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# PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

A summit on integrating employment and housing strategies to prevent and end homelessness

## Community Profile

COMMUNITY: Twin Cities: Minneapolis (Hennepin County CoC) & Saint Paul (Ramsey County CoC)

## DESCRIPTION

Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Hennepin and Ramsey counties, and the State of Minnesota seek to end homelessness through a **Housing First and Jobs Fast** approach. Most people experiencing homelessness in Minnesota (86%) face one or more significant health or social barriers to employment. Recognizing structural program disincentives to use Federal WIA funds to assist people with significant employment barriers, we have applied creativity and collaboration to achieve promising successes, which have not yet reached their full potential for impact. We are unified in seeing employment as essential to ending homelessness, and eager to partner with the Federal government and other communities to do so. *Heading Home: Minnesota's Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* sets increasing employment as a priority, and strong leadership of the State's workforce system contributes to our sense of opportunity. We have fostered promising innovations to achieve housing *and* employment outcomes:

- The Heading Home SNAP E&T Project at the Opportunity Center in Minneapolis is multi-agency collaboration co-locating housing and employment services, leveraging philanthropic resources from the United Way and other funders for providers to deliver services that would be difficult to offer or sustain with existing public funding streams. These services are used as match for Federal financial participation by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) for USDA's Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program Employment and Training program (SNAP E&T). DEED seeks reimbursement from USDA for allowable expenditures (\$800,000 to date) and reimburses these providers. Since inception in 2011, this effort has served over 890 SNAP-eligible participants and achieved employment for 35 percent of participants completing the program, with average hourly wages of \$10.50 and 34 average work hours per week. Nearly half (42%) of program participants have criminal histories and **all were homeless one year or more at entry**.
- The nationally-recognized Minnesota FastTRAC (Training, Resources, and Credentialing) Adult Career Pathways approach incorporates innovative strategies that integrate basic skills education, career-specific training, and support services to meet the needs of working adults. Each local Minnesota FastTRAC Adult Career Pathways program consists of a series of connected educational and training programs that allow low-skill students to advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment in a given sector. Navigators offer intensive career and academic advising coupled with support services such as childcare and transportation.
- STEP-UP is a job program for youth ages 14-21, which recruits, trains and places mostly low-income youth in jobs with Twin Cities businesses, nonprofits, and public agencies. The program helps interns explore diverse career interests, gain vital skills, make professional connections and prepare for meaningful careers.
- Hennepin County's Stable Families Initiative delivers enhanced employment services to families with a history of shelter use. An employment counselor assists heads of households in job readiness, developing resumes, completing applications, and providing other

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assistance to land an interview and a job. A Career Counselor supports participants in maintaining and advancing their position.

- Ramsey County leads *Everybody In*, a regional collaboration of community, business, and government leaders using their social capital to advance high-impact strategies for equity in employment, focused on ending racial employment disparities in the Twin Cities metro area.

Today, Minnesota's economy is strong and growing, creating 162,000 jobs since January 2011 and 200,500 jobs since the low point of the recession. Unemployment is 4.0 percent in the Twin Cities, the lowest rate of the nation's 50 largest metros. Minnesota has the third highest labor force participation (70 percent) in the nation. Employment has increased by 2.0 percent (56,311 jobs) since August 2013, the fourteenth fastest state and above the national rate of 1.8 percent. Yet Minnesota faces a shrinking talent pool: From 2010 to 2030, the portion of Minnesota's population 65 and older will increase from 13 percent to 21 percent. By the 2020s, retirement among baby boomers will surpass growth in the labor force, creating a shortage of workers to fill jobs vacated by retirees. A changing economy and new technologies have created a gap between the skills employers need and the skills of workers. By 2018, 70 percent of Minnesota jobs will require some education beyond high school, yet today only 40 percent of working adults in Minnesota hold a postsecondary degree. While these labor challenges present threats to Minnesota's economic growth, they also may open doors for populations with employment barriers to attain employment and career opportunities, as employers will be eager to find and retain talent.

