstream."

This study is Your Way Home's first endeavor to better understand how to more effectively prevent homelessness from occurring in our community. Through our longstanding partnership with HealthSpark Foundation, we undertook this work in the same deliberative approach that we used when first forming Your Way Home: by learning from others, reviewing our own data, testing pilot projects, and scaling what works. We hope that this report offers insight to other communities that are also ready to start addressing homelessness prevention as an extension of their homeless crisis response systems; provides useful tips for evaluating local systems and data; and highlights the innovative programs and services that so many other communities are already undertaking.

As our work evolves, we will share our findings and results on [YourWayHome.org](http://YourWayHome.org) where visitors will find detailed information on policies, procedures, forms, and data on our prevention and other efforts. We hope to hear from others, too, as they embark on their own projects to end homelessness in their communities.

In partnership,



Emma W. Hertz  
Administrator  
Montgomery County Office of Housing  
and Community Development



Russell Johnson  
President and CEO  
HealthSpark Foundation

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## About the Author Barbara Poppe



## Barbara Poppe and associates

The collective for impact

The lead author of this report is Barbara Poppe, founder of [Barbara Poppe and Associates](#) and the former executive director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. Ms. Poppe is a nationally recognized expert on homelessness and results-driven, public-private partnerships. Barbara Poppe and Associates, established in 2014, is an independent consulting firm that develops the capacity of communities and organizations to tackle complex issues using a collaborative systems approach to achieves results and impact.

Ms. Poppe served as the executive director of the [United States Interagency Council on Homelessness](#) from November 2009 to March 2014. During her tenure, Poppe oversaw the federal response to homelessness by working with 19 federal agencies to create partnerships at every level of government and with the private sector to reduce and end homelessness. In June 2010, Ms. Poppe and four cabinet secretaries announced [Opening Doors](#), the nation's first-ever comprehensive federal plan to prevent and end homelessness.

Ms. Poppe served as the executive director of the nationally recognized [Community Shelter Board](#) (Columbus, Ohio) from October 1995 to November 2009. She holds a Master of Science degree in Epidemiology from the University of Cincinnati.

Ms. Poppe is a frequent national, state, and local speaker on homelessness, and serves on the national boards of the [Enterprise Community Partners](#) and the [Siemer Institute for Family Stability](#).

**Katharine Gale**, an independent consultant from the San Francisco Bay Area with more than 20 years' experience in the fields of homelessness, special needs housing, and community development, assisted with the project. Her work focuses on performance improvement and strategy development at both program and system levels. She has authored community-level needs assessments for homeless and at-risk populations, and evaluated collaborative prevention, rapid re-housing, and special needs housing efforts.

In addition to her own consulting practice, Ms. Gale co-founded and serves as principal associate of [Focus Strategies](#), a California-based consulting firm helping communities use local data to improve their resource allocation and system structures to better address homelessness.

**Linda Siefkas** and associates edited and designed the research report.

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## About HealthSpark Foundation

[HealthSpark Foundation](#) is a private, independent foundation providing support to organizations that serve the unmet health and/or human service needs of residents living in and organizations serving Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

- With its strategic plan and grantmaking strategy, the foundation embraces a population health framework and approach to its work.
- The foundation makes its investments to reduce health disparities affecting particularly those experiencing poverty. With its continued focus on enhancing access to safe and affordable housing, improving food security and proper nutrition, and enhancing access to quality health care and supportive services, the foundation’s work is designed to improve the overall health and wellbeing of Montgomery County residents.
- The foundation is designed to exist in perpetuity, so its commitment is long-term. We invest our time, expertise and resources in finding innovative solutions to the complex challenges facing our health and human services systems and helping to build the capacity of the organizations delivering services.

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## About Your Way Home

[Your Way Home](#) Montgomery County (Pennsylvania) is a transformational partnership between government, philanthropic, nonprofit and community partners to end homelessness in our community. Its goal is to make the experience of homelessness brief, rare and non-recurring.

Your Way Home was established in 2014 as the county’s unified and coordinated housing crisis response system for families and individuals experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness. Through Your Way Home, the community developed a common agenda, a shared set of metrics, and mutually aligning activities. These shared goals and activities were created through a seven-year process that combined research and evaluation with capacity-building, training, and pilot projects to scale what worked. Your Way Home embraces a “housing first” approach to ending homelessness by first helping people find or maintain permanent housing with stability and then connecting them with community, health, human, and financial services they need to prevent future experiences of homelessness.

Through coordinated entry and assessment, Your Way Home prioritizes housing and services based on vulnerability and need rather than on a first come, first serve basis. Through progressive engagement, consumers are given just as much services and support as they need to succeed in order to preserve costly interventions like permanent supportive or subsidized housing for families and individuals with significant and lasting barriers to housing stability.

## Executive Summary

Strategies that advance eviction and homelessness prevention are complex, often misunderstood, and poorly utilized. Just as strategies that address homelessness when it occurs, preventing homelessness requires root cause analysis, systems change, targeting of resources, policy changes for organizations and systems, research and evaluation, and using data to plan, establish metrics, and measure progress.

This report describes how a local community – Montgomery County, PA – took a strategic look at what was working in other communities and how these strategies might advance eviction and homelessness prevention in their community.

### Key Terms

**Homelessness Prevention** is a range of types of assistance that is aimed at helping households avoid eviction or homelessness.

**Diversion** is a type of targeted homelessness prevention assistance aimed at helping households stay safely in current housing or, if that is not possible, move to other housing without requiring a shelter stay first. Priority is given to households that are most likely to be admitted to shelters or be unsheltered if not for this assistance.

Under the leadership of Your Way Home Montgomery County, in partnership and with funding from HealthSpark Foundation, two new efforts are being piloted to begin addressing “upstream prevention” needs in their community. [Figure 1](#) depicts the conceptual framework that was used to undergird this work.

The **first step** was to confirm that YWH was in fact ready to tackle “upstream prevention” and would build this work on the foundation of a high-functioning crisis response system (effective at diversion, targeting/matching interventions, with mostly successful exits to stable housing) and demonstrated results (low unsheltered and declining annual PIT count (Point in Time census of people experiencing homelessness)).

The **second step** was to analyze how and where people were becoming homeless within the community and then assess opportunities to begin to tackle a portion of these needs.

The **third step** was to determine what models could be adapted from other communities to address these needs.

## Upstream Prevention: an emerging premise

If you have a **high functioning crisis response system** (effective at diversion, targeting/matching interventions, with mostly successful exits to stable housing) that has **demonstrated results** (low unsheltered and declining annual PIT count)



*Housing stability is the primary goal of homelessness prevention.*

### Look upstream and determine opportunity(ies) for prevention (homelessness and/or eviction)

- What are greatest needs?
- What populations are most likely to become homeless?
- Which populations are most costly if they do become homeless?
- Where is there energy and interest for vulnerable populations?
- What impacts might create political will?
- Are there any financial resources or partnerships that might coalesce?
- How will we measure impact?

Figure 1. Overview of how communities can conceptualize work on preventing homelessness.

The following themes emerged from a review of published research on homelessness prevention:

- The causes of eviction and homelessness are complex and multi-dimensional.
- Race plays a critical role in determining eviction rates and is also correlated with rates of homelessness.
- The challenge of prevention is targeting services and resources toward those most likely to become homeless.
- Accurately targeted and effective community-based prevention programs can be cheaper for communities when shelters stays are expensive.



## Upstream Prevention: an emerging premise

Consequently, to be effective and efficient with limited resources, communities must target resources and define interventions specific to needs. (See Figure 2 for a conceptual framework to think about how to stratify and target needs.) The work of preventing homelessness can be community-wide to highly targeted.

Figure 3 depicts a sample of prevention strategies along a continuum from community-wide to highly targeted.



Figure 2. Conceptual framework illustrating how to target resources to reduce housing instability and prevent homelessness.

Notes on Figure 2: The entire circle represents the community risk pool of households at risk of homelessness – very low-income renters who are severely cost-burdened (paying more than 50% of their income for housing), are living in shared housing and/or vulnerable to financial crisis. Ideally, ongoing housing supports (rental assistance and access to financial assistance) would be available to all to ensure housing affordability, which would significantly reduce or eliminate risk of homelessness. When these broad-based supports are not available, the type of intervention will vary.

The smallest proportion of households are those at greatest risk and depicted in the center of the risk pool; these households should be targeted for diversion assistance to help them avoid entry into the homeless crisis response system or becoming unsheltered.

The next ring out are households who are at imminent risk of eviction; these households will likely need some type of legal intervention paired with financial assistance and social services. Households with multiple risk factors but not yet at imminent risk of homelessness may require interventions from prevention financial assistance to more intensive permanent supportive housing.

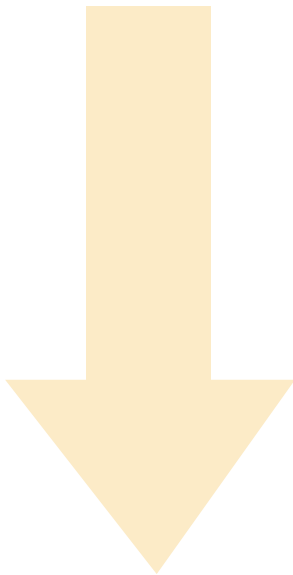
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### Executive Summary

## Upstream prevention strategies

Community-wide



Highly targeted



- Affordable housing campaign – preserve and create new affordable rental housing for extremely low-income households
- Broad-based emergency financial assistance and services
- Court-based eviction prevention
- Public housing eviction prevention
- Universal risk screener with targeted prevention services
- Target high-cost and vulnerable people
  - o Frequent users of jail, hospitals, detox, etc.
  - o Support youth transitioning from foster care
  - o Support elderly households to stay in home via home modification and home-based services
- Target vulnerable children and families
  - o Public and assisted housing eviction prevention services
  - o School-based supports
  - o Train family and child providers to provide housing stabilization service



Figure 3. Sample of types of homelessness prevention activities along the spectrum from broad impact to highly targeted impact.

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## Upstream prevention strategies

Ultimately, YWH explored the feasibility of three concepts:

- Court-based eviction prevention
- Universal screener with targeted prevention
- School-based prevention

Two pilots are being undertaken during 2018 – court-based eviction prevention and school-based prevention.

This report fully describes these components: consultation process, including the national scan of eviction prevention and homelessness prevention programs in local communities; specific content about each of the three concepts YWH considered; and summary of lessons learned.

For each concept, the report includes:

- Background and intent
- Communities/practices reviewed
- Key features across communities/practices
- Summary of all features and components of the reviewed programs
- Barbara Poppe and Associates (BPA) concept recommendation for local replication
- Rationale for testing the concept in Montgomery County
- Potential partners to be engaged
- Findings from the YWH feasibility analysis during summer/fall 2017 and YWH status of the concept as of January 2018
- BPA-recommended considerations for other communities to explore in considering replication of the idea
- Description of one model program from another community

This project charts a path forward for CoCs to begin tackling upstream homelessness prevention in a smart, strategic way. This is critical work as there are families and individuals who are harmed by housing instability and homelessness (under definitions broader than HUD's) that need attention.

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## Key Lessons

The following are the key lessons that emerged from the research. The next section describes the lessons in greater detail.

1. Embark on this journey only if you have the solid base of a well-functioning, homeless crisis response system and strong allies and partners beyond the homeless crisis response system. The crisis response system must provide solid diversion assistance for those who are at greatest risk of imminent homelessness. Additionally, a CoC primarily or exclusively composed of homeless assistance providers should not undertake this work alone.
2. Educate (and re-educate) CoC partners and allies that the loss of housing due to eviction (whether legal or informal) has harmful consequences to the household and the community even if they do not become literally homeless and require assistance through the homeless crisis response system.
3. Homelessness and eviction prevention should be viewed as a range of potential interventions along a spectrum from highly targeted to broad.
4. Review data to determine greatest needs and potential for impact.
5. Regardless of which approach is selected, each prevention initiative will need housing stabilization supports that address immediate and long-term needs paired with rental assistance. Access to legal services is frequently needed as well.
6. Due to the breadth and extent of needs, CoCs should consider a pilot approach to get started rather than building a comprehensive strategic plan that will be hard to implement.
7. Engage a cross sector of allies in the pilot selection process to determine the type and scope of project to be developed. Philanthropy can be a key partner for convening stakeholders and investing in the pilot.
8. Mobilize and engage the community about the need and solutions. Prevention is the very long game.

**For more information on implementing these key lessons, go to [Tips](#) for local policymakers, philanthropists, and providers of services.**

## Introduction and Purpose

HealthSpark Foundation undertook this study, as part of its catalytic partnership with Your Way Home Montgomery County, to advance efforts to ensure the housing stability of families and individuals who are homeless or at imminent risk for homelessness. Your Way Home Montgomery County is a public-private partnership among county government, local philanthropy, non-profit housing and service providers, landlords, and community partners united to end and prevent homelessness.

Since its launch in 2014, Your Way Home (YWH) has significantly decreased the number of families and individuals entering emergency shelter and transitional housing while exiting more people directly from homelessness to permanent housing. The impact of this collective effort has yielded a 96% success rate, as measured by households not returning to the homeless system in six months.

### Working Premise

Before a community tackles “upstream” prevention, there must be a solidly functioning homeless crisis response system that is appropriately resourced, effective at targeting, and can inform decisions about which households should be targeted through any “upstream” prevention activities.

Barbara Poppe  
*(See [Lesson 1](#) for more specifics)*

YWH has improved service coordination, provider collaboration, and the use of metrics to inform decision-making across sectors, organizations and communities. A significant element of YWH’s success has come from building in light support and housing counseling strategies, known as “diversion,” at the access points to the homeless system, to preserve housing when possible or resolve a housing crisis quickly without requiring further support from the homeless system.

In 2016, YWH initiated a counseling program designed to divert at-risk households from entering shelter. Housing Resource Centers (HRC) deliver coordinated and comprehensive rapid re-housing and housing counseling services to prevent homelessness and divert people from entering shelter. HRCs in each major region of the county receive referrals from the Your Way Home Call Center.

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## Introduction and Purpose



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Housing Stability Coaches in each HRC:

- 1) divert people from shelter who are at imminent risk for homelessness;
- 2) conduct a full SPDAT ([Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool](#)) vulnerability assessment on people who scored for medium or high acuity on the VI-SPDAT Pre-Screen conducted by the call center;
- 3) provide rapid re-housing subsidies and coaching to families and individuals experiencing homelessness; and
- 4) connect people with significant barriers to housing stability with permanent supportive housing providers. Housing Locators help rapid re-housing clients find and secure affordable market-rate rental housing in their community. In the first six-month period of 2016, 279 at-risk households were diverted from entering homeless shelters. Few of these households received financial assistance to avert eviction.

During the 2017 annual Montgomery County Point-In-Time count, 179 people in families and 243 individuals were counted. During 2016, the YWH call center received nearly 8,800 calls seeking housing stability information/services. The YWH shelter providers served 860 individuals in the most recent 12-month period, and 582 of 935 households exited from shelter/transitional/rapid re-housing to stable permanent housing – system-wide rate of 62% successful exits.

**Despite this success, YWH and the Foundation believed that the homeless/housing system transformation was incomplete: it was missing a broader prevention component using evidence-based interventions to prevent evictions and secure ongoing housing stability. Specifically, YWH wanted to add effective homelessness prevention “upstream” at the point where households begin to experience instability, even if they are not on the immediate verge of homelessness, by connecting families, youth and single adults with opportunities to improve their health, mental health and economic security. The Foundation also set out to engage, inspire and mobilize support for YWH across sectors, organizations, and communities through Montgomery County, PA, and beyond.**

As we began the inquiry, we needed to develop a shared understanding of the current “upstream” prevention response in place in the community and potential opportunities to reduce admissions into the YWH system of care by providing upstream prevention. For purposes of this study, “upstream prevention” is the combination of services, benefits, and policies that support households with a current place to live to avoid housing instability, eviction, and homelessness. Prevention may include rental and utility assistance, mediation, housing counseling, legal assistance, and a range of other strategies that advance housing stability.

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This is differentiated from services provided by the homeless crisis response system such as diversion, emergency shelter, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing. “Upstream prevention” may include a range of responses, from legal services to prevent eviction to emergency rent assistance to housing stabilization responses by child welfare workers to discharge planning by hospitals.

*A larger number of people are at risk of homelessness than those who will experience literal homelessness (defined as unsheltered or served in emergency shelter/transitional housing). Thus, before tackling upstream prevention, a community must have a solidly functioning homeless crisis response system that is appropriately resourced, effective at targeting, and can inform decisions about households that should be targeted through any “upstream” prevention activities.*

### Key research questions

**This study answered the following questions:**

- **Was the YWH homeless crisis response system functioning well enough to begin to tackle “upstream” prevention through new community collaborations?**
- **What types of prevention models could be implemented that would have impact on increasing housing stability of households most likely to be evicted or become homeless?**
- **What are the strategic opportunities or drivers that could be leveraged to test a targeted eviction or homelessness prevention model locally?**

### Purpose of the research

The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) describe that “an end to homelessness means that every community will have a systematic response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible, or if it can’t be prevented, it is a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience.” This study was undertaken to develop a better understanding of how communities might achieve that lofty vision that “homelessness is prevented whenever possible.”

Further, by describing the process of inquiry undertaken by YWH (with support from HealthSpark Foundation) along with the ideas that were tested and the lessons learned, this report is intended to be useful to other communities that are ready to tackle upstream prevention. This report is written from the perspective of a CoC (Continuum of Care<sup>1</sup>) responsible for the coordination of the homeless crisis response system in a region, since YWH is the CoC lead entity for Montgomery County. YWH recognized that, while it could be a catalyst for prevention, it was not the organization’s role to be solely responsible for the breadth of activities necessary to truly prevent homelessness.

<sup>1</sup> Continuum of Care A community planning body required by HUD to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximum self-sufficiency. Continuum of Care is often used to refer to the system of programs to address and prevent homelessness as well as the body that coordinates such efforts.



## What We Know About Homelessness Prevention

### **The causes of eviction and homelessness are complex and multi-dimensional.**

Although not every household that is evicted becomes homeless, there is a high correlation between eviction and homelessness. Housing market dynamics, including overall cost-burden – the percentage of income spent on housing – remain a consistent indicator of homelessness and eviction (Byrne, Munley, Fargo, Montgomery, & Culhane, 2013; Marr, 2016). Both housing cost and income are important, but unexpected changes in income appear to be the main shock that precipitates homelessness, more so than shocks in rent level (O’Flaherty, 2009). Despite common perception, mental illness is not a sufficient cause of homelessness (Montgomery, Metraux, & Culhane, 2013). The link between serious mental illness and poverty does pose serious risks for homelessness, however. The socioeconomic deprivation that often accompanies serious mental illness is more likely to account for the risk of homelessness than the mental illness itself.

The impacts of eviction and the sometimes-resulting homelessness cause rippling effects and can contribute to cycles of housing insecurity and poverty. As Matthew Desmond writes in “Evicted” (2016), “Eviction is a cause, not just a condition, of poverty.” Desmond explains that once evictions happen, the record follows individuals for years. Landlords will often reject tenant applicants with an eviction record, leading them to shelter in substandard housing or face housing insecurity. An ongoing Urban Institute study estimated the municipal cost of eviction and unpaid bills among financially insecure families to vary from the low range of \$8 million to \$18 million in New Orleans to a high range of \$280 million to \$646 million in New York City (Elliott & Kalish, 2017). The economic consequences of failing to prevent homelessness are severe and often borne by the taxpayer.

### **Race plays a critical role in determining eviction rates and is correlated with rates of homelessness.**

Blacks and Hispanics are overrepresented among the homeless population nationally (2016 AHAR). Emerging case studies are beginning to show serious disparities in eviction rates in racially segregated cities. In a Philadelphia study, eviction rates in predominantly Black neighborhoods (census tracts that were made up of an 80% or greater Black population), were more than three times the rate of predominantly White neighborhoods (Goldstein, Parker, & Acuña, 2017). Preliminary analysis of these areas found that racial composition of a neighborhood had a statistically significant effect on neighborhood eviction rates and had a more substantial impact than household income and tenure. Desmond’s (2012) analysis of inner-city Milwaukee neighborhoods reinforces these stark racial disparities. Between 2003 and 2007, Milwaukee experienced approximately 16 evictions each day. Despite accounting for only 22% of the neighborhoods in the study, 46% of these evictions took place in predominantly

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## What We Know About Homelessness Prevention



Black neighborhoods. According to Desmond (2012, p. 104), “This disparity ... reflects the overrepresentation of African-Americans among the urban poor as well as their concentration in segregated and disadvantaged neighborhoods.” Among those evicted, Black women outnumbered Black men by 1.75:1 and White women by 6.13:1.

