



Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Increasing Access to Income and Benefits for Homeless and Formerly Homeless Families in Cuyahoga County

Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI) has completed a final report with recommendations for the *Increasing Access to Income and Benefits for Homeless and Formerly Homeless Families in Cuyahoga County* project. In developing this report, SJI met with a broad range of people representing Jobs and Family Services (JFS), Cuyahoga County's homeless housing system and workforce providers. SJI was also able to spend time talking with two women who have participated in these services and hear about their experiences. In addition, SJI has reached out to a number of national organizations, providers and experts and identified emerging approaches and best practices to draw from related to increasing income, accessing benefits and effective employment and training models.

SJI looked closely at the areas of public benefits and employment and job training services as the primary vehicles to increase income for homeless and formerly homeless households. SJI has found challenges related to accessing and retaining important public benefits including TANF, SNAP and childcare vouchers. In addition, there are concerns about the impact of earned income on these programs, along with other forms of assistance including Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), which impact the decision to pursue employment.

SJI examined the process for participating in employment and job training services and mapped out the basic options available in Cuyahoga County. SJI identified challenges, obstacles and areas in need of improvement related to participation in local employment and training programs.

At the same time, SJI found a number of local assets and opportunities to build on which position the County to make significant progress towards improving access to benefits and participation in effective employment and job training services for households experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

The following page features a summary of the proposed recommendations.

Enterprise Community Partners, FrontLine Service, Cuyahoga Job and Family Services, and Cuyahoga County Office of Homeless Services consulted with Seattle Jobs Initiative to examine access to income and benefits for homeless and formerly homeless families in Cuyahoga County, which is made possible by a Deep Impact Grant of the O'Neill Family Foundation, Cuyahoga Jobs and Family Services and Cuyahoga County Office of Homeless Services. This work is part of the larger Housing First Initiative of Cuyahoga County, our community's strategy to end chronic homelessness among single adults, young adults and families through the creation of permanent supportive housing.

Summary of Key Recommendations

- ◇ Develop a cross system partnership that works together to create a clear referral and service coordination process involving workforce, housing and JFS which leads to broad access to effective employment and training services across all providers for households experiencing homelessness and housing instability
- ◇ Increase local capacity by supporting at least one current local workforce provider to commit to serving homeless households. In addition, it is recommended that housing providers currently offering employment assistance consider expanding and building out their employment services
- ◇ Improve the process and experience of applying for and renewing various public benefits including TANF, childcare vouchers and SNAP by considering the following: navigation, dedicated caseloads, points of contact, co-location, staff training and innovative technology solutions
- ◇ Explore the option of using CHILD and other data systems to better understand those who are “at-risk” of becoming homeless and their experiences as well as understanding how the data may help predict system utilization
- ◇ Expand and strengthen Supported Employment Services, starting with the FrontLine Service Supported Employment program. Included in this should be developing access to the funding and services offered by the State Vocational Rehabilitation program, Ohio Office of Disabilities (OOD)
- ◇ Vocationalize homeless housing services across all programs and services. Ideally the homeless housing process might be “saturated” with opportunities, examples and reminders about the benefits of engaging in employment
- ◇ Cross-system training and education resulting in staff from each sector – JFS, workforce and housing – having a working knowledge of each system