Even with these known opportunities and promising indicators, our communities struggle with disconnects between available resources for supporting employment and the needs of people experiencing homelessness. Rather than presume that employment needs of people experiencing homelessness are monolithic or can be taken as a given, we see value in better understanding the employment-related needs and aspirations of people experiencing homelessness and of employers that could hire them to tailor our responses to both groups. Such market research could inform how employment services are organized and delivered to engage this target population, and how best to address employers' potential concerns or questions and present a strong business case for hiring people who have experienced or are at risk of homelessness. This approach can be informed by how efforts to increase Veteran employment have focused on equipping workers with the skills employers need while helping employers understand the benefits of hiring Veterans and providing education and support to mitigate any risks they perceive.

Unfortunately, broad mandates for the workforce system to serve all job-seekers have not fostered tailored, population-specific approaches or ways to make the workforce system less intimidating or alienating for the most vulnerable members of our community, who may not feel poised or equipped to compete with housed job-seekers for available workforce services or jobs. Performance expectations for workforce services discourage efforts to engage people with significant employment barriers, as a failure to achieve catch-all employment outcomes could risk the availability of future funding. While Minnesota regularly demonstrates that *everyone* experiencing homelessness can be safely and stably housed, the body of evidence about effective approaches for improvement employment has not led to a similar clarity in practice: we are still developing know-how on improving employment outcomes, and welcome the opportunity to learn from other communities and experts.

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It is in this context, at this moment of opportunity, and in our search for greater clarity and accelerated progress that we join the conversation at the Partnerships for Opening Doors summit.

People experiencing homelessness in the Twin Cities may have many initial points of contact with the homeless response, workforce, and economic assistance systems. Coordinated assessment approaches to determine the needs of people experiencing homelessness holistically and provide options best suited to rapidly end homelessness from across the entire community's portfolio are actively under development, but are proceeding distinctly for each county (Hennepin or Ramsey) and population (adults, families, unaccompanied youth, and Veterans). The homeless response system, policies, and players differ between the counties, as distinct political jurisdictions and HUD Continuum of Care regions.

Hennepin County has a policy to shelter all families, largely funded by the County itself. The County also funds two large shelters for single adults and two youth shelters, and private funders support three other single adult shelters and one youth shelter. People reach shelter by calling 211 or by coming to a Hennepin County service center. Single adults can also go to a shelter to get in. Families in shelter are connected with services immediately to begin the process of finding housing and moving out. Most single adults leave shelter within a week and don't receive other homeless services. Single adults who remain in shelter longer are connected with a housing case manager to access supportive housing if appropriate. Connections to employment include referrals from shelters and shelter-based employment programs to the Opportunity Center or to mainstream workforce services. Transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, and rapid re-housing programs vary in their focus on employment.

Apart from the absence of a right-to-shelter policy, Ramsey County's homeless response system has more limited capacity but shares many of these features, and also includes a centralized family coordinated intake process as the front door to its family shelter system. Both counties have street outreach teams (which are significantly more robust in Hennepin County), HUD Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) resources, and state-funded Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP) grants, which can assist in stabilizing employment to prevent future or sustained homelessness.

Workforce services are delivered through the mainstream WIA-funded workforce system or through economic assistance programs, particularly the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, known locally as the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP). Services funded by USDA's SNAP E&T program introduce other variations. Hennepin and Ramsey counties largely operate distinct workforce systems, with a few providers (Goodwill-Easter Seals and RESOURCE, Inc.) serving both counties. The counties' public assistance programs recently collaborated to identify workforce needs and develop a shared philosophy of service and outcome expectations, which are now guiding funding actions in both counties. This effort introduced major philosophical shifts: serving whole families, not just an adult; providing community supports like parenting and literacy classes, children's mental health services, culturally-specific and -responsive services, and mentoring; promoting lifelong learning; emphasizing stackable credentials to promote career pathways; and confronting racial disparities.

Across these variations, the options for people experiencing homelessness in the Twin Cities to access support for employment proceeds along one or more of these pathways:

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- Homelessness-targeted programs combining a workforce and housing focus, like the Opportunity Center (which are rare but promising)
- Linkages to employment services brokered by targeted homelessness housing programs (which focus primarily on housing outcomes, and may lack access to needed employment supports)
- Workforce programs targeting populations with high employment barriers (which might not specifically target people experiencing homelessness)
- Workforce programs tied to mainstream economic assistance programs (which are large in scale but difficult to customize to the needs of homeless populations specifically)
- Mainstream workforce programs (which are large in scale but face disincentives for engaging populations with significant employment barriers)

We view the opportunities facing the Twin Cities similarly: to determine how each of these paths can help people experiencing homelessness find housing *and* employment success, and to cast housing and employment outcomes as shared priorities for the homeless response and workforce systems.