### **The challenge of prevention is targeting services and resources toward those most likely to become homeless.**

In most communities, while there is a large pool of people who might become homeless at any given time, only a fraction of that population becomes homeless. (Burt, 2007). In a study of six communities across the United States with well-developed prevention programs, Burt (2007) notes that while it can be easy for communities to offer prevention initiatives, it is difficult to effectively target scarce resources to those most at risk of becoming homeless. Inherent difficulties of implementing effective, community-wide prevention strategies have led historically to an emphasis on accommodating those who have already lost their housing (Culhane et al., 2011). In an analysis of applicants to New York City’s Homebase Community Prevention (CP) program, having a previous stay in a homeless shelter was the best predictor of risk for future shelter entry (Greer, Shinn, Kwon, & Zuiderveen, 2016). (CP provides coordinated case management, direct services and referrals to services, such as benefits advocacy, mediation, employment assistance, legal referrals, and limited financial assistance.)

### **Accurately targeted and effective community-based prevention programs can be cheaper for cities than expensive shelter stays.** (Culhane et al., 2011)

However, successful programs designed to prevent homelessness have shown net cost savings *only* when those at imminent risk of homelessness are successfully housed and the cost of providing emergency shelter is significant. The second challenge that Culhane et al. (2011) identify is effectiveness – is the assistance provided to families or individuals actually preventing or mitigating homelessness? Culhane et al. concludes, “the homelessness assistance system should help people to resolve their crises, access on-going sources of support in the community, and provide basic safety net assistance such as emergency shelter and temporary rental assistance as needed.” Per Culhane et al., a prevention-oriented approach is necessary to avoid the institutionalization of homelessness.

A more comprehensive literature review with citations is included in the appendix, [page 75](#).

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## Diversion: The cornerstone of an effective community response to homelessness

Diversion is a strategy that prevents homelessness for people seeking shelter by helping them identify immediate, alternate housing arrangements and, if necessary, connecting them with services and financial assistance to help them return to permanent housing. Diversion programs can reduce the number of families becoming homeless, the demand for shelter beds, and the size of program wait lists. The main difference between diversion and prevention is that prevention targets people at imminent risk of homelessness, whereas, diversion targets people as they are applying for entry into shelter. Effective diversion programs focus on quick solutions that have priority to keep the household in current housing if it's safe. Diversion may also provide limited financial, utility, and/or rental assistance; short-term case management; conflict mediation; connection to mainstream services and/or benefits; and housing search.

[National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)

Barbara Poppe and Associates recommends that communities adopt this standard and these performance measures for diversion:  
Diversion is offered to all populations and at least 50% of family households and 20% of single adult households are diverted.





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## The Consultation Process

Since its launch in 2014, Your Way Home Montgomery County has significantly decreased the number of families and individuals annually entering emergency shelter and transitional housing while helping more people to go directly from homelessness to permanent housing.

Still, YWH and HealthSpark Foundation believed that the homeless/housing system transformation was incomplete as it was missing a broader prevention component using evidence-based interventions to prevent evictions and secure ongoing housing stability.

Specifically, YWH wanted to add effective homelessness prevention “upstream” at the point where households begin to experience instability, even if they are not on the immediate verge of homelessness. The Foundation also set out to engage, inspire, and mobilize support for YWH through Montgomery County, PA, and beyond.

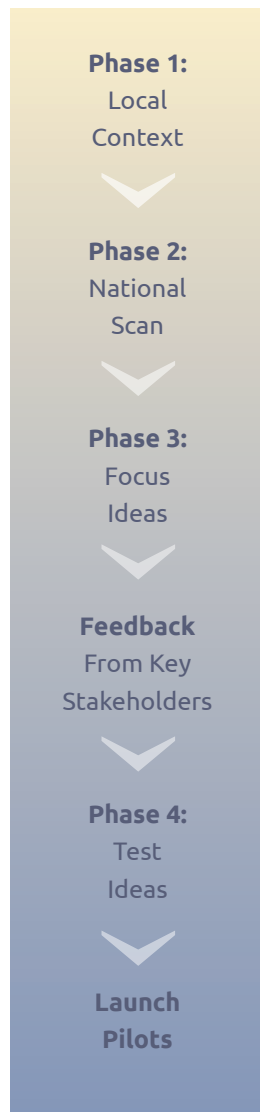
HealthSpark Foundation initiated the eviction and homelessness prevention project by collaborating with the Your Way Home team to write a request for proposals that was circulated nationally in the fall of 2016 to recognized industry thought leaders. The RFP requested respondents to research evidence-based and promising best practices to prevent eviction and support housing stability for at-risk individuals and families. The purpose of the research was twofold: to inform local policy and practices, including allocation of financial and human resources; and to identify potential sources of funding to support these eviction prevention strategies.

The scope of project work included:

- 1) conducting **research** to identify evidence-based and/or promising best practice models currently implemented in communities across the nation that operate a coordinated entry homeless crisis response system;
- 2) identifying specific **practices** appropriate for a range of sub-populations;
- 3) offering **technical assistance** to determine if any of these models can add value to the existing YWH shelter diversion programs/services currently in place; and
- 4) developing **outcome measures** to assist the YWH operations team in monitoring the cost-effectiveness and impact of eviction prevention programs/services.

The Consultation Process continued on next page

## The Consultation Process



A detailed project plan and timeline were put in place to guide the phases of the study.

- The **first phase** focused on understanding the local context and current functioning of the crisis response system functioning;
- The **second phase** included the literature review, national scan of best and promising practices, interviews with national experts on homelessness, and development of ideas for follow-up;
- The **third phase** was in-depth interviews in selected focus areas, development of concepts and sharing with local stakeholders during an onsite consultation (series of community meetings to share findings from the research and gather initial feedback on the ideas being developed);
- The **fourth phase** was the testing of the ideas to determine feasibility for pilot implementation. A second onsite consultation occurred during the final phase to align with the public announcement about the launch of the pilot demonstration project.

YWH designated a local person as the prevention study lead who managed, coordinated, and supported the research study for YWH. A Core Team composed of HealthSpark and YWH plus other key stakeholders was convened to inform the first three phases. The Core Team met monthly during the first six months of the project via conference calls and during the initial onsite consultation. The Core Team role ended following the onsite community feedback when the process moved to testing concepts with the YWH team leading to implementation during phase four.

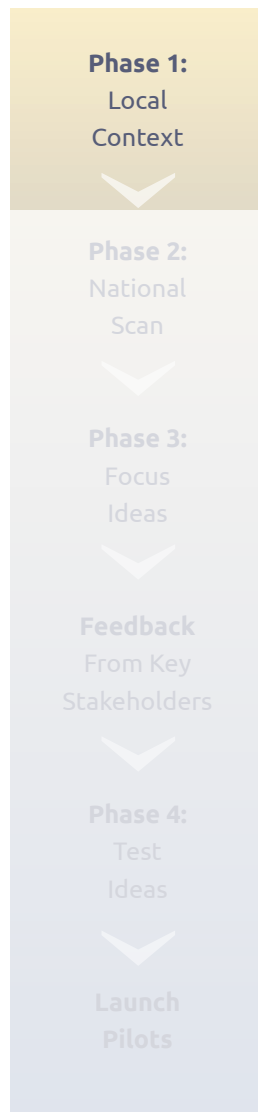


### Eviction and Homelessness Prevention Research Project

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## The Consultation Process



### Eviction and Homelessness Prevention Research Project

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## Phase 1: Understanding the local context

Phase 1 included a review of how the Your Way Home crisis response system was functioning and the local contextual data on housing, evictions, unemployment, and emergency needs. (A complete description is included in the appendix, [page 80](#).) The intent was for the Core Team, working with the consultant, to come to a shared understanding of current efforts and opportunities to determine the types of “evidence-based and promising prevention best practices that other communities have implemented to prevent eviction and promote housing stability.” The intent was not to evaluate current prevention efforts in Montgomery County.

### Conclusions from Phase 1 to inform national scan

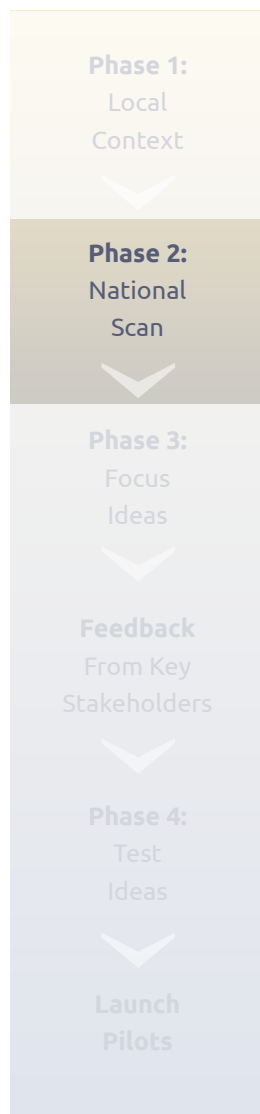
BPA concluded that YWH had an overall high functioning homeless crisis response system and solid data and analysis capacity; consequently, adding strategic and targeted “upstream” prevention was recommended. The Core Team determined that the following criteria would be used to evaluate best and promising practices for possible replication:

- 1) Outcomes must be measurable and improve housing stability or avoid homelessness.
- 2) Cost-effectiveness and cost-efficiency were paramount as the likelihood of significant new resources was limited.
- 3) Being locally implementable (not requiring state or federal policy changes) was key to being able to test models quickly.

Additionally, the Core Team wanted to seek out prevention models that would be: effective at preventing child and family homelessness; leverage expertise in diversion; work in the two zip codes with highest rates of eviction; address racial disparities; and leverage the combined resources of the new Montgomery County unified health, housing, and human services department. The Core Team decided not to explore models that were focused on institutional discharges (i.e., hospitals, jails, treatment facilities, etc.) since very few households appeared to enter the crisis response system from such facilities; however, it was agreed that at a future date, matching administrative data with these institutions might form a different picture, since HMIS (Homelessness Management Information System) records are based on self-reported data from clients and may underrepresent actual experience.

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#### Cost-avoidance: community-wide homelessness prevention compared to homelessness

- In **Chicago**, \$1,000 in emergency cash assistance was targeted to individuals on the brink of homelessness; those who received the assistance were 76% less likely to become homeless after six months than those who did not receive the assistance, and the estimated potential economic benefits are \$20,548 per homeless spell avoided, compared to the \$10,300 per-person program cost of averting homelessness through financial assistance (Evans, Sullivan, & Wallskog, 2016).
- **New York City's** HomeBase Community Prevention (CP) program uses a risk assessment to identify the households most likely to enter homelessness. CP provides case management as well as direct services and referrals to services such as benefits advocacy, mediation, employment assistance, legal referrals, and financial assistance. An evaluation of Homebase CP found its services reduced average nights in shelter by 22.6 nights, provided a net savings of \$140 per family that had access, and reduced shelter entries by 10 to 20 households for every 100 cases (Rolston, Geyer, & Locke, 2013).

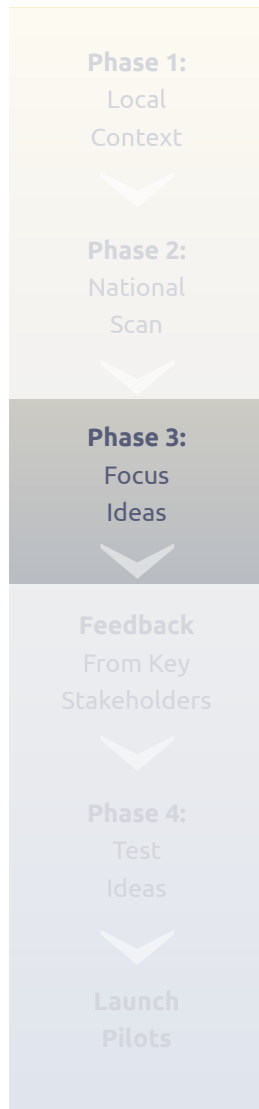
### Phase 2: Understanding what's working in other communities

Phase 2 included the literature review, a national scan of best and promising practices, interviews with national experts on homelessness, and development of ideas for follow-up. The literature review was conducted by BPA intern and graduate student Todd Ives. (See appendix, [page 76](#), for full report.)

Following this broad scan, programs that were identified as promising were contacted and/or reports were downloaded from their websites to further understand prevention practices underway in local communities.

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### Eviction and Homelessness Prevention Research Project

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### Conclusions from Phase 2 to inform deep dive on ideas

The Core Team was provided information on all the above program types researched.

- The Core Team decided not to explore further the community-wide financial assistance model; it would not be financially feasible to secure new funding sufficient to create measurable impact.
- The Core Team opted not to explore public/assisted housing-based eviction pre-vention since most evictions were not occurring from these residences, based on information from key leader interviews and HMIS data on prior residences.
- Due to the high number of children and families who experience homelessness, the Core Team decided to explore school-based models that prevent homelessness, including expansion of existing programs.
- Since the county's new unified health, housing and human services department was serving a broad range of households with low incomes, many of whom were experiencing housing instability, the Core Team chose to explore how a universal screener might be used to identify these at-risk households.
- Further exploration of court and legal strategies was also considered warranted due to the concentrated rate of eviction from two zip codes, and the racial disparities in homelessness, housing instability, and eviction.

### Phase 3: Deeper dive into selected ideas

During Phase 3, BPA developed recommendations in the three selected focus areas:

- school-based prevention
- universal risk screening with targeted prevention, and
- court/legal eviction prevention.

To better understand how practices were being implemented in local communities, BPA relied on guidance, expertise and suggestions from national leaders, review of available program evaluations, and referrals from the initial points of concept. Ultimately, 10 interviews were conducted using an interview guide (see appendix, [page 106](#)). Additional background materials, outcome data, reports, and evaluations were requested from each site. The concepts were developed and shared with the Core Team. Preparations were also made for an onsite consultation with local stakeholders. (See the next section of the report, [The 3 Selected Concepts](#), for the findings and recommendations for the focus areas.)

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## The Consultation Process

### Onsite Consultation: Gather local feedback and assess potential allies

During May 2016, YWH hosted a series of community meetings with Barbara Poppe to facilitate community dialogues about homelessness prevention, promote greater community awareness about best/promising practices, and explore a conceptual framework for targeting prevention.

The findings from the research were shared and initial feedback was collected on the ideas, including potential for collaboration and allies. Each group was asked to rate and rank the feasibility and impact of three ideas by completing a survey. (See appendix, [page 105](#), for the survey.)

#### Conclusions from the onsite

The results of the community stakeholder survey found this order of preference: court-based eviction prevention, universal screener with targeted prevention, and school-based prevention. These concepts aligned with the general impressions and feedback across all meetings.

#### Innovative Idea: Emergency Rent Coalition, New York City

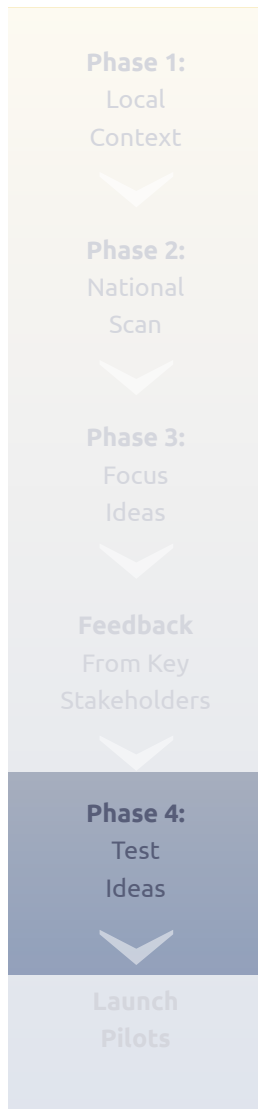
ERC is an informal network of organizations that share resources for rent arrears by filling gaps created by restricted funding. ERC works through an email list serve to connect organizations sharing resources. The membership meets every other month with speakers. Housing Court Answers, a local nonprofit focused on eviction prevention, moderates the coalition.



New York City



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## Phase 4: Testing feasibility of 3 ideas

The fourth and final phase was to determine feasibility of each idea for pilot implementation, and if feasible, to create a pilot project for implementation during 2018. This phase focused on determining the extent of interest in moving an idea forward to the pilot stage, assessing political will, strength of interest and capacity of potential partners for implementation, alignment with, and leveraging of, YWH activities, and potential for funding to cover the costs of a pilot. YWH operations team led this work with technical assistance and strategy guidance from BPA. (See the next section, [The 3 Selected Concepts](#), for a description of this work organized by idea.)

### Conclusions from Phase 4

YWH, by working in partnership with the courts, the Montgomery Bar Association and Foundation, legal aid and other philanthropic partners, was able to develop the idea and secure initial funding to launch the court-based eviction prevention concept as a pilot for implementation during 2018. YWH and HealthSpark Foundation determined that a second onsite visit by Barbara Poppe, of BPA, would be useful to support the public announcement and launch of EPIC – the Eviction Prevention & Intervention Coalition – the pilot demonstration project for court-based eviction prevention.

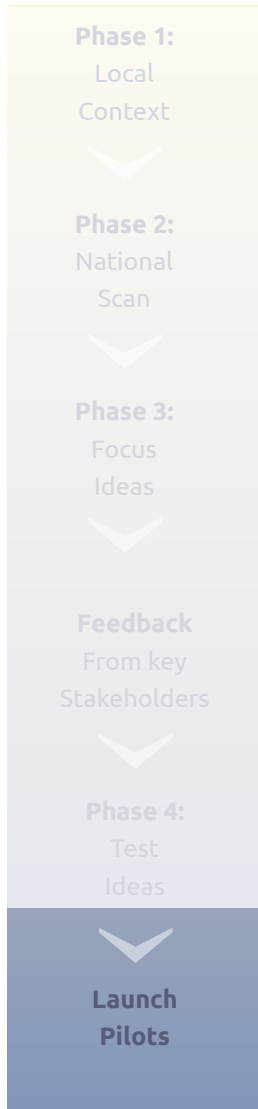
The idea for a universal screener with targeted prevention was deferred due to other competing priorities in Montgomery County; the timing and bandwidth to tackle this idea was insufficient. YWH may also explore whether other systems, like health care or food security programs, might be interested in partnering to develop this concept.

Although expansion and enhancement of school-based prevention as a Siemer site was determined to be not feasible at this time due to changes in the local funding environment, through conversation with another current funder YWH found interest in developing the concept for implementation during 2018. YWH is working to test the model in a school district with a significant number of homeless children.



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## The Consultation Process



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## Onsite Consultation: Public launch of EPIC – the Eviction Prevention and Intervention Coalition

During November 2017, the onsite consultation with Barbara Poppe included meetings with the YWH operations team and the YWH Advisory Council and was coordinated with other activities, including the Bar Association’s reception and fundraiser to benefit EPIC, a community forum on childhood hunger and homelessness, and a planning session with YWH and HealthSpark Foundation about the final report and dissemination of findings.

### Conclusions from second onsite consultation

YWH concluded that even with highly engaged partners, the YWH operations team (the backbone support organization for Your Way Home’s Collective Impact structure) and community partners only had bandwidth to support up to two prevention pilots during 2018. They were also cognizant that should the court-based eviction prevention program and the school-based prevention program prove to be successful, additional resources (funding and staff time) will need to be identified and invested to scale up these initiatives.

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## The 3 Selected Concepts

### Overview

The following describes the facts of each concept considered for pilot implementation:

- Background and intent
- Communities/practices reviewed
- Key features across communities/practices
- Summary of all features and components of the reviewed programs
- BPA concept recommendation for local replication
- Rationale for testing the concept in Montgomery County
- Potential partners to be engaged
- Findings from the YWH feasibility analysis during summer/fall 2017 and YWH status of the concept as of January 2018
- BPA-recommended questions for other communities to explore in considering replication of the idea
- Description of one model program from another community

#### The 3 concepts:

- Court-based eviction prevention
- Universal risk screening with targeted prevention
- School-based prevention



## The 3 Selected Concepts



### Eviction and Homelessness Prevention Research Project

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## Court-based eviction prevention

### Background

Not all families and individuals who are evicted from their homes will become literally homeless; but for very low-income households, eviction is an indicator of extreme housing instability and insecurity, and will necessitate a move that will be disruptive and traumatic to all members of the household. For some households, eviction may be the first step in the downward spiral to homelessness. Legal strategies that help the household retain their home can be used to stop this downward spiral. Some communities have dedicated eviction or housing courts, while others handle evictions as part of the municipal or district courts. Housing courts will be the generic term used throughout this section to denote the various types of courts that handle evictions.

### Intent

Reduce the number of households that are evicted and required to vacate current housing; or defer/delay the timeframe for exit from the housing, which can facilitate a more orderly/less abrupt departure, but may not ultimately preserve housing.

### Communities reviewed

Baltimore, MD	Bronx, NY	Cleveland, OH
Columbus, OH	Portland, ME	Washington, D.C.

In some, but not all, communities, multiple contacts were interviewed. Wide-ranging points of view were sought from representatives of legal services, court officials, social service organizations, and community collaborators. Some communities, including New York City and Washington, D.C., have well-developed approaches. Others, such as Baltimore and Columbus, were early in their efforts.

### Lack of tenant legal representation = more evictions

- One study estimated that more than 70% of U.S. households facing eviction receive no legal representation (Seedco 2009).
- Yet tenants with counsel are more likely to appear in court and are significantly less likely to be evicted than their unrepresented counterparts, irrespective of the merits of their case (Monson and Lempert 1992; Seron et al. 2001).

The 3 Selected Concepts continued on next page

## Court-based eviction prevention

### Keys features across communities

All interviewees noted that the ability to provide an immediate response to the crisis was essential (e.g., payment toward past due rent). A *partnership with the court* that handles evictions was critical. **Providing services based in a courthouse on hearing dates** was found to be far more effective than providing services in advance or services being available at a community-based organization since uptake was less than if provided at the courthouse. Consequently, a willing and enthusiastic partnership with a judge and his/her team is required and will greatly improve impact. Further, being able to help the tenant avoid future eviction was viewed as prudent.

### Features and components of reviewed programs

The reviewed communities offered a range of responses with great variation. This list compiles the types of eviction prevention activities that were offered.

#### ❖ *Housing court to promote availability of services and process.*

- Make space available within courthouses for onsite provision of legal information, advice and services, and for supportive services providers.
- Post notices and have staff advise tenants of the availability of legal and supportive services assistance.
- Partner with supportive services organizations to help tenants pay past due rent or relocate to safe housing in event the eviction proceeds.
- Adjust courtroom schedules to improve access to legal services. This may include scheduling eviction cases to be heard only on one day a week which makes it easier for pro bono programs to staff courts. Another practice is block scheduling that permits time for onsite legal representatives to meet with tenants before their cases are heard.
- Ideally, judges and magistrates promote the availability of services and become champions for a fair process that helps level the playing field.



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## Pro bono and Lawyer for the Day programs

Volunteer lawyers can provide critically needed legal advice, mediation, and representation for low-income households facing eviction. Typically organized by legal aid organizations, local bar associations or their affiliated organizations, pro bono or lawyer for the day programs recruit, train, organize, and match volunteer lawyers with opportunities to fulfill civil legal needs that cannot be met by paid lawyers. Types of legal representation vary by community and may include eviction prevention. Some programs focus on other populations or issues, including domestic violence victims, refugees and immigrants, public disability benefits, and veterans. Services are generally free. Lawyer for the Day programs provide limited legal representation that begins and ends on the same day as opposed to full representation that will represent the client from beginning to end of the case. Limited legal representation usually requires special permission from the judge or court system. Pro bono programs appeal to attorneys who want to volunteer time and are willing to complete the training necessary to be effective in this specialized area of law. (See [this 2008](#) evaluation of a pilot Lawyer for the Day in New York to learn more.)

While volunteer legal services can fill a gap, they typically are not able to serve tenants with complicated cases, e.g., eviction from public housing which is regulated by both federal and local or state regulations. For Continuums of Care, partnering with these programs can be a way to broaden partnerships in the community.

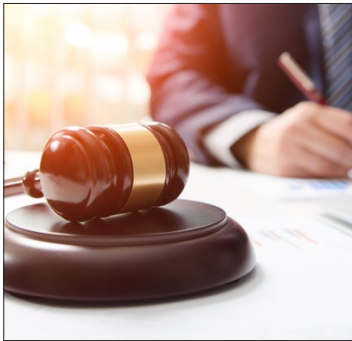
Following are some well-developed programs that provide assistance to tenants to help avoid eviction.

- [Boston Bar Association Lawyer for the Day in the Boston Housing Court](#)
- [Legal Aid Society of Columbus Tenant Advocacy Project](#)
- [District of Columbia Bar Pro Bono Center, Landlord Tenant Resource Center](#)
- [Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project](#)
- [New York City Housing Court, Volunteer Lawyer for the Day](#)

Features and components of reviewed programs continued

- ❖ *Legal representation for tenants reduces the number of evictions and can delay loss of housing.*
  - Legal Aid organizations are independent, nonprofit agencies that provide civil legal aid to low-income Americans. These organizations often receive funding from the Legal Services Corporation (LSC). Most, but not all, include tenant representation in housing court as one of their services. To find a program near you, [click here](#). Fees are based on a sliding scale for low-income households.
  - Lawyer for the Day and pro bono (volunteer) initiatives provide full and limited representation for tenants in housing courts. ([See sidebar previous page.](#))
  
- ❖ *Tenant information and education can be critical in helping tenants find legal assistance and become familiar with the eviction process.*
  - Post online resources to help tenants prepare for the eviction hearing. Pine Tree Legal Assistance offers tenants extensive [self-help tools](#) online since it provides services across the state of Maine and does not have the resources to be in every county.
  - Include contact information for legal aid and/or online resources in eviction notices. In Franklin County, Ohio, the phone number for Columbus Legal Aid Society is included in all eviction notices.
  - Offer materials onsite at the courthouse. [Housing Court Answers](#), in New York City, provides information tables in every housing court.
  - Station specialists onsite to explain the process and answer questions. In New York City, Housing Court Navigators (volunteer lawyers, paralegals or specially trained volunteers) provide general information, written materials, and one-on-one assistance to eligible, unrepresented litigants. In addition, [Court Navigators](#) provide moral support, help tenants access and complete court forms, assist with keeping paperwork in order, access interpreters and other services, explain what to expect and the roles of each person in the courtroom. In some jurisdictions, these specialists can accompany the litigant into the courtroom.

## Court-based eviction prevention



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- ❖ **Mediation is a process that brings together the landlord and the tenant in an attempt to resolve the dispute and reach a settlement, as an alternative to the formal court process. A trained mediator conducts the session and remains a neutral third party. Generally, mediation is provided within the courts, through law school mediation programs, and community mediation centers.**
  - In some courts, this is a voluntary offering by the court. [New York City Housing Courts](#) and [Cleveland Housing Courts](#) have well-developed processes.
  - In some courts, the judge makes mediation a mandatory first step in the housing court process. A judge in Garfield Heights, Ohio, has adopted this approach by using a portion of court file fees to contract with [Cleveland Mediation Services](#). When both sides show up in court, they are able to reach a settlement 85% of the time. Landlords save time and money, and tenants can avoid a judgment and have input into their housing situation.
- ❖ **Emergency financial assistance is often required to stop the eviction process.**
  - Often, financial assistance is required to cover arrearages owed to the landlord even if the tenant and landlord work out a repayment plan. Financial assistance may be required to pay utility turn-on fees and utility arrearages if the tenant is required to cover utilities as condition of his or her lease or, may be cause for emergency code enforcement. Financial assistance may be provided by a social service organization onsite in the court or by arranging future payment with a clear deadline.
  - Service coordination and linkage to other community resources may also accompany the provision of financial assistance.
- ❖ **Providing money management supports and assistance to secure income and/or benefits can prevent future recurrence of eviction.**
  - Some social service organizations operating within the courts were able to provide follow-up service coordination and linkages to other agency services and/or community programs. Assistance with applying for programs that provide longer-term assistance with paying rent or reduce costs for the tenant is a key feature of the BronxWorks program ([see sidebar here](#)).
  - Legal representation to secure disability and other benefits can help tenants increase income and make housing more affordable. Legal Aid Societies often provide this service.

The 3 Selected Concepts continued on next page



## Court-based eviction prevention

### ***Innovative program model: BronxWorks Seniors Homelessness Prevention Project (SHPP)***

- Helps seniors avoid eviction in both the short term and long term. In cases where seniors are unsafe, in an untenable housing situation, or the rent is too high to insure long-term sustainability, SHPP will find suitable alternative housing arrangements.
- Based in the courthouse – strong partnership with the courts; approached by supervising housing court judges to create program.
- Comprehensive – immediate and long-term sustainability
  - Interface with other BronxWorks programs, e.g., SNAP counselor, financial management
  - Added entitlement specialists to make sure that seniors receive all the benefits for which they are eligible (e.g., senior rent freeze, SNAP, etc.)
  - Sometimes just very simple things like getting direct deposit and automatic payments to landlords
  - Minor repair program – provides urgent repairs that landlord doesn't provide (e.g., fixing window blind)
- Works with other resources: Emergency Rent Coalition; senior citizen rent exemption program (landlords receive property tax abatement credit applied to their property tax bill in the same amount as the increase that the tenant is exempted from paying); Legal Aid for legal issues.



Bronx, NY

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## Court-based eviction prevention



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- ❖ *Housing conditions requiring maintenance arising from landlord or tenant neglect is often at the root of the tenant-landlord dispute.*
  - Some tenants are at risk of eviction due to code enforcement actions. Coordination with code enforcement to prevent loss of housing is an important strategy. In Columbus, the city code enforcement notifies the Legal Aid Society of Columbus (LASC) that can follow up to offer services to the tenant. LASC also provides an online guide for tenants, "[My Landlord Isn't Making Repairs: What Can I Do?](#)".
  - BronxWorks is able to address home maintenance and repairs for eligible seniors. This may include minor issues such as light bulb replacement, to more serious issues related to hoarding.
  - Washington, D.C. Legal Aid got a statutory change allowing tenants to file civil actions against landlords for housing code violations through the [Housing Conditions Calendar](#). This simple and expedited process can provide mediation or issuance of orders/sanctions for repairs. A D.C. housing inspector attached to the court visits properties, confirms conditions, and follows up to ensure repairs are made.
- ❖ *Community awareness, advocacy and public awareness efforts can improve tenant rights and process protections, increase legal representation, and produce other solutions.*
  - Statewide or local reports on deficiencies in current housing court systems and results can be used to document unfairness and create momentum for statutory changes. The Public Justice Center report, "Justice Diverted: How Renters Are Processed in the Baltimore City Rent Court," provides a deep dive into Baltimore's evictions crisis, which takes a particularly heavy toll on women and African-Americans. The report is being used to advocate for more tenant rights, protections, and process improvements.
  - Local and statewide advocacy can also focus on increasing legal representation for low-income tenants. [New York City](#) recently guaranteed a legal right to representation for every low-income tenant facing eviction.
  - Cleveland recently hosted a community-wide [book reading](#) of "Evicted," by Matthew Desmond.
  - Franklin County, Ohio, launched a community task force to [prevent family homelessness](#), with some activities focused on reducing evictions.

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### BPA concept recommendation for local replication

#### Test a new partnership to implement a court-based eviction prevention initiative.

The pilot would expand legal help for renters – increasing renters’ access to legal information, assistance at court, mediation and/or legal representation paired with a supportive services provider to work with households on immediate financial needs and longer-term financial viability to prevent future recurrence of eviction. This pilot would help level the playing field between landlords and tenants and reduce the number of renters who are evicted. Elements could include same-day legal representation (i.e., Lawyer for the Day) by Legal Aid and/or pro bono lawyers, mediation, use of “navigators” (trained non-legal staff or volunteers), new resources for tenant information and education about the legal process and tenant rights and responsibilities, access to emergency financial assistance, help securing income and benefits, financial coaching and money management, and other strategies that increase the financial stability of the household. Since housing quality issues are often interrelated with eviction, ideally the pilot also would address housing conditions, coordinate with code enforcement, and arrange for home repairs.

#### Rationale for testing the concept in Montgomery County

1. **Stop downward spiral:** Families who are evicted lose jobs, possessions, and have a harder time finding their next place to live. Neighborhoods with high “churn” become more unstable and blighted over time. The impact is greatest on children, women, and African-American families and communities.
2. **Reduce negative outcomes for vulnerable people:** Children have lifelong negative consequences related to health and economic well-being; elderly who become homeless have increased health risks.
  - Pediatrician and researcher, Dr. Megan Sandel, MD MPH, found that being behind on rent is strongly associated with high risk of child food insecurity; children and mothers in fair or poor health; children at risk for developmental delay; and mothers experiencing depressive symptoms.
  - Seniors on fixed incomes at the lower income levels can be vulnerable to eviction as they struggle to pay for food, medication, health care, and housing. The consequences of eviction on health and well-being can lead to premature entry into nursing home care.

## Court-based eviction prevention

### Rationale for testing the concept in Montgomery County continued

- 3. Build on community expertise, recent research on emerging practices from other communities, and the capacity for innovation:** Replicate emerging practices and test effectiveness in a suburban community.
  - Legal Aid of Southern Pennsylvania (LASP) has strong experience with legal strategies.
  - Housing Counseling expertise developed by YWH can be used to develop a social services component.
  - Montgomery Bar Association has a new Access to Justice initiative that has begun recruiting pro bono attorneys and paralegals.
  - Housing Equality Center is developing a new resource guide for tenants.
- 4. Potential for high impact:** 2,120 orders of possession were issued during 2016. If just 20% of evictions were stopped, 400 families would be spared and their housing stabilized.



### Potential partners within Montgomery County

Magisterial District Court, Montgomery Bar Association, The Montgomery County Foundation, Inc., Legal Aid of Southern Pennsylvania, Montgomery County Foundation, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services.

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## Court-based eviction prevention

### YWH feasibility analysis

YWH reached out to potential key partners and found all to be willing to participate. In particular, the Bar Association was implementing a new initiative focused on access to justice, which was well aligned with this project. Legal Aid helped YWH understand the Montgomery County court system and key players.



Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

In Montgomery County, an elected Magisterial District Judge presides over each of the 30 individual district courts. YWH identified the Magisterial Districts that covered the two zip codes with the highest rates of eviction, then engaged with the district judge that was viewed as most likely to participate based on recommendations from court partners. The outreach was positive, and the district judge was also enthusiastic about participation. The Bar Association Foundation and Montgomery County committed to funding a share of the project, which encouraged others to contribute. The planning team was able to learn from BronxWorks through telephone, email, and an onsite visit to the project. The planning team also observed the Montgomery County court proceedings. The planning team developed program operating procedures with technical support from BPA. Technical support was also provided to develop a program evaluation framework using the YWH HMIS (Homelessness Management Information System) platform. The Bar Association, in partnership with Legal Aid, is developing and conducting training for volunteer attorneys, which will provide CLE credit (continuing legal education).

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## Court-based eviction prevention



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### YWH feasibility analysis continued

- EPIC (Eviction Prevention & Intervention Coalition) relies on the use of volunteer attorneys, and the Bar Association is providing ongoing volunteer recruitment and management through existing platforms. The Bar Association offered the landlord/tenant CLE for free to any attorney who volunteered for at least one shift in the pilot, which was a successful recruitment strategy.
- Wherever possible, Your Way Home utilized existing case management forms and tools to insure continuity of services between programs. This included use of the Rapid Re-Housing Housing Stability Plan, monthly budget, and rental agreement already in use.
- In addition to looking toward national models, YWH engaged local legal advocacy programs for assistance in navigating state legal requirements. For example, a local legal advocacy program for children's services provided a template for the Limited Representation Waiver adopted by the program. Engaging local legal expertise – even across sectors – was helpful in addressing the finer points of policy and procedure.
- One of the main components of the program was providing onsite services. The judge agreed to allow the program to use the two small conference rooms for private meetings. Additionally, the court approved a flyer to be distributed with every Notice of Hearing that will inform tenants about the program.

### YWH status as of January 2018

**EPIC (Eviction Prevention & Intervention Coalition) was formed during fall 2017 and oversaw the six-month pilot. Funding in the amount of \$70,000 has been secured from the Bar Foundation and the Montgomery County Department of Housing and Community Development, and additional grant applications have been submitted to public and private funding entities. In October 2017, Your Way Home released an RFP for the social services partner and awarded the contract to an existing Housing Resource Center (rapid re-housing and housing counseling provider). A policy and procedure manual, complete with the required forms and templates, has been developed in consultation with the Bar Association/ Foundation, Legal Aid, Montgomery County Courts, and YWH. A training program for volunteer lawyers has been developed and was hosted in late November. All volunteer slots for the pilot project have been filled by these volunteers. The response from community partners has been incredibly positive to date, and additional courts have already approached YWH about expansion projects in their areas. The pilot project launched on January 8, 2018.**

## Considerations for replicability in other communities

### Court-based eviction prevention

#### Questions

1

Where are evictions occurring in your community, what is known about the scope of the problem, and who is impacted?



#### Possible next steps

- Review data from Legal Aid to gain an understanding of the tenants they serve, including demographic and household characteristics, zip code or other geographic indicators, etc.
- Review 2-1-1 data on requests for housing assistance, emergency financial aid, and other indicators.
- Look for other data about evictions from the courts.
- Review data from any homeless hotline or coordinated process to access emergency shelter.

2

How is legal assistance provided to those facing evictions, what is the current capacity of legal aid to provide representation, and what are the current challenges in meeting needs?



- Meet with Legal Aid as a potentially significant resource to build your knowledge base.
- Meet with local bar association representatives who may manage pro bono services or “access to justice” initiatives.
- Meet with community mediation organizations to determine if they are working with tenants.
- Spend the day in housing court (or local equivalent) and observe the proceedings.

3

Who would be interested in providing leadership or championing the case for a court-based eviction prevention pilot?



- Champions could be well-regarded attorneys, civic or philanthropic leaders, judges (active or retired), or business leaders.
- Ask everyone you meet with to suggest a community leader who might be willing to champion this effort.
- Reach out to your existing philanthropic partners and test their interest in being a champion or their willingness to introduce you to someone who might be able to champion.

Continued next page

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Considerations for replicability in other communities: continued on next page

## Considerations for replicability in other communities

### Court-based eviction prevention

#### Questions

4

**Is a judge/magistrate who handles evictions open to being a willing partner and to develop a pilot?**



#### Possible next steps

- Note: this is essential for success of the project. The support of the judge/magistrate and the court administration is essential.
- Once you have a good understanding of the local court system (from the interviews above and your online research) and you know the scope and geography of evictions, begin narrowing your focus to the judges/magistrates who see a high number of evictions and are viewed as inclined toward this type of activity.

5

**What partnerships and resources could be identified to develop and support the pilot?**



- The most important partner will be the housing court.
- The local bar association and legal aid should be at the top of your list of other potential partners. The bar association may also have a foundation that is willing to underwrite some of the costs.
- Identifying a strong social services partner is critical. Agencies that currently provide diversion services should be considered since they have many skills that can be deployed for project success.

6

**Are there any fees or other funding that could be used to support the costs of a pilot?**

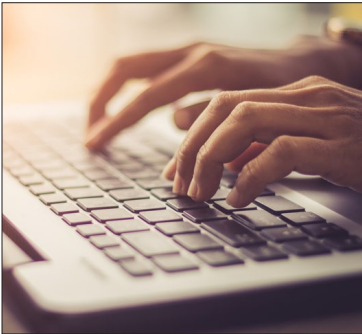


- In-kind, volunteer, and financial resources (new or realigned) will be needed to cover the cost of the pilot and include legal services, supportive services and financial assistance, project coordination, and evaluation.
- It may be possible that a portion of the court filing fees could be used to cover costs.
- Local governments often can provide funding to cover financial assistance, legal services, project coordination, and evaluation.
- Federal funding sources such as CDBG, SSVF, ESG, and EFSP may cover a portion of the costs.
- Corporate philanthropy, particularly banks with CRA (Community Reinvestment Act) requirements, may be interested in supporting your project.

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## Universal risk screening with targeted prevention

### Background

Organizations that serve very low-income households can screen for homelessness and/or risk of homelessness and then connect at-risk and homeless recipients with crucial services, thereby reducing the negative consequences of homelessness for the individual and the community. Ideally, earlier intervention would reduce the flow into homelessness. An additional benefit would be creating awareness for service providers that their client/patient is in a crisis and may enable the providers to adapt their treatment/service to accommodate. (For example, if a physician is aware that a patient's housing is unstable, he/she may avoid prescribing an antibiotic that requires refrigeration.) The screening should lead to a more intensive assessment and perhaps an intervention. This strategy could be applied to a sub-set of the population that is likely to experience homelessness (i.e., previously homeless) or is particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of homelessness (e.g., youth transitioning from foster care) or at greater risk of long-term homelessness (e.g., persons with co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorders).

### Intent

Identify households that receive public or nonprofit services and who are at-risk of homelessness, and provide targeted prevention services to reduce the number who experience literal homelessness.