In addition to the approaches described in the first section above, Hennepin and Ramsey counties provide Diversionary Work Program (DWP) services for people as they first access welfare funds. When they apply for cash benefits, eligible families enter DWP and receive intensive services that focus on immediate employment. After four months, if the crisis has not been resolved, families may be eligible for TANF. Hennepin County has a targeted program for unemployed single adults experiencing homelessness. They receive two weeks of pre-employment counseling and then can enroll in job skills training and work with a housing case worker simultaneously to find employment and housing.

Ramsey County designed a sector-based stackable credential initiative called Healthcare Pathways, a partnership with Ramsey County Workforce Solutions, Century College, and area healthcare facilities. Low-income MFIP families interested in healthcare enroll to obtain credentials for Personal Care Attendant and Certified Nurse Assistant, with follow-on options for Trained Medication Aide (TMA) and Phlebotomy certificates. By stacking credentials, wages increase from \$9.00 per hour to \$13.50 per hour.

In addition, the Ramsey County Families Achieving Success Today (FAST) program aims to find better paths to employment and family and economic stability for MFIP recipients with disabilities who might otherwise apply to Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or have difficulty engaging in employment services. FAST provides a comprehensive set of co-located services designed for families who experience multiple barriers to employment. FAST presents an opportunity to test the efficacy of an integrated, co-located service design that utilizes evidence-based practices for families with serious disabilities.

The target population includes all 5,231 people in Hennepin and Ramsey counties experiencing homelessness, and thousands of households at risk for whom stronger employment outcomes could prevent homelessness. In general, we believe that employment is important for everyone experiencing or at risk of homelessness, regardless of barriers, disabilities, or other sources of income.

- Hennepin County's 2014 Point-in-Time (PIT) count identified 3,731 people experiencing homelessness, including 1,358 children and 2,370 adults. Two-thirds were in emergency shelter, 27 percent in transitional housing, and 6 percent unsheltered (197 people). Forty-

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- four percent were women. The majority were people of color: 64 percent African American, 7 percent Native Americans, and 5 percent Latino. Fifteen percent were chronically homeless.
- Ramsey County's 2014 PIT identified 1,500 people, including 986 adults and 514 children. Of the sheltered population, half were in emergency shelter and half in transitional housing. Only 4.5 percent of the total were unsheltered. Fifty-two percent were women, 57 percent African American, 10 percent Latino, five percent American Indian, and six percent multiple races. Seventeen percent were chronically homeless.

### COLLABORATION

Hennepin County's efforts to end homelessness are grounded in collaboration, guided by a ten-year plan founded by nearly seventy community leaders in 2006. The previously mentioned Opportunity Center and the Stable Families Initiative serve as examples of collaborative, silo-crossing approaches. In addition, Ramsey County's financial workers and employment counselors are co-located in Ramsey County shelters to assist with access to benefits, including SNAP E&T enrollment and job placement assistance.

### INNOVATION

Although **targeted models** focused on employment for people experiencing homelessness are limited, they are helping to illuminate effective approaches. We see significant potential impact of increased flexibility (perhaps under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) to field, develop, and refine these approaches, and to set appropriate performance expectations for their success. As with the Opportunity Center, **philanthropic support** has been a vital for filling gaps in existing services to create bridges and pathways to mainstream workforce systems, as well as to create incentives for engaging individuals with significant employment barriers. Similarly, **leveraging state funding sources** is an important strategy. In addition to DEED's strategic use of SNAP E&T resources for the Opportunity Center, Minnesota's Group Residential Housing (GRH) program has been used extensively to house chronically homeless individuals and families, covering the majority of rent and some service costs. Structured as a state-funded income support program, recent policy changes have focused on reducing work disincentives and increasing employment for GRH participants.