### Screeners reviewed

- **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)** developed a "[universal screener](#)" to identify veterans' housing instability among those who accessed VA health care. Veterans who were assessed as housing unstable were referred to specialized VA homeless prevention services. ([See text box on page 44.](#))
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
- [Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance](#) recognized that many families eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program benefits and services may be experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness or housing instability, and developed a guide to help state TANF agencies identify and serve these vulnerable families. The [guide](#) includes several options for developing a standardized set of questions regarding housing status and risk of homelessness to integrate into the TANF client intake process. (2016)

## Universal risk screening with targeted prevention

### Screeners reviewed: continued

- [Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation](#) developed a Housing Status Assessment Guide for state TANF and Medicaid programs that provides recommendations on a set of standardized housing status and homelessness risk questions that can be incorporated into state applications for TANF and/or Medicaid. The [guide](#) includes a Housing Status Assessment Tool, as well as a Housing Status Summary and an Assistance Priority & Response Matrix that can be used following assessment to determine the relative priority and appropriate intervention for each family or individual, based on present housing needs, as well as links to relevant federal resources. (2009)
- **Los Angeles County.** The Economic Roundtable developed [recommendations](#) for screening and assessment, “trip wires,” and timely services that include employment and prevention assistance based on a comprehensive evaluation of data on households receiving public assistance. The review included data on health, mental health, justice system, education, child welfare, and labor market outcomes.
- **New York City.** NYU School of Medicine is conducting cross-system collaboration to develop a new homelessness prevention screening tool for emergency department patients.
- **Hunger screener.** Children’s HealthWatch developed a [HungerVital](#) Signs screener to identify children at risk for hunger insecurity. Intended for use by health care providers, social service providers, community-based outreach workers, teachers, and anyone who works with young children, the Hunger Vital Sign uses two questions to identify young children and families who may need assistance.



### Eviction and Homelessness Prevention Research Project

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Universal risk screening with targeted prevention continued on next page

**Universal risk screening  
with targeted  
prevention**

**Innovative program model: Veterans Homelessness  
Screening Clinical Reminder**

The Clinical Reminder is used by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs and was field tested, refined, and validated. Three million veterans were screened: 0.72% screened positive for homelessness and 0.67% screened positive for risk. The majority of veterans who screened positive and requested follow-up received services – most frequently provided by Social Work and the Health Care for Homeless Veterans program – within 30 days: 71.5% of those who screened positive for homelessness and 64.6% of those who screened positive for risk. 83.3% of veterans who initially screened positive for either homelessness or risk and responded to a rescreen at least six months later, resolved their housing instability. (Montgomery et al. March 2014)

The screener is very simple to administer and includes only four questions.



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Universal risk screening with targeted prevention continued on next page

## Veterans Homelessness Screening Clinical Reminder

**1. In the past two months, have you been living in stable housing that you own, rent, or stay in as part of a household?**

- Yes, living in a stable housing ➔ *Proceed to question 2*
- No, not living in a stable housing ➔ *Proceed to question 3*

---

**2. Are you worried or concerned that in the next 2 months you may NOT have stable housing that you own, rent, or stay in as part of a household?**

- Yes, worried about housing in the near future  
➔ *Proceed to question 3*
- No, not worried about housing in the near future  
➔ *Reminder completed*

---

**3. Where have you lived for MOST of the past 2 months?**

- Apartment/House/Room – No government subsidy
- Apartment/House/Room – With government subsidy
- With Friend/Family
- Motel/Hotel
- Hospital, Rehabilitation Center, Drug Treatment Center
- Anywhere outside (e.g., street, vehicle, abandoned building)
- Homeless Shelter
- Other \* \_\_\_\_\_

---

**4. Would you like to be referred to talk more about your housing situation?**

- Patient agrees to referral
- Patient declines referral at this time – given information for future reference

---

**What's the best way to reach you?**

How to reach: \_\_\_\_\_

## Universal risk screening with targeted prevention

### Features and components of reviewed screeners

Interviewees noted that using a screener should have validated questions and be simple to administer. Decisions about who among the positive screens will receive follow-up referral and assessment need to be made as the screener is being implemented. Varied approaches are possible from completing full assessments and linkage to services for all who test positive, based on the availability of resources for assessment and linkage to prevention assistance. For example, an individual who also had a substance use disorder might be eligible for referral and assessment in communities where specialized homelessness prevention services are available; whereas, someone without a substance use disorder might only receive some on-the-spot brief problem-solving assistance. The VA allowed each VA Medical Center to determine how to respond to positive screens. As a result, many different approaches were implemented, which has been widely viewed as very successful. The Economic Roundtable recommendations were not implemented in Los Angeles, and it is not known whether any communities adopted the HHS screener recommendations. Informal conversations indicate that a number of health care systems and managed care organizations are exploring or testing homeless risk screeners.

### BPA concept recommendation for local replication

**Adopt a uniform screening and referral process for households receiving services from Montgomery County. Develop specialized prevention services for sub-populations that are highly vulnerable with high risk of homelessness and expensive to re-house if they become homeless.**

Possible sub-populations that could be targeted include:

- Youth transitioning from foster care
- Families receiving child welfare services and are at-risk of out-of-home care
- Adults/youth receiving mental health services
- Adults/youth exiting jail or engaged with the court system
- Seniors with housing quality problems and/or who need accessibility modifications

### Rationale for testing the concept in Montgomery County

1. **Better outcomes:** Households that are housing unstable or at risk of homelessness will be more successful in programs and services provided by Montgomery County if their homes become stable foundations. Improved housing stability will improve health outcomes, increase participation in the workforce, reduce criminal justice involvement, and increase educational outcomes for children and adults.
2. **Potential for overall community cost savings:** High-cost services for emergency-room treatment and institutional care could be reduced.
3. **Innovation:** Leverage the new consolidation of Montgomery County's housing and services agencies under a unified leadership structure and the concurrent development of a shared data system.
4. **Community expertise:** Build response off the success of Housing Counseling (diversion) expertise developed by YWH.
5. **Potential for high impact:** Because Montgomery County serves many of the most vulnerable citizens, there is opportunity for early identification and intervention for a significant number of households.

### Potential partners within Montgomery County

Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) was recently established as a unified agency including aging and adult services, children, children and youth, community connections, drug and alcohol, health, mental health and developmental disabilities, housing and community development and veterans' affairs.

### YWH feasibility analysis

YWH, which is operated under the leadership of the director of the Montgomery County Office of Housing and Community Development, explored the feasibility of embedding a homeless screener in the new unified intake and data management system being developed by the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services. The hope was to gain commitment to test the VA screener described above across DHS divisions and implement a pilot project with one to two high-priority sub-populations. Prevention services could be provided by redeploying existing resources for homelessness prevention (e.g., train mental health staff how to do diversion and set aside a small pool of financial assistance to support that work), or by better connections to YWH feasibility analysis.

### YWH feasibility analysis continued

Universal risk screening with targeted prevention continued on next page

## Universal risk screening with targeted prevention

community programs (e.g., if veterans were identified as at risk or homeless, create a new partnership with the SSVF provider). Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services leadership determined that the best “home” for this project would be with the Department’s Community Connections Office, which provides intake and referral for all Montgomery County human service offices. Since this office was set to create and adopt a unified data system over the next few months, the timing seemed ideal – the universal screener could be embedded within the new intake system from the start.

### YWH status as of January 2018

**The development of a new data system to support the recently created DHHS has been challenging due to the complexity and differences among the divisions that are being unified. Additionally, there were concerns about the adequacy of resources to respond to those who screened positive for risk of homelessness. YWH has concluded that incorporating a screener into the new data system and intake processes is not feasible at this time. Instead, YWH is exploring whether or not community organizations such as the network of food pantries or hospital emergency departments might be interested.**

**A second option being explored is the feasibility of repurposing FEMA/EFSP funds for this use, and how to incorporate a universal screener into the local 2-1-1 that would link to these funds. Montgomery County recently consolidated administration of FEMA/EFSP funds into its CoC Governance board, which provides the opportunity to more effectively target these funds to prevention programs aligned with the continuum of care. These options are being explored through 2018.**

### Eviction and Homelessness Prevention Research Project

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Universal risk screening with targeted prevention continued on next page

## Considerations for replicability in other communities

### Universal risk screening

#### Questions

1

**What services, systems, or community organizations do people who experience homelessness engage with before entering the crisis response system?**



#### Possible next steps

- There are multiple methods that could be used to make this determination; see below for a few ideas.
- Review HMIS (Homelessness Management Information System) data to understand where households are residing before shelter admission.
- Conduct an administrative data match with public agencies that are responsible for child welfare, public assistance, senior services, behavioral health care, etc., or such institutions as jails and courts, to determine the extent to which their clients enter the homeless crisis response system. Engaging an external researcher from a local university or research institute may be helpful.
- Review 2-1-1 data requests for housing assistance, emergency financial aid, and other indicators. Review the magnitude of unmet need.
- Conduct a client survey or conduct focus groups at a community service center to gauge the level of housing instability and homelessness among the populations served by these public agencies.
- Host a community dialogue with emergency assistance providers to understand their experience and request data.

Continued next page



## Considerations for replicability in other communities

### Universal risk screening

#### Questions

2

**What systems or networks of community organizations come in contact with large numbers of very low-income people/households?**

**Is there openness to developing a screener and embedding it in the intake and client monitoring processes?**

**Is there capability to incorporate a screener into the data system?**



#### Possible next steps

- The most likely candidates are hospital emergency rooms, food pantries, public assistance offices, child welfare, and corrections.
- Meet with key leaders at these organizations to determine potential interest and understand current responses to potential homelessness. These meetings may be bolstered by findings from an administrative data match.
- Discuss their concerns about frequent or high-cost users of these services and gauge their understanding about the extent to which these sub-populations may also have housing instability.
- If possible, learn if they ask about housing instability routinely and how they handle situations when this arises.
- Determine if they collect data on housing status. If yes, request aggregated reports that describe the scope and profile of households with housing instability.

3

**What resources are available for sub-populations to receive targeted prevention services?**

**What is the potential cost-benefit that could inform which sub-population is selected to receive targeted prevention services?**



- If there is a level of interest, begin meeting with program managers and direct line staff to gain better understanding of the client flow processes.
- Again, data reports and administrative data matching can greatly inform this process, especially if you can compare costs to serve housing unstable clients versus stably housed clients.
- Engaging an external researcher from a local university or research institute may be helpful to provide an unbiased review of the potential benefits.

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## Considerations for replicability in other communities

### Universal risk screening

#### Questions

4

**What would be the next steps to develop a pilot?**

**What partnerships and resources could be identified to develop and support the pilot?**

**Are funding sources available that could be used to support the costs for a pilot?**



#### Possible next steps

- Based on what you've been able to learn through the above processes, make a strategic decision on next steps based on needs, interest, and potential impact. The local context will determine the appropriate approach.
- In-kind, volunteer, and financial resources (new or realigned) will be needed to cover the cost of the pilot and include supportive services and financial assistance, project coordination, and evaluation.
- A large public system or hospital may be willing to cover the full cost of the pilot, or at least significant portion, if the potential for cost avoidance is significant.
- Federal funding sources like CDBG, SSVF, ESG, and EFSP may cover a portion of the costs. Financial partners could be local government and philanthropy.

## The 3 selected concepts



## School-based prevention

### Background

Given the long-term negative consequences of homelessness on children, some communities have developed partnerships with public schools to identify families with children who are at risk of experiencing homelessness. The Siemer Institute is working in more than 50 communities across the country to prevent family homelessness and school instability through school-social service partnerships (see sidebar). A Siemer Institute program operates within one school district in Montgomery County. This site was achieving strong housing outcomes, but services were limited to families that had income and were usually provided to families that did not meet the McKinney-Vento eligibility criteria for homelessness<sup>2</sup>.

Consequently, it was unlikely that the program reduced literal family homelessness. Beyond Siemer Institute programs, the [National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth](#), has documented a variety of effective school-based programs and partnerships. One partner was recently profiled in a national education report, “How One District Cut Student Homelessness by 25 Percent.” Due to the ready availability of data and analysis support, this study focused on the Siemer Institute programs.

### Intent

Stabilize housing for school children who are imminently at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

### Communities reviewed

Greater Phoenix, AZ and Greater Cincinnati, OH. These communities were selected from the Siemer Institute sites nationwide using these criteria: focus on McKinney-Vento eligible students (homeless per the McKinney-Vento Education definition), low barrier eligibility (i.e., income not required), and strong housing stability outcomes.

<sup>2</sup>Youth or families who “lack a fixed, regular, and nighttime residence” or an “individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is a) a supervised or publicly operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations; b) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill; or c) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.”

### Eviction and Homelessness Prevention Research Project

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School-based prevention continued on next page

## School-based prevention



### Keys features across communities

The interviewees noted that having a strong partnership with the schools was critical. Schools were needed to:

- 1) identify children and families for services based on the McKinney-Vento criteria, and
- 2) ensure children succeed academically through in-school and after-school supports.

Ideally, school personnel should: identify and refer at-risk families; have an established liaison and process to support the referrals; and maintain regular communication about families' needs and progress. Social services partners should provide a comprehensive, strengths-based approach and be able to directly deliver or have in place strong partnerships that address whole family needs (i.e., two-generation). Funding for both communities' programs was provided by grants from the Siemer Institute and the United Way affiliate.



The [Siemer Institute](#) is a national organization focused on enhancing educational opportunities for school-aged children by preventing family homelessness and reducing school instability.

By partnering with United Way affiliates in 53 communities, the partners provide case management, partner with local school districts, offer financial management coaching, and provide financial assistance to assist with housing stability. The Institute provides grant funding, conducts evaluation, and promotes best practices.

An evaluation of 2016 data submitted by all Siemer sites found that 40% of families served increased their income, 66% increased housing stability, and 98% of children avoided a disruptive school move.

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School-based prevention continued on next page

## School-based prevention

### Features and components of reviewed programs

Both incorporated one or more of these features:

- **Comprehensive case management** for six to 18 months was provided to all program participants with length and intensity tailored to family needs. Both programs reported that initially meetings may be held weekly, with reduced frequency over time. Supporting the family to increase housing stability was the primary focus for case management using a strengths-based approach. Face-to-face and telephone meetings were used to make it convenient for families.
- Service coordination was an essential feature for both programs to help families meet a wide range of needs beyond housing, including food, clothing, school uniforms, hygiene products, and school supplies.
- In the Greater Phoenix program, two organizations partner to provide the program. One agency provides a school-based case manager focused on meeting the needs of children, and the other agency employs a separate case manager for services for parents. The social workers were able to flex to serve all families and family members as needs arose. Case management was available at the school, the community resource center located near the school, and in the homes of participants.
- In the Greater Cincinnati program, the sponsoring agency, Brighton Center, has an extensive array of in-house services available to support families enrolled in the program. The social worker uses a “service-bundling” approach to coordinate these in-house services, e.g., financial education, workforce, basic needs, etc. Brighton Center also is part of the “Access to Safety Net Alliance,” which meets monthly to share information on landlord outreach, employment supports, financial assistance, and other needs. These community partners are a frequent source of referrals. Brighton Center is also updating its program to align with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s [Family-Centered Coaching](#) model of working holistically with families.



Cincinnati, Ohio

### Eviction and Homelessness Prevention Research Project

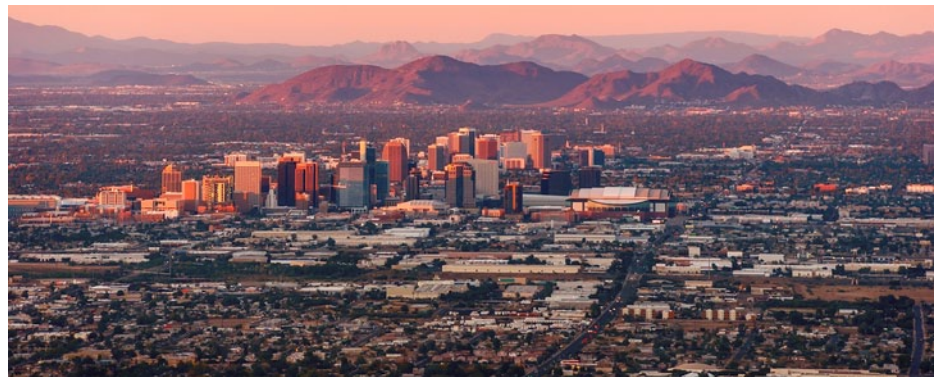
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School-based prevention continued on next page

## School-based prevention

### Features and components of reviewed programs continued

- **School-based services** were fully integrated into both programs with the primary intent to keep children stable in school. Both programs knew and worked closely with school personnel – principal, teachers, school secretary, and guidance counselors, and were able to meet with families and children at the schools. Both programs worked closely with the district McKinney-Vento homeless liaison.
- Both work with families, children, and schools to enroll children in extracurricular and academic enhancement services, support children to reduce disciplinary infractions, improve attendance, and identify and address children’s needs.
- In the Greater Phoenix program, school personnel identify a child or family that needs homelessness prevention services and provides information about the child or family to district office personnel who determine program eligibility and obtain release of information for referral to the program. Eligible children must be homeless according to the McKinney-Vento Education definition and enrolled in Head Start through grade 8 in one school district. 100% of families referred by the district to the program are admitted. Program services are focused in one elementary school with the highest population of homeless children. The school provided an on-site office for the program which made it convenient for the family, and also enabled the program staff to observe and interact with the children.



Phoenix, Arizona

- In the Greater Cincinnati program, there is a strong partnership at all levels from reciprocal board membership through frontline staff. The schools make direct referrals after obtaining participation waivers from families. Eligible children must be homeless according to the McKinney-Vento Education definition and enrolled in grades K-3 in school districts across eight counties in Northern Kentucky. Because the program capacity is limited, efforts are made to enroll families with the greatest need and best fit for the program. Some families that cannot be assisted by this program are referred to other Brighton Center programs.

School-based prevention continued on next page

## School-based prevention

### Features and components of reviewed programs continued

- **Housing stabilization supports** are the centerpiece of both programs and include landlord mediation, advocacy with utility companies, education on landlord/tenant rights and responsibilities, credit repair, and housing relocation. Families that are living doubled-up may choose to remain in that situation or relocate to a different living situation. When these families opt to continue shared housing due to the lack of other available, affordable housing that meets their needs, case managers will help families make that housing more stable. This may mean providing coaching or direct mediation with the primary tenant or identifying additional resources that increase overall financial stability. Families are assisted in applying for public and assisted housing. Programs also made referrals for legal representation and mediation as needed.
- **Two-Generation (2-Gen) approaches** are strongly recommended by the Siemer Institute which is publishing a series of briefs on this topic in early 2018. 2-Gen approaches consider and serve the needs of both adults and children in a family. The institute recommends that sites develop a highly customized, “whole family” focused strategy that would be “less about coordinating discrete services offered to different family members and more about a mindful consideration of the family as a unit, one that can thrive with the right social, emotional, financial, educational and other supports.”<sup>3</sup> Both programs have elements of 2-Gen approaches and are working to further refine their programs to align with this approach.



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School-based prevention continued on next page

## School-based prevention

### Features and components of reviewed programs continued

- **Emergency financial assistance** is an essential component to cover arrearages due to landlords, pay utility turn-on fees and utility arrearages, adult and child educational expenses (e.g., certification, enrollment fees, etc.), essential furnishings and household supplies, and if relocation is needed, initial deposits and rent. Both programs relied heavily on referrals and linkages to financial assistance available through public and private sources but did provide limited financial assistance from program funds when critical to family and housing stability. The average financial assistance provided directly by the programs was very modest, \$100 and \$1,000 for Greater Cincinnati and Greater Phoenix, respectively.



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<sup>3</sup> "Defining Two-Generation Programming in a Family Stability Context," Siemer Institute, September 2017.

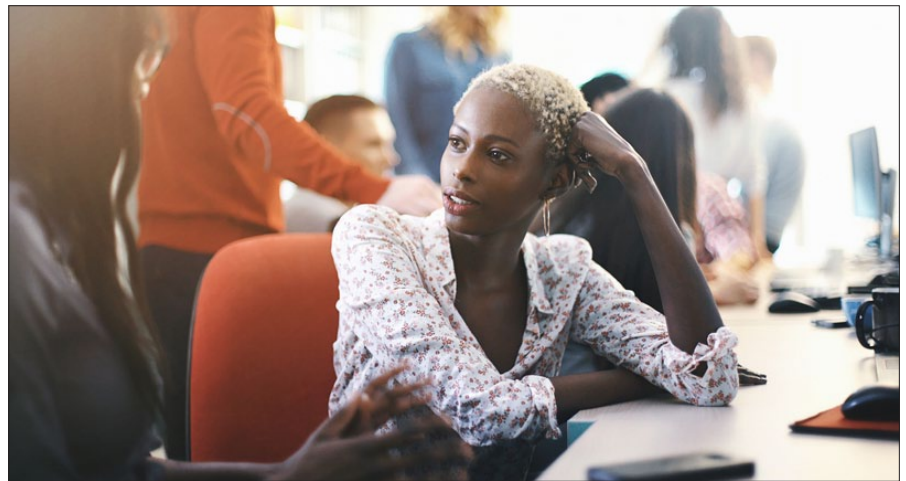
School-based prevention continued on next page



## School-based prevention

### Features and components of reviewed programs continued

- **Employment, income and benefits.** Both programs provided extensive supports to improve income through public assistance and employment. This included help with public assistance applications (e.g., cash assistance, food stamps, Medicaid, etc.), referrals to agency-sponsored employment programs, connection to community-based employment services, referrals for free tax preparation, and other supports that facilitate income and employment (e.g., transportation, work clothing, etc.).
- **Financial coaching** to prevent future recurrence of financial instability and homelessness. Both programs noted the importance of money management, budget development, establishment of banking relationships, and other supports that help family develop skills to be more financially stable.
- The Greater Cincinnati program uses the evidence-based financial coaching model developed by the [Financial Opportunity Center](#) of LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation). This model focuses on helping people get “steady, living-wage employment, boost their credit rating and increase net income and net worth.”



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## School-based prevention

### Innovative program model

#### [Stable Families](#), Brighton Center, Northern Kentucky

**Objectives:** Children stay in school and achieve academically; families maintain stable housing, increase income, and obtain work

**Eligibility:** Resident in one of two counties in northern Kentucky, school-aged children in grades K-3, homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness (using McKinney-Vento Education definition); ability to earn income (employment is not required at admission; families with adults on fixed income can be served by a different, longer-term program operated by Brighton Center). 100% of referrals from schools.

**Capacity:** 75 families enrolled at point in time; 135 annually.

**Staffing:** 1.25 FTE case managers

**Annual Budget:** \$83,500 (staff and cash assistance)

**Funding Sources:** Siemer Institute and United Way of Greater Cincinnati

#### 2-Generation Program:

- **Case management:** Up to 18 months to create a plan with the family to stabilize and thrive; intensive (weekly for three months) then tapering over time.
- **Service bundling:** Brighton Center has in-house resources for financial management, benefits, employment, basic needs, etc. Organized as [Financial Opportunity Center](#) (evidence-based practice) – financial coaching, employment, and work supports.
- **Partnership with schools:** Ensures children do well in school and access all school-based services
- **Housing services:** Stabilize or relocate, if doubled up; prevent eviction. Works with housing authority and other landlords.
- **Cash assistance:** Average \$100 per household

**Outcomes:** 72% exit to stable housing; 65% increase income; 99% of children remain stable in school



### Eviction and Homelessness Prevention Research Project

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School-based prevention continued on next page

Features and components of reviewed programs continued

- **BPA concept recommendation for local replication**

**Develop a pilot project in one school district with a high number of homeless children. Co-locate family homelessness prevention services in school. Serve homeless families identified by the schools as “homeless” and target services to those most at risk becoming “literally homeless”** (i.e., unsheltered or living in emergency shelter). Model after the comprehensive approach used by two Siemer sites, the Brighton Center in Northern Kentucky and A New Leaf/Helping Families in Need serving Greater Phoenix, and identify multi-service agency or resource center to partner.

**Rationale for testing the concept in Montgomery County**

1. **Reduce impacts of high mobility on all children served by schools with high rates of homelessness:** 683 children were homeless under the McKinney-Vento Education definition and served by Montgomery County schools during the most recent school year that data was available. Nearly 70% of these children were living doubled up and at-risk of literal homelessness.
2. **Reduce negative outcomes for children:** Children have lifelong negative consequences related to health and economic well-being.
3. **Innovation:** Replicate Siemer Institute emerging practices for 2-Gen strategies and test effectiveness in a suburban community.
4. **Build on community expertise:** Current Siemer programs have experience with schools. Housing counseling expertise (diversion) developed by YWH can be used to develop the social services component.

**Potential partners to be engaged**

Regional McKinney-Vento coordinator for Pennsylvania Department of Education, North Penn School District, United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey (the Siemer Institute grantee), and nonprofit organizations providing housing counseling (diversion).

## School-based prevention

### Features and components of reviewed programs continued

#### YWH feasibility analysis

YWH reached out to United Way. The timing was not good for a new initiative as the United Way is in the midst of merging into a regional United Way. Expanding or revising the current Siemer program was not viewed as a current priority. Your Way Home reviewed local data to determine other districts with high mobility rates and identified North Penn School District as having a relatively high percentage of homeless students, per the McKinney-Vento definition. School district staff were also highly recommended as partners as a result of their innovative work in other areas.

#### YWH status as of January 2018

**While not premised on the Siemer Institute model, North Penn School District and YWH have agreed to partner on a school-based prevention project starting in fall 2018 to serve families homeless under the McKinney-Vento definition. In December 2017, a local funder committed to investing in this project, and using the outcomes analysis as a means of evaluating its applicability and scalability for other communities. YWH and North Penn School District are working through implementation steps through spring 2018 in order to launch the project by the start of the 2018-2019 school year. The project will use a 2-Gen approach and apply the success of YWH's rapid re-housing program to stabilize housing services. YWH is approaching a local university to conduct the program evaluation.**



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School-based prevention continued on next page

## Considerations for replicability in other communities

### School-based prevention

#### Questions

1

**Which school districts and school buildings have the highest number and rates of homelessness?**



#### Possible next steps

- Review school district data to identify schools with high numbers of homeless children. The National Center for Homeless Education can be a resource to identify how your community and state collects and organizes this data.
- Review HMIS data to understand demographic and household characteristics of families with children, zip code or other geographic indicators with high incidences of child homelessness.
- If you have a homeless hotline or coordinated process to access emergency shelter, review that data.
- Look for other local data or studies about child homelessness.

2

**Is there a willingness by a school district to partner to develop a pilot?**



- Note: this is a critical requirement.
- Meet with the local McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison – a great resource to build your knowledge base.
- Meet with family shelter and housing programs to understand more about existing school partnerships and opportunities to prevent homelessness.
- Meet with principals at high-mobility schools or schools with high numbers of homeless children. If they express interest, meet with district leadership to build the partnership.

Continued next page

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## Considerations for replicability in other communities

### School-based prevention

#### Questions

3

What partnerships and resources could be identified to develop and support the pilot?



#### Possible next steps

- Ask everyone you meet with to suggest a community leader who might be willing to champion this effort.
- Champions could be well-regarded civic or philanthropic leaders, current or former school board members, or business leaders.
- Check to see if there is an existing **Siemer Institute** partner operating in your area.
- Reach out to your existing philanthropic partners and test their interest in being a champion or their willingness to make an introduction to someone who might be able to champion.
- Based on what you've been able to learn through the above processes, make a strategic decision on next steps based on needs, interest, and potential impact. The local context will determine the appropriate approach.

4

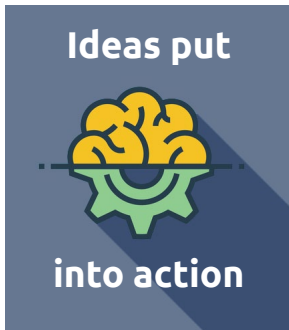
Are there any funding sources that could be used to support the costs for a pilot?



- In-kind, volunteer, and financial resources (new or realigned) will be needed to cover the cost of the pilot and include legal services, supportive services and financial assistance, project coordination, and evaluation.
- Local governments often can provide funding to cover financial assistance, legal services, project coordination, and evaluation.
- Federal funding sources like CDBG, SSVF, ESG, and EFSP may cover a portion of the costs.

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## Lessons Learned

### Introduction

Those who have been working on homelessness issues for a while have probably heard the oft-repeated caution about homelessness prevention: “Most people who receive prevention assistance would not have become homeless even without assistance.” Chances are that the local CoC has been challenged simply having enough resources to help those who experience literal homelessness. But your organization may also have that nagging doubt and may even be feeling community pressure to focus on prevention to truly end homelessness.

This research project charts a path forward for CoCs to begin tackling “upstream” homelessness prevention in a smart, strategic way.

This is critical work as there are families and individuals who are harmed by housing instability and homelessness (under definitions broader than HUD’s) that need attention. Additionally, dislocation and housing instability negatively impact communities in multiple ways. For example, stable children in schools with “high churn” have been shown to have poor academic achievement as teachers spend more time orienting and working with the newly arriving children. Neighborhoods with high eviction rates are less cohesive and economically stable than those with lower rates. Housing instability also precipitates systemic responses that are costly (e.g., transporting students to new school districts, operating housing/eviction courts, providing homeless services, etc.). Housing instability is also associated with negative health outcomes which can be costly to health systems and taxpayers.

As President Obama noted in the preface to [Opening Doors](#), “Instead of simply responding once a family or a person becomes homeless, prevention and innovation must be at the forefront of our efforts.” The lessons learned from this project are shared to help communities craft their own path toward prevention and innovation.



## Upstream Prevention: an emerging premise

If you have a **high functioning crisis response system** (effective at diversion, targeting/matching interventions, with mostly successful exits to stable housing) that has **demonstrated results** (low unsheltered and declining annual PIT count)

*Housing stability is the primary goal of homelessness prevention.*

### Look upstream and determine opportunity(ies) for prevention (homelessness and/or eviction)

- What are greatest needs?
- What populations are most likely to become homeless?
- Which populations are most costly if they do become homeless?
- Where is there energy and interest for vulnerable populations?
- What impacts might create political will?
- Are there any financial resources or partnerships that might coalesce?
- How will we measure impact?

Figure 1. Overview of how communities can conceptualize work on preventing homelessness.



## Lessons learned



## Overview of Key Lessons

The following are the key lessons that emerged from the research. The next section describes the lessons in greater detail.

- Embark on this journey only if your community has the solid base of a well-functioning, homeless crisis response system and strong allies and partners beyond the homeless crisis response system. The crisis response system must provide solid diversion assistance for those who are at greatest risk of imminent homelessness (see earlier in this report for a description of effective diversion). Additionally, a CoC primarily or exclusively composed of homeless assistance providers should not undertake this work alone.
- Educate (and re-educate) CoC partners and allies that the loss of housing due to eviction (whether legal or informal) has harmful consequences to the household and the community, even if households never become literally homeless **and** require assistance through the homeless crisis response system.
- Homelessness and eviction prevention should be viewed as a range of potential interventions along a spectrum from highly targeted to broad.
- Review data to determine greatest needs and potential for impact.
- Regardless of which approach is selected, each prevention initiative will need housing stabilization supports that address immediate and long-term needs paired with rental assistance. Access to legal services is frequently needed as well.
- Due to the breadth and extent of needs, consider a pilot approach to get started rather than building a comprehensive strategic plan that will be difficult to implement in a timely way.
- Engage a cross sector of allies in the pilot selection process to determine the type and scope of the project to be developed.
- Mobilize and engage the community about the need and solutions. Prevention is the very long game.

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Lessons learned continued on next page

## Lessons learned



## Specifics on Each Key Lesson

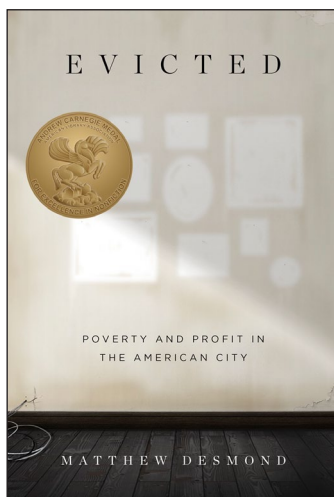
### Lesson 1

**Embark on this journey only if your community has the solid base of a well-functioning, homeless crisis response system that provides solid diversion assistance for those who are at greatest risk of imminent homelessness. Partners from beyond the homeless crisis response system are critical.**

A well-functioning crisis response system has amassed sufficient resources and partners to be effective at generally meeting the needs of people who experience literal homelessness. This is indicated by:

- General trends reflect decreasing homelessness across most populations, as measured by the annual PIT.
- Length of time homeless is decreasing over time or is holding at a fairly low time period (i.e., less than 60 days)
- Exits to permanent housing are increasing over time and above 50% for the whole system and higher for programs such as rapid rehousing and transitional housing.
- Low unsheltered population can be documented.
- Diversion is offered to all populations, and at least 50% of family households and 20% of single adult households are diverted.
- Before embarking on “upstream” prevention, a community must offer diversion across all populations. This will ensure that the people who are most vulnerable to immediate homelessness are being served ahead of those whose risk of literal homelessness is in the future. The additional benefit is that the expertise and skills used by diversion can be applied to “upstream” prevention.

## Lessons learned



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## Lesson 2

**Educate (and re-educate) CoC partners and allies that the loss of housing due to eviction (whether legal or informal) has harmful consequences to the household and the community even if households never become literally homeless and require assistance through the homeless crisis response system.**

- Develop your messaging around why prevention is important. Why now? Why in this manner? For CoCs that have spent the last few years fending off the prevention advocates, this change in policy will need a solid explanation and messaging strategy.
- If you've been resisting the pressure to tackle homelessness prevention using the admonition that "most people who receive prevention assistance would not have become homeless even without assistance," you will need to articulate why the time has come to take up the charge now. A myriad of [studies](#) point to the negative outcomes of housing instability and consequences of eviction. In addition, research supports a strong connection between managing the social determinants of health and access to safe, stable housing.
- You will also want to describe how your community assists those individuals who experience literal homelessness through diversion and crisis response system effectively and efficiently.
- A number of great books, including "[Evicted](#)," by Matthew Desmond, and "[\\$2 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America](#)," by Kathryn Edin and Luke Schafer, provide compelling first-person stories about real impacts of housing instability and eviction.
- To further community interest, enthusiasm, and understanding, HealthSpark presented copies of "Evicted" at the YWH annual summit. This was an excellent way to socialize the importance of prevention.

Lessons learned continued on next page

## Lessons learned

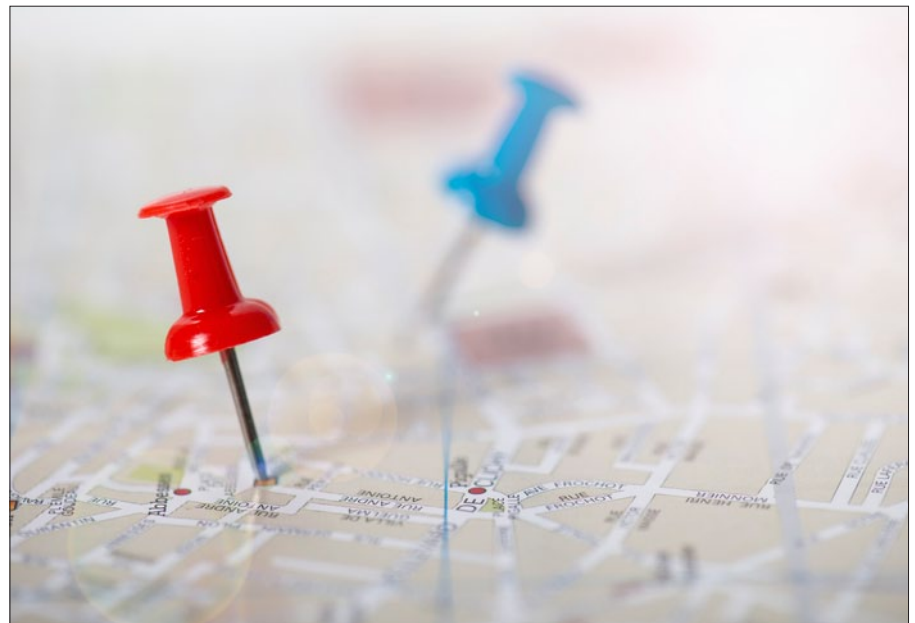
### Lesson 3



### Lesson 3

**Homelessness and eviction prevention should be viewed as a range of potential interventions along a spectrum from highly targeted to broad.**

- Determining how and where you would like to intervene along the spectrum from broad-based to highly targeted will give your work focus and make it more manageable. You will need to be clear on your specific target and plan an intervention that is specific to that purpose. This can be a great time to look for the “low-hanging fruit” to demonstrate success and impact.
- For example, YWH determined that the extreme geographic disparities on where evictions were occurring (60% of evictions occurred in two of 66 zip codes) was both a compelling argument and permitted a highly targeted approach. Still, be prepared to respond to consumers and advocates for consumers who will not be eligible because they don’t reside in a targeted community.



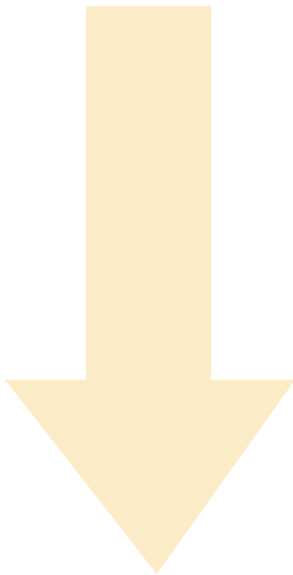
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Lessons learned continued on next page

## Lessons learned

Community-wide



Highly targeted

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## Upstream prevention strategies



- Affordable housing campaign – preserve and create new affordable rental housing for extremely low-income households
- Broad-based emergency financial assistance and services
- Court-based eviction prevention
- Public housing eviction prevention
- Universal risk screener with targeted prevention services
- Target high-cost and vulnerable people
  - o Frequent users of jail, hospitals, detox, etc.
  - o Support youth transitioning from foster care
  - o Support elderly households to stay in home via home modification and home-based services
- Target vulnerable children and families
  - o Public and assisted housing eviction prevention services
  - o School-based supports
  - o Train family and child providers to provide housing stabilization service



Figure 3. Sample of types of homelessness prevention activities along the spectrum from broad impact to highly targeted impact.

Lessons learned continued on next page

## Lessons learned



### Lesson 4

#### Review data to determine greatest needs and potential for impact.

- First, gather HMIS (Homelessness Management Information System) data to understand “feeder” systems into homelessness. Demographic reports showing who is entering the homeless system will reveal household characteristics, race, and disabilities. A report on places stayed prior to entry is useful to indicate the types of places people are coming from (their own housing, subsidized housing, living with family and friends), and geography (zip code analysis is particularly helpful). For this analysis, exclude those who have an entry point that is already homeless (i.e., shelter or unsheltered) and focus on those entering from a housed or institutional location. Review whether some sub-populations have longer lengths of time homeless than others and see if they are entering homelessness from different points.
- For example, if there are a high number who were previously in subsidized housing, perhaps there is a way to partner with the housing authority to implement an eviction prevention program for public and assisted housing.
- For example, it may be that a low number of people who enter from “institutions,” but if they have significantly longer lengths of time homeless or are more likely to become chronically homeless, it may make sense to explore a prevention pilot targeted to reduce admissions from institutions.
- Using data to understand disproportionality and disparities related to gender and race is critically important. New research from [SPARC](#), sponsored by the Center For Social Innovation, documents that people of color are dramatically more likely than White people to experience homelessness in the U.S.
- Review other system data that you can access to understand connections to homelessness, looking for information about the scope of the problem, characteristics of those who are impacted, and geographic locations related to the housing crisis. By exploring the data, you should also learn more about how (if) other systems try to help households with their housing crises.
- 2-1-1 data about types of calls for housing and emergency housing assistance: to learn more about the locations where people are living when they call for assistance, both in terms of their type of housing and specific locations (neighborhoods, zip codes) that have higher rates of calls. Look for patterns.
- Legal Aid: to understand data on who they represent, outcomes, and who they can’t help.

## Lessons learned



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## Lesson 4 continued

- Jails and corrections, health and behavioral health care services: can be especially helpful if these institutions track people's housing destination at time of exiting. You can also inquire if representatives would consider doing an administrative data match with another system such as HMIS data.
- Child welfare: find out if the system tracks housing status of youth exiting foster care and follow up. Is housing a factor for children being placed in out-of-home care?
- Public assistance programs: determine if they track housing status of clients. Do they offer homeless prevention assistance? Would they be interested in an administrative data match?
- Food pantries: find out if they track the housing status of clients. Do they offer homeless prevention assistance?

## Lesson 5

**Regardless of which approach is selected, each prevention initiative will need housing stabilization supports that address immediate and long-term needs paired with rental assistance. Access to legal services is frequently needed as well.**

- **Housing stabilization supports should be paired to the intensity of the intervention.** Diversion-type skills in problem-solving and mediation can be helpful across all types of interventions. Service coordination and linkage to community and mainstream resources likewise is an important type of housing stabilization supports. Housing search and connection to landlords will be critical for school-based, court-based, and other community prevention programs when the household's current housing situation is not salvageable. All of these housing stabilization supports will be needed for re-entry and discharge programs that seek to prevent homelessness at discharge from corrections, hospitals, and health care facilities. Financial coaching, money management, and representative payee services may also be included. The length of time that services are provided will also vary from one-time to ongoing.