### FUNDING FOR INITIATIVE/PROJECTS

The Opportunity Center funding approach described above represents the most innovative model in the Twin Cities for supporting targeted employment and housing supports for people experiencing homelessness, leveraging private philanthropic resources to finance match-eligible services that draw Federal financial participation (\$800,000 to date) from SNAP E&T, with reimbursement distributed to providers by DEED, the state's workforce agency. RESOURCE, Inc. also has a Young Dads program that serves primarily African American men with criminal backgrounds who struggle with homelessness. Participants are often doubled up and do not qualify for other assistance. This program pools Hennepin County, United Way, and other philanthropic support to provide customized services to this population.

For 2013 WIA funds, Hennepin County received \$4,975,057 (across two Workforce Investment Boards: one in Minneapolis and another that includes suburban Hennepin County) and Ramsey County received \$2,467,441. Other funding streams include the Minnesota Youth Program (\$658,325 for Minneapolis/ Hennepin County and \$405,185 for Ramsey County) and TANF Consolidated funds for the DWP and MFIP employment services for TANF families and

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Emergency Services to address basic needs of families experiencing difficulties in paying their rent and utility bills, which often prevents eviction and homelessness. TANF funds are also used to support housing partnerships initiatives to address housing needs and support collaborations to assist families in becoming self-sufficient. TANF funds used for employment total \$27.9 million in Hennepin County and \$17.1 million in Ramsey County.

### CONNECTION TO EMPLOYERS

Employers are engaged in obvious ways through Twin Cities employment and training programs, which have established strong partnerships with businesses and employers to connect job seekers with jobs. By learning from employers about current practices and emerging trends in various market sectors, these programs guide job seekers to relevant training, education, and employment opportunities to advance their careers. Employers also mentor participants, coaching on the soft skills such as working with confidence, having a positive attitude, effective communication, and networking. These programs identify job openings through web-based research, faxed or mailed job announcements, and extensive networking. Job leads are maintained in a variety of formats. Networking and information sharing information expands the capacity of these programs to make effective employer/employee matches. In addition, employers are connected to efforts to identify jobs for people experiencing homelessness through Workforce Investment Boards, consisting of business-led boards of community leaders from a variety of industries. Routine engagement of employers in the context of homeless service planning is limited.

### COMMUNITY CONTEXT

	Hennepin	Ramsey	Total
Community Population	1.2 million	511,000	1.7 million
2014 PIT (overall homeless)	3,731	1,500	5,231
2013 CoC award	\$9,204,994	\$5,752,495	\$14,957,489
2013 WIA formula grant allocation	\$4,975,057	\$2,467,441	\$7,442,498
Current unemployment rate	4.0%	4.0%	4.0%

### DATA AND RESULTS

Minnesota workforce programs use Workforce One, a web-based application to track employment and training services to more than 100,000 customers across Minnesota's One Stop network. It maintains client-level demographic data and employment outcomes like job placements and wages. Minnesota's HMIS is undergoing significant changes and currently has limited connection to other data systems. Hennepin County maintains a shelter database that can be matched with other county data.

Hennepin County sponsored research to examine the incomes of families entering shelter and their incomes a year later, using DEED data on wages. Only 29 percent of families earned income in the quarter preceding shelter entry and only 29 percent earned income one year later. This motivated the Stable Families Initiative, in which earned income will be measured pre- and post-enrollment. As this program is relatively new, results are forthcoming. Results for the Opportunity Center are reported above.

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## SUGGESTIONS FOR REPLICATION

<b>What works for us...</b>	<b>...and could be even stronger with Federal help</b>
Engaging philanthropy and state agencies to fill gaps in existing resources and strategically maximize existing funding opportunities	Additional Federal resources combined with guidance, recommendations, and encouragement to focus on people experiencing homelessness
Home-grown provider know-how on engaging and supporting people experiencing homelessness	A national resource library of evidence-based practices specifically for increasing employment among people experiencing homelessness
Willing partners in the workforce system	Encouraging and expecting mainstream workforce systems to engage people with significant employment barriers, supported by clear service standards and reasonable performance measures
Willing partners in the homeless response system	Elevating the importance of employment for housing-focused homelessness programs, with technical assistance to help increase employment
Rich local data on homelessness and the characteristics and challenges of people experiencing homelessness	More market research with people experiencing homelessness about how to make employment services and increased employment compelling and responsive to diverse needs and aspirations
Skilled employment and training programs identifying employers and viable jobs	Establishing the business case for employers to hire people experiencing homelessness