Lessons learned continued on next page

## Lessons learned



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## Lesson 5 continued

- **Rental assistance should also be sized to the intensity of the need.** Most commonly, emergency rental and utility assistance is needed to address arrearages and to establish a new apartment. Typically, these are provided on a short-term basis. Longer term, ongoing rental assistance may be required for persons with disabilities who are exiting institutions which would require partnership with public or assisted housing agencies.
- **Legal assistance and mediation are sometimes needed.** Mediation may be a critical component of court-based eviction prevention and may also be a helpful resource for school-based programs. Legal assistance can benefit all types of programs, too. Resources can range from self-help online supports (must be specific to county and state laws to be useful) to limited representation (one day in court) to full representation. Legal services can be pro bono (volunteer) or paid. Tenant education on rights and responsibilities could be a component of helping tenants gain long-term housing stability. Access to legal services may also be needed for households to secure public and disability assistance.

## Lesson 6

**Due to the breadth and extent of needs, consider a pilot approach to get started rather than building a comprehensive strategic plan that will be difficult to implement in a timely way.**

- Too often, communities create comprehensive strategic plans that require significant effort, meetings and process but then do not get implemented. Tackling prevention through a pilot approach should feel more manageable.
- Narrowing your focus will enable you to amass the resources necessary and demonstrate impact. Given there is not a great amount of evidence about “what works for whom,” a pilot project with a strong evaluation overlay can contribute not only to your community’s success but also to the national dialogue on homelessness prevention. The discipline required to evaluate the pilot also will enhance your focus.
- Select a single project for pilot implementation, secure resources and partners, and build an implementation plan with measurable outcomes. Design the pilot with the evaluation in mind and be clear on objectives and how they will be measured. Evaluate impact then determine whether to scale further.
- Success in one area will help you build a path forward with other populations and partners.

Lessons learned continued on next page



## Lessons learned



### Eviction and Homelessness Prevention Research Project

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## Lesson 6 continued

- YWH considered three ideas for pilots but found community interest was initially lacking for two ideas. One idea was adjusted to garner the partnership support needed and will be launched in fall 2018. YWH also found that the time required to launch one pilot was all their team could muster at a time. The ever-changing federal budget scenarios also projected some skepticism about tackling broad issues that underlie homelessness, which would have worked against them if the approach had been to develop a comprehensive plan. The takeaway is to assess limits on those resources – better to have one really good project than two “half-baked ones.”

## Lesson 7

### Engage a cross sector of allies in the pilot selection process to determine the type and scope of the project to be developed.

- Prevention will require new allies and you will need current partners and allies to feel part of the new effort. A mix of current and new partners can provide the foundation for the strong working relationships, trust, and credibility required to be successful. As noted in Lesson 1, the CoC should have a strong base of community partners engaged with the homeless crisis response system.
- Philanthropy can be a key partner for convening stakeholders and investing in the pilot.
- Health care systems could be an ally and partner in a frequent-user pilot to reduce emergency department visits and hospitalization.
- Local government planning departments charged with neighborhood revitalization could be a potential ally for an eviction prevention project.
- School districts may be willing to join forces to reduce housing instability in highly mobile schools.
- The YWH planning process included both new and potential allies; however, the participants were not explicitly charged with engaging their stakeholders and serving as the two-way communication bridge. Consequently, some new stakeholders were unprepared to participate in the pilot implementation since they had treated their role as a passive commenter, not an engaged stakeholder.

Lessons learned continued on next page

## Lessons learned



### Lesson 7 continued

- Reach out, engage, and assess a range of partners to test potential for interest, political will, and resources before selecting the approach.
- Consider who would be interested in providing leadership for a prevention pilot.
- Gauge the political will and enthusiasm develop and sponsor a pilot.
- Identify potential partnerships and resources that could develop and support the pilot.
- Pick the pilot that appears to generate the greatest interest and potential. Avoid pursuing what may be the highest impact project if political will and interest are absent – you can always come back to this idea once you have a proof point.

### Lesson 8

**Mobilize and engage the community about the need and solutions. Prevention is the very long game.**

- Communicate progress through regular media coverage, program announcements in allies' newsletters, and events.
- Provide community education about the problem and solutions through forums, newsletters, etc.
- Celebrate success. As noted by Becky (Kanis) Mariotta and Joe McCannon <sup>4</sup>, "scheduling regular celebration and appreciation is a critical source of energy for the initiative."

<sup>4</sup> For more on large-scale improvement, see [here](#).

## Tips for local policymakers

Preventing homelessness requires data-driven approaches to improving public policies and making smart investments. Local public-sector leadership is essential since homelessness prevention must be a core safety net strategy for low-income households. Key policymakers from housing, human services, public services, criminal justice, and health care sectors can partner with the Continuum of Care (CoC) to develop effective homelessness prevention strategies.

### Information gathering and assessment

- Understand how well the homeless crisis response system, operated by the CoC, is currently functioning on key performance measures. Review current diversion assistance practices to be sure that these are widely available to people who are at greatest risk of imminent homelessness. (See definition of diversion, [page 3](#).)
- Review how mainstream programs and systems for low-income households currently function and respond to housing crises that arise for program participants.
- Assess if “tripwires” or flagging methods are in place in public assistance programs that can be a catalyst for connecting at-risk and homeless recipients with crucial services.

Review public assistance programs, like TANF, Medicaid, SNAP (previously known as food stamps), and WIC (a nutrition program for women, infants, and children).

- Determine if effective re-entry planning is in place from all public institutions that prevents discharge to homelessness. Review corrections, health, and child welfare systems, especially.
- Ascertain the role that housing and eviction courts do or could play in preventing eviction.
- If your community has specialty treatment courts, find out if they are effective at preventing homelessness.
- Conduct cross-system data analysis with the CoC’s HMIS (Homelessness Management Information System) to determine areas that might inform decisions on how to target the initiative to meet greatest needs and impacts. Review utilization, demographic, and cost data to understand current impacts and help prioritize populations and systems for potential intervention.

### Planning

- Develop or map a strategic understanding of the political landscape and how it will affect your approach. Assess key partners and systems to engage. Develop your plan to review data and develop a project with an eye toward engaging these key partners. Assess when and how to engage broader community groups, either through surveys, community meetings, or focus groups.

Identify when and how to obtain approval for new funding decisions or project implementation strategies. Plan ahead.

- Identify the role the public-sector can play in realigning existing resources or identifying new resources to support this work.
- Specify policies that could be adjusted, relaxed, or streamlined to facilitate the pilot project.

### Commitment of resources

- Commit senior staff time to work with the CoC leadership and participate in the project planning and implementation phases.
- Commit and/or raise resources (staff time and financial support) to catalyze a public-private pilot approach to test ideas. Flexible resources will be the most helpful, but targeting existing resources can also be effective. Regardless of which approach is selected, each prevention initiative will need housing stabilization supports that address immediate and long-term needs paired with rental assistance. Access to legal services is frequently needed as well.
- Found out if competitive funding applications could be used to secure pilot funding.

### Education and engagement

- Engage other funders early in the process. This can be helpful in giving a better sense of which projects will have traction with external entities.
- Develop your messaging around why this is important. Why now? Why in this manner? For CoCs that have spent the last few years fending off the prevention advocates, this change in policy will need a solid explanation and messaging strategy.
- Educate elected leaders and senior policy officials that the loss of housing due to eviction (whether legal or informal) has harmful consequences to the household and the community even if they do not become literally homeless and require assistance through the homeless crisis response system.
- Provide public education to generate support for preventing homelessness.

## Tips for philanthropists

As noted in a 2009 article <sup>5</sup>, catalytic philanthropists should, “gather knowledge about the problem they are tackling and use this knowledge to inform their own actions and motivate the actions of others. Making knowledge actionable requires more than just gathering and reporting data. The information must also carry emotional appeal to capture people’s attention and practical recommendations that can inspire them to action.”

Philanthropy can be a catalyst for transformative and strategic investment and partnership to advance “upstream” prevention through systems change, research, pilot projects and system-level capacity building. Philanthropy also has the convening power to bring local government, nonprofit service providers, and the private sector for meaningful collaboration and participation.

### Convening

- Mobilize key community leaders who will be necessary for success. Prevention requires partnerships beyond the existent CoC partners, and philanthropy can open the door to new partnerships.
- Host community conversations and forums to explore findings and gather input. Engage public leaders in these events. Offer practical ways that all can participate.
- Offer to convene cross-sector key leaders on behalf of the CoC.
- Engage public sector leaders, especially those that the CoC has not been able to cultivate and engage.
- Convene other funders to engage the community dialogue about the need for homelessness prevention and solutions. These can range from informal, social gatherings to more highly structured events with formal presentations.
- Create a funders collaborative.

### Advocacy

- Encourage public-sector participation in administrative data matching to use data from multiple systems of care to identify where people who become homeless come from, what services they use, what types of households they are.
- Research promising best practices and evidenced-based tools and share this information with the CoC and policy makers. Identify local, regional and national experts whose work may help inform the CoC of opportunities.
- Invest in and encourage other philanthropic partners to invest in housing stabilization supports, rental assistance, and legal services, and to support the costs of the pilot evaluation.

### Advocacy continued

- Offer public testimony about the needs and solutions.
- Philanthropy can hold the line on the need to be responsible for solid results not just “feel-good” work. Prevention requires a data-disciplined approach to be ensure effectiveness and efficiency.

### Partnership

- Commit senior staff time to work with the CoC leadership and participate in the project planning and implementation phases. Be an active and supportive partner and thought leader.
- Work with the CoC to understand how well the homeless crisis response system is currently functioning on key performance measures. Review current diversion assistance practices to be sure that it is widely available for people who at greatest risk of imminent homelessness. Support an external system review.
- Create actionable knowledge.

### Funding

- Allocate general operating support, service/program and capacity-building grants to organizations working to deepen impact around “upstream” prevention.
- Invest in and require an outcome-driven evaluation for pilot project(s).
- Issue matching grant challenges.
- Invest in and support HMIS (Homelessness Management Information System) and community data reviews and the dissemination of findings to determine greatest needs and potential for impact.

<sup>5</sup> Kramer, 2009

## Tips for providers

Providers of services to families, individuals, and children who are at risk of homelessness are likely keenly aware of the consequences when homelessness is not averted. Still, providers can be isolated in their perspective because of restrictive funding covenants, historical approaches to service delivery, lack of access to data or data analysis and other constraints. Their willing partnership in systems transformation needs to be nurtured and is absolutely necessary to truly transform the community response.

### Assessment

- Be candid and honest in your appraisal of how well the homeless crisis response system is functioning; have a critical eye for whom diversion assistance works and who is being well served.
- Review your organizational data to contribute to the conversation about greatest needs and potential for impact.
- Appraise how well your organization is preventing homelessness – who is well-served and who is not.

### Determination of your role

- Be crystal clear about the role your organization actually has in the context of the CoC system.
- Assess what diversion programs/services are specifically aligned with the vision for the system.
- Assess if and how your organization and its partners might participate in a pilot by examining your expertise and resources for housing stabilization supports, provision of rental assistance, and legal services. Depending on your program, your role may be more of “cheerleader” than a direct participant in implementation. Still, this work is not for everyone. Be deliberate in your assessment of your role and its value to the CoC.

### Engagement

- Engage in advocacy. Help educate (and re-educate) CoC partners and allies and policymakers that the loss of housing due to eviction (whether legal or informal) has harmful consequences to the household and the community.
- Fully engage your organization from frontline staff to program managers to board members and volunteers in the development of the pilot(s); gather and use data to understand impacts.
- Actively mobilize and engage your constituencies about the need and viable solutions. Prevention is the very long game and everyone needs to work together to make it happen.

## Conclusion

Ending homelessness is possible. It takes knowledge of what works, political will, sufficient resources, and a set of smart strategies that are implemented well locally.

This report describes a path forward for communities, to begin to tackle and stop the flow of families and individuals into homelessness through eviction and homelessness prevention. Communities that have effective, efficient homeless crisis response systems and strong community partners are well-positioned to begin this work. By assessing needs as well as the community's interest in tackling new challenges, communities can test models and scale up what works. Success in one area can build and advance the political will necessary to achieve our vision that no one should be without a safe, stable place to call home.

# Appendix 1: Project Overview

## Overview of the Research & Consultation Phase

### Purpose

1

Research evidence-based and promising practices to prevent eviction and support housing stability for at-risk individuals and families.

- inform local policy and practice including allocation of financial and human resources; and to identify potential sources of funding to support these eviction prevention strategies
- inform the national dialogue on how to prevent homelessness

### Needs Data

2

- 1) Montgomery County 2-1-1 data/YWH Call Center Data/Montgomery County Navigates Data: frequent need for emergency housing assistance
- 2) Montgomery County courts (2016) 5,545 landlord tenant cases were filed and 2,120 orders of possession were issued.
- 3) 683 children were homeless under the Education definition in Montgomery County schools (SY2015-16). Nearly 70% of these children were living doubled up.
- 4) Population who experiences homelessness is disproportionately Black or African-American and are usually families with children.
- 5) Need for eviction and homelessness prevention is concentrated in two zip codes: 19401 - Norristown and 19464 - Pottstown

### Local Challenges

3

- Lack of adequate household income
- Overall shortage of affordable, quality rental housing
- Shortage of financial assistance to pay for housing related costs to prevent eviction

### Local Opportunities

- Existing programs operate independently with limited coordination → Align and collaborate
- YWH crisis response system is functioning well and the Housing Counseling outcomes are excellent → Apply expertise and lessons learned
- Montgomery County alignment → New integrate Health and Human Services Department

### Ideas

4

**Universal screener for service-connected households** unified Montgomery County Health and Human Services implements screener for risk of homelessness and provides targeted prevention services to vulnerable populations

**Enhanced eviction court partnership** in Norristown or Pottstown with legal services and as needed comprehensive social supportive services.

**Enhanced prevention program for families that are identified as homeless by schools** in Norristown or Pottstown.

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## Appendix 2: A Review of Current Research on Homelessness and Eviction Prevention

**Income and housing market dynamics have been consistently shown to explain a large portion of homelessness in the United States** (Culhane, Metraux, & Byrne, 2011; Quigley & Raphael, 2001). Modest improvements in the affordability of housing through appropriately targeted subsidy could reduce the incidence of homelessness to a fraction of its current level (Cunningham et al., 2015; Quigley & Raphael, 2001). In the 2016 point-in-time count, more than 549,000 people were experiencing homelessness in the United States (Henry, Watt, Rosenthal, Shivji, & Abt Associates, 2016). This marks a 3% decline from the 2015 count. The decline in overall homelessness was entirely achieved through a decrease in the sheltered population. From 2015-2016, the 5% decrease in the sheltered homeless population was partially offset by a 2% increase in the unsheltered population. The increase in unsheltered homelessness in the past point-in-time count is atypical from current trends, however. Since the rollout of the Opening Doors framework, the comprehensive federal agenda to prevent and end homelessness, total homelessness has decreased by 14%, or 87,000 people, and unsheltered homelessness has declined by 25%, or 57,000 people. Notably, racial and ethnic minorities are overrepresented among the homeless population. Per 2015 U.S. Census estimates, Blacks make up 12.6% of the total U.S. population but represent 39% of people experiencing homelessness. Similarly, Hispanics comprise 17.1% of the total population but 22% of the homeless population. To reach a functional end to homelessness per the goals of Opening Doors, communities must follow emerging best practices to efficiently and effectively target their resources.

**The causes of eviction and homelessness are complex and multi-dimensional.** As stated, housing market dynamics including overall cost-burden – the percentage of income spent on housing – remains a consistent indicator of homelessness and eviction (Byrne, Munley, Fargo, Montgomery, & Culhane, 2013; Marr, 2016). Both housing cost and income are important, but unexpected changes in income appear to be the main shock that precipitates homelessness, more so than shocks in rent level (O’Flaherty, 2009). Despite common perception, mental illness is not a sufficient cause of homelessness (Montgomery, Metraux, & Culhane, 2013). The link between serious mental illness and poverty does pose serious risks for homelessness, however. The socioeconomic deprivation that often accompanies serious mental illness is more likely to account for the risk of homelessness than the mental illness itself. The impacts of eviction and resulting homelessness cause rippling effects and can contribute to cycles of housing insecurity and poverty. As Matthew Desmond writes in “Evicted” (2016), “Eviction is a cause, not just a condition, of poverty.” Desmond explains that once evictions happen the record follows individuals for years. Landlords will often reject tenant applicants with an eviction record, leading them to shelter in substandard housing or face housing insecurity. An ongoing Urban Institute study has estimated the municipal cost of eviction and unpaid bills among financially insecure families to vary from the low range of \$8 million to \$18 million in New Orleans



to a high range of \$280 million to \$646 million in New York City (Elliott & Kalish, 2017). The economic consequences of failing to prevent homelessness are severe and often borne by the taxpayer. Financially insecure families who are evicted can have substantial consequences on a city's budget through lost property taxes, unpaid bills, and increased reliance on homeless services and social safety nets. Losing the home through eviction can lead to situations of double precarity where housing loss fuels job loss, which in turn reinforces housing precarity (Desmond, 2016). Low-income workers are 11 percent to 22 percent more likely to lose their jobs after a forced move compared to those with stable housing (Desmond & Gershenson, 2016). In this way, eviction and economic insecurity are mutually reinforcing.

It is not only the intersection of income and housing costs that matter for eviction. Race plays a critical role in determining eviction rates. As mentioned, Blacks and Hispanics are overrepresented among the homeless population nationally. Emerging case studies are beginning to show serious disparities in eviction rates in racially segregated cities. In a Philadelphia study, eviction rates in predominantly Black neighborhoods (census tracts that were made up of a 80% or greater Black population), were over three times the rate of predominantly White neighborhoods (Goldstein, Parker, & Acuña, 2017). Preliminary analysis of these areas found that racial composition of a neighborhood had a statistically significant effect on neighborhood eviction rates and had a more substantial impact than household income and tenure. Desmond's (2012) analysis of inner city Milwaukee neighborhoods reinforces these stark racial disparities. Between 2003 and 2007, Milwaukee experienced approximately 16 evictions each day. Despite accounting for only 22% of the neighborhoods in the study, 46% of these evictions took place in predominantly Black neighborhoods. According to Desmond (2012, p. 104), "This disparity ... reflects the overrepresentation of African-Americans among the urban poor as well as their concentration in segregated and disadvantaged neighborhoods." Among those evicted, Black women outnumbered Black men by 1.75:1 and White women by 6.13:1. In Milwaukee, women were, on average, paid less than men and generally had higher childcare expenses, as single-mother households make up 58% of all African-American households in the city. On top of this, single mothers also have to secure households that can suitably house themselves as well as their children, which is costlier, and have fewer opportunities than men to participate in the informal economy to make extra money. Segregated neighborhoods in which Blacks are concentrated in economically disadvantaged areas places them at higher risk of eviction. The unique challenges that Black women face make them especially vulnerable to eviction.

In most communities, while there is a large pool of people who might become homeless at any given time, only a fraction of that population becomes homeless. The challenge of prevention is targeting services and resources toward those most vulnerable (Burt, 2007). In a study of six communities across the United States with well-developed prevention programs, Burt (2007) identifies five of the most effective prevention strategies that may be implemented at all levels of prevention: housing subsidies, supportive services coupled with permanent

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housing, mediation in housing courts, cash assistance for rent or mortgage, and rapid exit from shelter. Burt notes that while it can be easy for communities to offer prevention initiatives, it is difficult to effectively target scarce resources to those most at risk of becoming homeless, however. Per Burt, prevention resources are not likely to be used efficiently unless they are community-wide and part of a larger structure of planning and organization that address proper targeting of support.

Inherent difficulties of implementing effective, community-wide prevention strategies have historically led to an emphasis on accommodating those who have already lost their housing (Culhane et al., 2011). Relatively recent policy changes at the federal level, notably including the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program, have signaled a paradigm shift toward prevention-based approaches to homelessness. Culhane et al. (2011) identifies two challenges to prevention amid shifting thought on how to prevent and eliminate homelessness – efficiency and effectiveness. In the absence of overarching mainstream initiatives to prevent poverty and eliminate the affordable housing crisis, prevention activities are limited to the homelessness-specific resources on hand. Using the public health model, Culhane et al. (2011) distinguishes between primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention initiatives to demonstrate efficient and effective systems. Primary prevention entails broad efforts that only indirectly address homelessness, such as reducing poverty. Accordingly, primary prevention activities ought to target households which are likely to become imminently homeless without assistance – efficiency. A comprehensive triage approach which assesses a person’s imminent need for housing is one way to meet the challenge of identifying the most at-risk of homelessness. In an analysis of Homebase CP service applicants, having a previous stay in a homeless shelter was the best predictor of risk for future shelter entry (Greer, Shinn, Kwon, & Zuiderveen, 2016). Homebase’s services were the most beneficial when targeted at those with the greatest risk of homelessness as predicted by previous stays. Secondary intervention initiatives are those which rapidly identify and end homelessness episodes. Secondary prevention does not prevent new cases of homelessness but are necessary to divert individuals from shelter and solve the immediate crises of lost housing – such as emergency cash assistance or landlord mediation. Tertiary prevention is designed to mitigate the effects of housing instability once homelessness occurs and to create opportunities for stable housing. Tertiary prevention should target households most in need and provide a greater level of such intervention as relocation assistance, landlord recruitment, and rental assistance.

Accurately **targeted** and **effective** community-based prevention programs can be cheaper for cities than expensive shelter stays (Culhane et al., 2011). However, successful programs designed to prevent homelessness have shown net cost savings only when those at imminent risk of homelessness are successfully housed and the cost of providing emergency shelter is significant.

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- In an evaluation of New York City’s Homebase Community Prevention (CP) program, services rendered including case management, direct services and referrals to services, such as benefits advocacy, mediation, employment assistance, legal referrals, and limited financial assistance, had a significant positive effect on homelessness prevention. The evaluation found that Homebase CP reduces average nights in shelter by 22.6 nights and suggests that the program saved \$140 per family that had access to it (Rolston, Geyer, & Locke, 2013). The net effect of Homebase CP reduced shelter entries by 10-20 households for every 100 cases.
- In another study of a Chicago-based emergency cash assistance program, those who received a one-time \$1000 cash assistance benefit were 76% less likely to become homeless after six months than those who did not receive the assistance (Evans, Sullivan, & Wallskog, 2016). The estimated potential economic benefits were \$20,548 per homeless spell avoided, compared to the \$10,300 per person cost of operating the call center. Considering cost externalities of homelessness, this marked a \$10,000 per-person savings for preventing homelessness.

The second challenge that Culhane et al. (2011) identify is effectiveness: is the assistance provided to families or individuals actually preventing or mitigating homelessness? Both short-term and long-term assistance programs have been demonstrated to be effective in preventing homelessness among their target population.

- Research has shown housing vouchers to be critical for preventing family homelessness from occurring and helping families in the shelter system leave it permanently (Khadduri, 2008).
- A shallow rent subsidy (between \$200 and \$400 a month) for persons living with HIV/AIDS was found to decrease homelessness rates and allow recipients to maintain independent housing compared to those who did not receive the subsidy (Dasinger & Speiglmann, 2007).
- Longer-term approaches, such as Housing First, which provides a permanent housing subsidy and ongoing supportive services, has consistently been shown to facilitate a high tenant retention rate (close to 85% retention after one year) among those who have experienced the most difficulty in being housed (Culhane et al., 2011).

Culhane et al. concludes, “the homelessness assistance system should help people to resolve their crises, access on-going sources of support in the community, and provide basic safety net assistance such as emergency shelter and temporary rental assistance as needed.” Per Culhane et al., **a prevention-oriented approach is necessary to avoid the institutionalization of homelessness.**

Todd Ives, MPA

John Glenn College of Public Affairs, Ohio State University  
Policy Intern alumni, Barbara Poppe and Associates

## Appendix 3: The Consultation Process in Detail

HealthSpark Foundation initiated the eviction and homelessness prevention project by collaborating with the Your Way Home team to write a request for proposals that was circulated nationally in the fall of 2016 to recognized industry thought-leaders. The RFP requested respondents to research evidence-based and promising best practices to prevent eviction and support housing stability for at-risk individuals and families. The purpose of the research was twofold: to inform local policy and practices, including allocation of financial and human resources; and to identify potential sources of funding to support these eviction prevention strategies.

The scope of project work included:

- 1) conducting **research** to identify evidence-based and/or promising best practice models currently implemented in communities across the nation that operate a coordinated entry homeless crisis response system;
- 2) identifying specific **practices** appropriate for a range of sub-populations;
- 3) offering **technical assistance** to determine if any of these models can add value to the existing YWH shelter diversion programs/services currently in place; and
- 4) developing **outcome measures** to assist the YWH operations team in monitoring the cost-effectiveness and impact of eviction prevention programs/services.

Your Way Home Montgomery County (YWH) is a public-private partnership between County government, local philanthropy, non-profit housing and service providers, landlords, and community partners united to end and prevent homelessness. Since its launch in 2014, YWH has significantly decreased the number of families and individuals annually entering emergency shelter and transitional housing while helping more people to go directly from homelessness to permanent housing. YWH has improved service coordination, provider collaboration, and the use of metrics to inform decision-making across sectors, organizations and communities. A significant element of YWH's success has come from building in light support and housing counseling strategies, known as "diversion," at the access points to the homeless system, to preserve housing when possible or resolve a housing crisis quickly without requiring further support from the homeless system.

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## Project Core Team

**Convener: Russell Johnson**, President/CEO & Project Sponsor  
HealthSpark Foundation

**Project Lead: Emma Hertz**, Administrator/YWH Operations Team  
Montgomery County Office of Housing & Community Development

**Carolyn Mayinja**, Senior Manager/YWH Operations Team  
Montgomery County Office of Housing & Community Development

**Tim Pirog**, Community Housing Coordinator  
Montgomery County Office of Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Early Intervention

**Elizabeth DiArcangelo**, Administrator  
Montgomery County Community Connections

**Greg Barchuk**, YWH Data Manager/YWH Operations Team  
Montgomery County Office of Housing & Community Development

**Jason Alexander**, YWH Senior Policy Advisor/YWH Operations Team  
Capacity for Change, LLC

**Kayleigh Silver**, YWH Program Manager/YWH Operations Team  
Montgomery County Office of Housing & Community Development

**Barbara Wilhelmy**, Executive Director  
Pottstown Cluster of Religious Communities/YWH Housing Resource Center

**Laurie O'Conner**, Administrator  
Montgomery County Office of Children & Youth

**Ruth Nieboer**, Director of Housing  
The Salvation Army, Norristown

**Sean Halbom**, Administrator  
Montgomery County Office of Veterans Affairs

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Still, YWH and the Foundation believed that the homeless/housing system transformation was incomplete as it was missing a broader prevention component using evidence-based interventions to prevent evictions and secure ongoing housing stability. Specifically, the YWH wanted to add effective homelessness prevention “upstream” at the point where households begin to experience instability, even if they are not on the immediate verge of homelessness, by connecting families, youth and single adults with opportunities to improve their health, mental health, and economic security. The Foundation also set out to engage, inspire, and mobilize support for Your Way Home across sectors, organizations, and communities through Montgomery County, PA, and beyond.

The Foundation and YWH selected Barbara Poppe and Associates (BPA) as the consulting firm. Barbara Poppe was the project lead and manager.

A detailed project plan and timeline were put in place to guide the phases of the study.

- The **first phase** focused on understanding the local context and current functioning of the crisis response system functioning;
- The **second phase** included the literature review, national scan of best and promising practices, interviews with national experts on homelessness, and development of ideas for follow-up;
- The **third phase** was in-depth interviews in selected focus areas, development of concepts and sharing with local stakeholders during an onsite consultation (series of community meetings to share findings from the research and gather initial feedback on the ideas being developed);
- The **fourth phase** was the testing of the ideas to determine feasibility for pilot implementation. A second onsite consultation occurred during the final phase to align with the public announcement about the launch of the pilot demonstration project.



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YWH designated a local person as the prevention study lead who managed, coordinated, and supported the research study for YWH. A Core Team composed of HealthSpark and YWH plus other key stakeholders was convened to inform the first three phases. The Core Team met monthly during the first six months of the project via conference calls and during the initial onsite consultation. The Core Team role ended following the onsite community feedback when the process moved to testing concepts with the YWH team leading to the implementation during phase four.

## Phase 1: understanding the local context

Phase 1 included a review of how the Your Way Home crisis response system was functioning and the local contextual data on housing, evictions, unemployment, and emergency needs. (A complete description is included in the appendix, [page 80.](#)) The intent was for the Core Team, working with the consultant, to come to a shared understanding of current efforts and opportunities to determine the types of “evidence-based and promising prevention best practices that other communities have implemented to prevent eviction and promote housing stability.” The intent was **not** to evaluate current prevention efforts in Montgomery County.

The following were the components of the contextual review.

- **Review local data and program/system descriptions** to develop overview of current needs and strategies to provide eviction prevention services.
  - Review of local HMIS (Homelessness Management Information System) and PIT (Point in Time) reports: reasons for homelessness; assessment data collected during shelter admission; profile of previous shelter clients that exit to family/friends or disappear with returns to shelter or show up as unsheltered; demographic characteristics and system outcomes
  - Review of local program descriptions and client profiles for existing prevention and diversion programs
  - Review of community and mainstream resources available to households, including data on evictions, 2-1-1 data on requests for prevention assistance, and other indicators of housing instability
  - YWH prepared an inventory of all prevention programs and captured program and eligibility requirements, description of each program and type/amount of financial assistance available. This inventory was published following the initial onsite consultation.

- **Compare Montgomery County to national indicators** to understand economic and housing factors that have been shown to impact rates of homelessness. This was completed by Todd Ives, a graduate student from the Ohio State University and an intern with BPA. (See appendix, [page 102](#), for full report.)
- **Interview key leaders** to understand perceived strengths, weaknesses and opportunities to improve eviction prevention and housing stability in Montgomery County. BPA interviewed five local providers and system leaders, representing legal aid, schools, public housing, aging, and a prevention program.

### Comparison of 2013-2017 PIT Counts

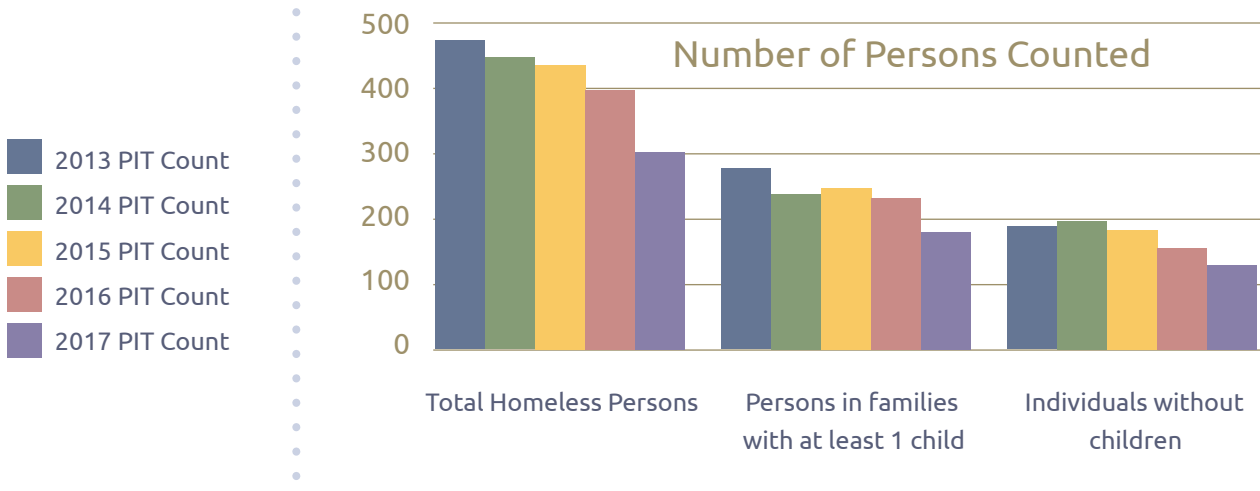


Figure 6 Homelessness declining since 2013 per annual PIT Counts.

### Key findings from Phase One:

- Your Way Home is functioning well: reduced overall homelessness, achieved excellent diversion outcomes, and strong cross-sector collaboration.
  - Review of admission data from the homeless crisis response system’s HMIS (Homelessness Management Information System<sup>6</sup>) found less than 6% are admissions from institutions (e.g., hospitals, jails, etc.).
  - YWH housing counseling (diversion) outcomes are very strong (73% successful resolution).
  - More than 60% of households exit emergency shelter, rapid rehousing, and transitional housing to permanent housing.

<sup>6</sup> Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) is a computerized data collection tool designed to capture client-level information over time on the characteristics and service needs of men, women, and children experiencing homelessness.



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- The population that experiences homelessness is disproportionately Black or African-American (55% per 2017 HUD CoC dashboard) and are usually families with children (58% per 2017 PIT).
- Eviction and housing instability are highly geographically concentrated. Two of 66 zip codes in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, represent more than 60% of evictions; requests for emergency financial aid and housing assistance are also high from these areas. Both areas have a significantly lower median household income than the county median and are greater percentage of Black or African-American households than the county.
- Significant numbers of children are impacted by homelessness: 683 children were homeless under the McKinney-Vento Education definition and served by Montgomery County schools during most recent school year; 743 children were served by emergency shelter during the most recent 12-month period.
- An estimated 23.8%, or 20,150, renters are extremely housing cost-burdened and pay more than 50% of their income on rent.
- Montgomery County had recently consolidated its health, housing, veterans and human services programs under a unified leadership structure. This presented an opportunity for new integrated services partnerships that could reduce homelessness.

**History of Eviction Services Provided in Montgomery County**

Prior to 2014, the start date of Your Way Home, Montgomery County provided stipends to individuals and families at imminent risk of eviction. To qualify, the consumer had to have an eviction notice and less than 14 days to vacate. The county's HMIS (Homelessness Management Information System) tracked the appropriation of eviction prevention funds and linked consumer data to outcomes such as shelter utilization and recurring requests for eviction prevention support. Based on the analysis of these data, the county determined that the program was not cost-effective and at best, prevented some and delayed many evictions. Accordingly, the county ended the eviction prevention financial assistance program in 2014.

Currently, consumers seeking eviction prevention services are offered financial counseling and diversion services such as referrals for legal assistance, budget/credit counseling and other prevention-oriented services. Consumers with a prior history with YWH may also receive supports from their housing stability coach and/or the housing locator whose function is to balance the interests of landlords with consumer needs.

- 28 different programs/resources were identified that offer prevention-type services targeted to persons at risk of homelessness in Montgomery County. Generally, service providers did not coordinate services or collaborate.
- Both legal aid and housing authority leaders confirmed that eviction from public housing was rare and reducing evictions from these units would have low impact on homelessness overall.
- Top issues cited by key leader interviews:
  - Lack of adequate household income with very few ways to help families overcome this challenge.
  - Overall shortage of affordable, quality rental housing.
  - Insufficient financial assistance to pay for housing related costs to prevent eviction.
  - Generally, prevention programs operated independently of each other. All indicated that they could meet needs of households who met their criteria; however, all also reported that there are households not being helped due to lack of resources or mismatch between needs and program eligibility requirements. All cited benefits of a more comprehensive and coordinated community strategy.

### Conclusions from Phase 1 to inform national scan

BPA concluded that YWH had an overall high functioning homeless crisis response system and solid data and analysis capacity; consequently, adding strategic and targeted “upstream” prevention was recommended. The Core Team determined that the following criteria would be used to evaluate best and promising practices for possible replication:

- 1) Outcomes must be measurable and improve housing stability or avoid homelessness.
- 2) Cost-effectiveness and cost-efficiency were paramount as the likelihood of significant new resources was limited.
- 3) Being locally implementable (not requiring state or federal policy changes) was key to being able to test models quickly.

Additionally, the Core Team wanted to seek out prevention models that would be: effective at preventing child and family homelessness; leverage expertise in diversion; work in the two zip codes with highest rates of eviction; address racial disparities; and leverage the combined resources of the new Montgomery County unified health, housing, and human services department. The Core Team decided not to explore models that were focused on institutional discharges (i.e. hospitals, jail, treatment facilities, etc.) since very few households appeared to enter the crisis response system from such facilities; however, it was agreed that at a future date, matching administrative data with these institutions might form a different picture, since HMIS (Homelessness Management Information System) records are based on self-reported data from clients and may underrepresent actual experience.

### Cost-avoidance: community-wide homelessness prevention compared to homelessness

- In **Chicago**, \$1,000 in emergency cash assistance was targeted to individuals on the brink of homelessness; those who received the assistance were 76% less likely to become homeless after six months than those who did not receive the assistance, and the estimated potential economic benefits are \$20,548 per homeless spell avoided, compared to the \$10,300 per person program cost of averting homelessness through financial assistance (Evans, Sullivan, & Wallskog, 2016).
- **New York City's** HomeBase Community Prevention (CP) program uses a risk assessment to identify the households most likely to enter homelessness. CP provides case management as well as direct services and referrals to services such as benefits advocacy, mediation, employment assistance, legal referrals, and financial assistance. An evaluation of Homebase CP found its services reduced average nights in shelter by 22.6 nights, provided a net savings of \$140 per family that had access, and reduced shelter entries by 10 to 20 households for every 100 cases (Rolston, Geyer, & Locke, 2013).

## Phase 2: Understanding what's working in other communities

Phase 2 included the literature review, a national scan of best and promising practices, interviews with national experts on homelessness, and development of ideas for follow-up. The literature review was conducted by BPA intern and graduate student Todd Ives. (See appendix, [page 76](#), for full report.)

The national scan of best and promising practices including reviewing documents, reports and workshops posted on the websites of the American Bar Association (ABA), Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP), National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), Siemer Institute for Family Stability, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Other research was conducted via phone and email contact with researchers and national experts Dennis Culhane (University of Pennsylvania), Vince Kane (VA), Sharon McDonald (NAEH), Rob Podlogar (Siemer Institute), and Mary Beth Shinn (Vanderbilt University).

Following this broad scan, programs that were identified as promising were contacted and/or reports were downloaded from their websites to further understand prevention practices underway in local communities.

The types of homelessness and eviction prevention programs that were reviewed fell into these categories:

**Community-wide emergency financial assistance:** Traditional homelessness prevention that provides financial assistance to help families with rent or utility arrearages to avoid eviction. Some also provide case management, mediation, and other supports. Sixteen programs were reviewed, including three statewide and 13 local programs. Some programs used risk assessments to determine eligibility and extent of assistance provided. Evaluations were available for seven of the 16 programs reviewed. Generally, results were positive with regard to retaining housing. Only two evaluations reviewed the impact of the prevention program on the homeless crisis response system.

**Court and legal services models:** These models included court-based mediation; onsite services in eviction and housing courts; and legal assistance (pro bono/volunteer, pro se/self-representation, limited representation/one day, and full service/complete case). (For a complete description of the communities that were reviewed, see the next section of this report.)

**Programs for families that are identified by schools:** Given the long-term negative consequences of homelessness on children, some communities have developed programs that identify families with children who are at risk of experiencing homelessness. The [Siemer Institute](#) is working in more than 50 communities across the country to prevent family homelessness and school instability. The institute provides grant funding, conducts evaluation, and promotes best practices. A 2016 evaluation using data on families that participated in Siemer programs found that 40% of families increased their income, 66% increased housing stability, and 98% of children avoided a disruptive school move. (For a complete description of the communities that were reviewed, see the next section of this report.)



### **Housing Court Helps Tenants Avoid Homelessness**

In Cleveland, Ohio, a dedicated [housing court](#) makes social service referrals before and during process and offers mediation. Bailiffs also have the ability to temporarily stop the process if when they arrive they determine extreme circumstances exist that indicate the resident should not be put out on the street (i.e., elderly or disabled, or a person with children in the home who might not otherwise be able to find shelter). They reported that these practices have reduced recidivism rates, resulted in fewer emergency stops on evictions, and bolstered the court's efficiency.

[November 2016](#)

**Public and other assisted housing eviction prevention programs:** Evictions are costly for public housing agencies (PHA) and assisted housing managers, and there are collateral consequences to the community, including potential homelessness. PHA eviction prevention models have been developed and refined to prevent eviction through early intervention and focused services. This strategy has been adopted by communities across the United States. USICH published a [guidebook](#) to eviction prevention strategies for PHA residents profiling PHAs that have developed model programs. NeighborWorks recently published a [best practices review](#) of eviction prevention programming.

**Screening of service-connected households with targeted interventions:** Also reviewed is another approach that screens individuals and households receiving services from a public or community-based organization (e.g., health care, public assistance, food pantry, etc.) for risk of homelessness. The risk assessment could lead to a more intensive assessment and perhaps an intervention for priority or all at-risk populations. For example, this strategy could be applied to a sub-set of the population that is likely to experience homelessness (i.e., previously homeless) or to people who are particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of homelessness (e.g., youth transitioning from foster care) or to those at greater risk of long-term homelessness (e.g., persons with co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorders). (For a complete description of the screeners that were reviewed, see the next section of this report.)

## Conclusions from Phase 2 to inform deep dive on ideas

The Core Team was provided information on all the above program types researched.

- The Core Team decided not to explore further the community-wide financial assistance model; they did not believe it would be financially feasible to secure new funding sufficient to create measurable impact.
- They determined not to explore public/assisted housing-based eviction prevention since most evictions were not occurring from these residences, based on information from key leader interviews and HMIS (Homelessness Management Information System) data on prior residences.
- Due to the high number of children and families who experience homelessness, they decided to explore school-based models that prevent homelessness, including expansion of existing programs.
- Since the county's new unified health, housing and human services department was serving a broad range of households with low incomes, many of whom were experiencing housing instability, the Core Team decided to explore how a universal screener might be used to identify these at-risk households.
- Further exploration of court and legal strategies was also considered warranted due to the concentrated rate of eviction from two zip codes, and the racial disparities in homelessness, housing instability, and eviction.

## Phase 3: Deeper dive into selected ideas

During Phase 3, BPA developed recommendations in the three selected focus areas:

- school-based prevention
- universal risk screener with targeted prevention, and
- court/legal eviction prevention.

To better understand how practices were being implemented in local communities, BPA relied on guidance, expertise and suggestions from national leaders, review of available program evaluations, and referrals from the initial points of concept. Ultimately, 10 interviews were conducted using an interview guide (see appendix, [page 106](#)). Additional background materials, outcome data, reports, and evaluations were requested from each site. The concepts were developed and shared with the Core Team. Preparations were also made for an onsite consultation with local stakeholders. (See the next section of the report, The 3 Selected Concepts, for the findings and recommendations for the focus areas.)

## Onsite Consultation: Gather local feedback and assess potential allies

During May 2016, YWH hosted a series of community meetings with Barbara Poppe to facilitate community dialogues about homelessness prevention, promote greater community awareness about best/promising practices, and explore a conceptual framework for targeting prevention.

The findings from the research were shared and initial feedback was collected on the ideas, including potential for collaboration and allies. Each group was asked to rate and rank the feasibility and impact of three ideas by completing a survey. (See appendix, [page 105](#), for the survey.) The schedule was sequenced to build to a decision on next steps for Phase 4, as follows:

- Meeting with Core Team to review final recommendations and discuss roles at each feedback session.
- Community meeting with YWH community providers, with focused invitations to core providers and prevention providers.
- Social event with key YWH leaders to gather informal feedback.
- Deep dive meeting with court administrator and legal aid to explore court-based eviction prevention.
- Deep dive meeting with current community-based homelessness prevention providers to explore support and interest in all three ideas and how to leverage existing resources.
- Funder and system leader meeting to explore support and interest in all three ideas and how to leverage existing resources and potential for new investment and partnerships. This was followed by a dinner with selected private funders to continue the conversation.
- Planning session with the Core Team to debrief on meetings and establish an implementation plan.

### **Innovative Idea: Emergency Rent Coalition, New York City**

ERC is an informal network of organizations that share resources and resources for rent arrears by working on filling gaps created by restricted funding. ERC works through an email list serve to connect on sharing resources. The membership meets every other month with speakers. [Housing Court Answers](#), a local nonprofit focused on eviction prevention, moderates the coalition.

## Conclusions from the onsite

The results of the community stakeholder survey found this order of preference: court-based eviction prevention, universal screener with targeted prevention, and school-based prevention. This aligned with the general impressions and feedback across all meetings.

These priorities were identified for the next phase:

- Keep the conversation going:
  - Broadly disseminate materials developed during the three phases, including the community inventory of prevention programs, to community stakeholders.
  - Develop a report on next steps to share with all who participated in community meetings.
- Determine whether any concepts could be easily implemented, e.g., emergency rent coalition
- Assess feasibility for pilot projects on court-based eviction prevention, universal screener with targeted prevention, and school-based prevention:
  - Target follow-up with potential funders to assess interest.
  - Focus initial staff work on developing court-based eviction prevention due to high interest and potential partner interest.
  - Follow up with key leaders about interest in developing universal screener and school-based prevention.

## Phase 4: Testing feasibility of three ideas

The fourth and final phase was to determine feasibility of each idea for pilot implementation, and if feasible, to create a pilot project for implementation during 2018. This phase focused on determining the extent of interest in moving an idea forward to the pilot stage, assessing political will, strength of interest and capacity of potential partners for implementation, alignment with, and leveraging of, YWH activities, and potential for funding to cover the costs of a pilot. YWH operations team led this work with technical assistance and strategy guidance from BPA. (See the next section, The 3 Selected Concepts, for a description of this work as organized by idea.)





**Eviction and Homelessness  
Prevention Research Project**

Your Way Home  
Montgomery County  
and HealthSpark Foundation

**Conclusions from Phase 4**

YWH, by working in partnership with the courts, the Montgomery Bar Association Foundation, legal aid and other philanthropic partners, was able to develop the idea and secure initial funding to launch the court-based eviction prevention concept as a pilot for implementation during 2018. YWH and HealthSpark Foundation determined that a second onsite visit by Barbara Poppe, of BPA, would be useful to support the public announcement and launch of EPIC – the Eviction Prevention and Intervention Coalition – the pilot demonstration project for court-based eviction prevention.

The idea for a universal screener with targeted prevention was deferred due to other competing priorities in Montgomery County; the timing and bandwidth to tackle this idea was insufficient. YWH may also explore whether other systems, like health care or food security programs, might be interested in partnering to develop this concept.

Although expansion and enhancement of school-based prevention as a Siemer site was determined to be not feasible at this time due to changes in the local funding environment, YWH through conversation with another current funder found interest in developing the concept for implementation during 2018. YWH is working to test the model in a school district with a significant number of homeless children.

**Onsite Consultation: Public Launch of EPIC –  
the Eviction Prevention and Intervention Coalition**

During November 2017, the onsite consultation with Barbara Poppe included meetings with the YWH operations team and the YWH Advisory Council and was coordinated with other activities, including the Bar Association’s reception and fundraiser to benefit EPIC, a community forum on childhood hunger and homelessness, and a planning session with YWH and HealthSpark Foundation about the final report and dissemination of findings.

**Conclusions from second onsite consultation**

YWH concluded that even with highly engaged partners, the YWH operations team (the backbone support organization for Your Way Home’s Collective Impact structure) and community partners only had bandwidth to support up to two prevention pilots during 2018. They are also cognizant that should the court-based eviction prevention program and the school-based prevention program prove to be successful, additional resources (funding and staff time) will need to be identified and invested to scale up these initiative

## Appendix 4: Data Review and Context Setting

### Purpose

The intent of this context setting is for the Core Team, working with the Consultant, to come to a general shared understanding of current efforts and opportunities to determine the types of “evidence-based and promising prevention best practices that other communities have implemented to prevent eviction and promote housing stability.” The intent is not to evaluate current prevention efforts in Montgomery County.

- 1) **Review** local HMIS (Homelessness Management Information System) and other data and program/system descriptions to develop overview of current needs and strategies to provide eviction prevention services.
  - Review of local HMIS reports: reasons for homelessness; assessment data collected during shelter admission; profile of previous shelter clients that exit to family/friends or disappear with returns to shelter or show up as unsheltered (if outreach data is in HMIS)
  - Review of local program descriptions and client profiles for existing prevention and diversion programs
  - Review of community and mainstream resources available to households, including data on evictions, 2-1-1 data on requests for prevention assistance, and other indicators of housing instability
- 2) **Interview** five current, local providers and system leaders to understand perceived strengths, weaknesses and opportunities to improve eviction prevention and housing stability in Montgomery County.

### Sources of Contextual Information

The Core Team needs to determine the specific local information that will be used to ground this study. A YWH Prevention Study Lead should be designated by the Core Team to compile, coordinate and summarize the information for use by the Core Team and the Consultant. It may be desirable to set up an online file sharing system to facilitate collaboration. The Consultant will provide an overview of the current system based on the contextual information gathered by the Core Team in the final report. Decisions about what information will be compiled and summarized will be the decision of the Core Team. The Core Team will need to determine feasibility and cost/benefit for the YWH Prevention Study Lead to compile, coordinate and summarize the information. A “just enough” and “KISS” approach is recommended by the Consultant.

- Local Program Summaries and Reports (i.e., system map or inventory)
- Perspectives (i.e., qualitative information)
- Client Data (i.e., quantitative information)

## Local Program Summaries and Reports

### Potential Content

- Overview of the YWH system of care
- Summary of local program descriptions, including eligibility criteria and requirements, client outcomes, and client profiles for existing YWH system prevention and diversion programs
- Summary of community and mainstream resources to prevent eviction that are available to households, outcomes, and current levels and sources of funding for these resources. This should include prevention, landlord mediation, legal assistance, court-sponsored programs to reduce evictions, emergency financial assistance, etc. These can be both public and private sources.
- Summary description of the major public programs and role in prevention, including outcomes, and current funding levels for these resources: CoC, ESG, CDBG, TANF, FEMA, Ryan White, state funds (managed through the county's human services block grant and other sources of state funds); and private sources of support (e.g., faith-based communities)
- Description of any local/regional collaborations that have a goal to prevent homelessness
- Any recent reports that are relevant to this study

## Local Perspectives on Effectiveness of “Upstream” Prevention

The Consultant will conduct five telephonic interviews with current, local providers and system leaders (determined by Client Group) to understand perceived strengths, weaknesses and opportunities to improve eviction prevention and housing stability in Montgomery County. In addition to these perspectives, it may be useful for the Core Team to gather current perspectives about how well “upstream” prevention is currently working. This information could be gathered through adding an agenda item to standing meetings, hosting a focus group, or issuing a survey.

### Potential Content

- Perspectives from YWH Call Center and 2-1-1 on households that are “falling through cracks”
- Perspectives from shelter providers on types of households that they believe they should not be seeing in shelter (e.g., direct discharge from mental health facility) and what would be needed to avoid shelter admission or re-admission
- Perspectives from child welfare agency/providers, mental health providers, substance use providers, domestic violence providers and health care providers on households that are being discharged to homelessness and/or otherwise “falling through cracks” and the extent to which their respective organizations are currently providing housing stabilization services and believe that this is within their role
- Perspectives on whether there are certain areas within Montgomery County which have greater rates of housing instability and the resources and gaps within those communities to prevent eviction

## Client Data

Information about households that are served by the YWH system of care and the community points of contact that demonstrate and describe the need for “upstream” prevention services is foundational information that will inform the study and selection of best practices for future implementation in Montgomery County. The YWH Prevention Study Lead, with guidance from the Consultant, will need to gather and compile the Client Data. No original data collection is anticipated nor needed. Most data should be available from routinely available reports.

## Potential Content

- Two years (or more) of summarized and analyzed clean data from the same time frame across all three datasets (HMIS, YWH Call Center and 2-1-1). (See more detailed request below for each.)
- Two years (or more) of Montgomery County school system data on homeless children
- Other available data that is an indicator of housing Instability (e.g., eviction data, code violations that result in eviction, behavioral health system data, child welfare data, etc.)

## HMIS Data

Basic descriptive and outcome data of households that received services, shelter, diversion, etc. via the YWH system, including the reasons for homelessness, prior living situation, assessment data, etc. [intent: understand who experiences homelessness and is served by the YWH system.]

## Key Questions

To what extent do households become homeless again, and how are they different from those who remain housed? [intent: identify who needs “prevention” assistance to avoid a recurrence of homelessness]

- What is the profile of previous shelter clients that exit to family/friends or disappear?
- What is the profile of previous shelter clients with returns to shelter or show up as unsheltered (if outreach data is in HMIS)?

**This inquiry will be based on the data fields that are currently collected and analyzed. The description below describes generally the types of data that would be helpful.**

Potential data fields include:

- Provider Type
- Provider CoC Jurisdiction
- Entry Exit Reason Leaving
- Exit Destination
- Prior Residence
- Entry Date
- Exit Date
- Length of Program Stay
- Gender
- Family Status
- Race
- Disabled
- Age at Exit

## YWH Call Center Data

Basic descriptive and outcome data of households who contacted the YWH Call Center seeking assistance. [intent: identify households who may be unstably housed but not served by YWH system to identify who needs “prevention” assistance to reduce housing instability]

### Key Questions

What is known about households that call YWH with a housing crisis and to what extent can their housing crisis be resolved? How is their crisis resolved? This inquiry will be based on the data fields that are currently collected and analyzed. The description below describes generally the types of data that would be helpful. Potential data fields include:

- 1) Describe those who receive initial shelter versus receive diversion versus not assisted
  - Characteristics – such as household type, household size, income, VI-SPDAT score, disability, etc.
  - Reason for contact
  - Current housing at time of initial contact
  - Reason for disposition
  - Initial outcome
  - Later return for additional or other services
- 2) Potential data fields include:
  - Prior Residence
  - Anything that describes purpose of call or nature of crisis (not a normal HMIS field)
  - Entry Date (will likely be same as call date for call center)
  - Exit Date (will likely be same as call date for call center)
  - Assessment Score
  - Destination at Exit (if this reflects referral received; otherwise also need referral received)
  - Length of Program Stay
  - Gender
  - Family Status
  - Race
  - Disabled
  - Age at Entry
  - Income at Entry
  - Homeless history
  - Veteran Status
- 3) If data can be de-duplicated by household, identifying the extent the household had more than one presenting need would be helpful. An Excel table summarizing this data would be ideal.

## Local Key Leader Perspectives

The purpose of conducting five key informant interviews is to better understand how local “upstream” prevention is working (strengths, gaps, and opportunities) and garner suggestions for ideas on how to improve the community response. These telephonic interviews, conducted by the Consultant, will be used by the Core Team to determine the most fruitful areas for best practices exploration. Once the Core Team determines specific people to be interviewed, the lead staff will need to make an introduction to the Consultant. The Consultant will design, conduct and summarize the findings of the interviews.

### Potential Key Informants

- YWH system lead(s), diversion providers, HRC, etc.
- 2-1-1
- Lead providers or system heads or key staff for public assistance, child welfare, mental health, substance use treatment, domestic violence services and health care
- School system homeless coordinators
- Court system, legal assistance, mediation services
- Community based or neighborhood organizations that provide prevention services
- Advocates or community leaders that have expressed interest in prevention

### Guiding Questions for Key Leader Interviews

#### Your organization:

- What does your organization do to prevent eviction?
- Who is served by these services? Who is turned away?
- What resources (funding/partnerships) does your organization use to prevent eviction?
- How are you judging your effectiveness?

#### Your community:

- Beyond your program, what works or are promising practices that prevent eviction and promote housing stability within Montgomery County?
- What broader mainstream resources are being deployed to prevent eviction?
- Among the households that are experiencing housing instability and facing eviction or loss of housing, which are not being assisted but should be assisted?

- What is the current relationship between these systems to provide eviction prevention services? Who can and should be helped via broader mainstream and community response? Who should the homeless response system be prepared to serve?

**Your aspirations:**

- What are the most important changes in how the community addresses eviction prevention that should be considered?
- What new prevention strategies should YWH and the community explore for adoption or adaptation for local replication?
- How should the impact and cost-effectiveness of any model that is implemented by YWH be assessed over time?
- Any final thoughts?



## Appendix 5: Comparisons of Homelessness in Montgomery County to National Data

Research over time points to housing market dynamics as consistently the most important community level determinant of homelessness (Byrne, Munley, Fargo, Montgomery, & Culhane, 2013; Quigley & Raphael, 2001). Necessarily, income and housing affordability are among the foremost factors that impact ability to have a home. According to Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies, the number of cost-burdened renter households has increased by 3.6 million from 2008 to 21.3 million in 2014 (Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, 2016). The amount of severely cost-burdened renters increased by 2.1 million to a record high 11.4 million in that same time period. Accordingly, a recent study by Redfin estimated that 2.7 million renters faced eviction in the U.S. in 2015 (Marr, 2016). The macro-level scope of evictions is largely unknown as there is currently no national database on evictions, although the census bureau is planning to start tracking the issue in 2017. In an analysis of 19 states and more than 6 million eviction records, Redfin determined that eviction rates are much higher in areas of higher cost-burden (income-to-rent ratio) and areas with a higher percent of foreign-born residents. In one of the first analyses to use HUD's community level point-in-time count data, Byrne et al. (2013) revealed similar findings. HUD fair market rent level, single-person households, size of the Hispanic population (in urban settings), size of the Black population (in rural settings), size of the baby-boomer cohort (age 50-69, in urban settings), and recently moved households were all positively associated with increased homelessness rates in the general population.

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, has a much lower homelessness rate per 10,000 people (5.24) than both the state of Pennsylvania (12.05) and the United States (17.57). Still, several key indicators for homelessness stick out for Montgomery County. As stated, the United States has experienced a significant uptick in the number of cost-burdened renters over the past decade. Montgomery County is not immune to the rising disparities between income and housing cost that previous literature has deemed vital determinants of eviction and homelessness. Per 2015 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates, 23.8%, or 20,150, renters in Montgomery County are extremely cost-burdened, or pay 50% or more of their income on rent. This figure is slightly below the national and state estimates of 24.5%, but it marks a 1.5% increase in extremely cost-burdened renters in the county since 2011. Per estimates from the National Low Income Housing Coalition’s 2016 “Out of Reach” report, Montgomery County has more expensive housing on average compared to the state of Pennsylvania (see Figure 1). Still, housing cost-burden in the county remains on par with state and national levels as the estimated renter median income is on average \$15,000 more per year compared to the state of Pennsylvania. Similarly, low-income renters, defined as those who make 30% of the area median income, make nearly \$3,000 more a year in Montgomery County compared to the state (See Figure 2).

Figure 1

<b>Annual Income Needed to Afford</b>	<i>Pennsylvania</i>	<i>Montgomery County*</i>
Zero bedroom	\$25,847	\$33,200
One bedroom	\$30,700	\$40,120
Two bedroom	\$28,000	\$48,400

Figure 2

<b>Income Levels</b>	<i>Pennsylvania</i>	<i>Montgomery County*</i>
30% of area median income (AMI)	\$21,098	\$24,090
Estimated renter median income	\$30,773	\$45,274

Per 2015 ACS estimates, Montgomery County also has higher rates of percent-foreign born population (10%) than the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (6%) but less than the rate of the United States (13%). Redfin points to increased incidents across the United States of landlords targeting non-U.S. citizens for eviction. Immigrants may also be more likely to face difficulties in keeping up with rent or experience housing discrimination. The ways in which Montgomery County's immigrant population may be impacted warrants further research. Finally, **Montgomery County also has a higher percentage of single-person occupied rental units (45%) compared to the United States (37%)**. It is speculated that single-occupied units may be more prone to income or rent shocks due to only having one income in the household.

In summary, Montgomery County's homelessness rate is substantially lower than the rates of both Pennsylvania and the United States. Still, higher housing prices, larger foreign-born population, and sizeable single-renter household percentage highlight key indicators that should alert Montgomery County to the potential for increases in households that may experience homelessness.

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Policy Intern alumni, Barbara Poppe and Associates

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## Appendix 6: Survey for Initial Feedback on Models

- 1) **Universal screener for service-connected households** to leverage unified Montgomery County Health and Human services. Implement screener for risk of homelessness then provide targeted prevention services to vulnerable populations, e.g., youth transition from foster care, frail elderly, etc.

*Development of this concept for implementation in Montgomery County has the potential to significantly reduce housing instability and prevent eviction. (please check one box)*

7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know

Comments

- 2) **Enhanced eviction court partnership** in Norristown or Pottstown with legal services and as needed comprehensive social supportive services.

*Development of this concept for implementation in Montgomery County has the potential to significantly reduce housing instability and prevent eviction. (please check one box)*

7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know

Comments

- 3) **Enhanced prevention program for families that are identified as homeless by schools** in Norristown or Pottstown.

*Development of this concept for implementation in Montgomery County has the potential to significantly reduce housing instability and prevent eviction. (please check one box)*

7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree or disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know

Comments

### Please rank among the 3 models (1=preferred for local pilot implementation)

\_\_\_ Universal screener for service-connected households

\_\_\_ Enhanced prevention program for families that are identified as homeless by schools

\_\_\_ Enhanced eviction court partnership

\_\_\_ **I would like to be involved with the next steps. Name/email:**

*Please provide additional suggestions, concerns, and/or ideas on the back of this form. Thank you!*

## Appendix 7: Interview Guide for Promising Practices

### Exploratory Questions

- 1) What are the promising practices that your community is using to prevent eviction and promote housing stability?
- 2) What services are provided?
- 3) How are the services organized? How is the effort staffed?
- 4) Among the households facing eviction, who is helped and who is not helped to avoid eviction?
- 5) What organizations are involved in this effort? What are the roles for each organization?
- 6) What is the role (if any) for the homeless response system in preventing eviction? What is the relationship between this project and the homeless response system?
- 7) How are the impacts and outcomes being measured? What are the results?
- 8) What are the costs to operate annually?
- 9) What funding sources are used to pay for project costs?
- 10) How are you assessing the cost-effectiveness of this effort?
- 11) What do you think is most effective? What do you think could be improved?
- 12) What else should I know about your effort?