

**Pierce County Community Connections  
Homeless Programs  
Operating Policies and Procedures  
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## **I. Introduction**

In April 2012, the Tacoma, Lakewood, Pierce County Continuum of Care adopted the Plan to End Homelessness (the "Plan"), which integrated three separate plans addressing chronic homelessness, family homelessness, and homelessness among all populations. The Plan, which aligns the three incorporated plans with the federal Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act, establishes specific goals and objectives targeted at ending chronic homelessness and reducing all homelessness. To achieve the goals of the Plan, Pierce County Community Connection (PCCC) has aligned its funding allocation with the performance outcomes outlined in the HEARTH Act, which include:

- Reducing the number of people who become homeless
- Reducing the length of homelessness
- Reducing the returns to homelessness
- Reducing overall homelessness
- Increasing jobs and income

Pierce County brings a variety of resources to the work to end homelessness in the County, including political will, staff expertise and funding. The following Table provides a summary of the funding resources PCCC allocates, and the general eligible uses associated with each.

**Table 1. Funding Sources**

Funding Source	Housing Strategies/ Components	Targeted Population	Eligible Activities
<b>HUD: Continuum of Care (COC)</b>	Permanent Supportive Housing	Literally homeless individuals with disabilities and families with one member who has a disability	Acquisition, Rehabilitation, New Construction, Leasing, Rental Assistance, Transition (leasing), Tenant Based Rental Assistance, Sponsor-Based Rental Assistance, Project Based Rental Assistance, Vacancies and Property Damage, Supportive Services: Annual assessment of service needs, assistance with moving costs, case management, child care, education services, employment assistance or job training, food, housing search and counseling services, utility deposits, legal services, life skills training, mental health services, outpatient health services, outreach services, substance abuse treatment services, transportation
	Rapid Re-housing Transitional Housing Supportive Services Only	Literally homeless individuals and families	
<b>HUD: Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG)</b>	Street Outreach	Literally homeless individuals and families	Engagement, Case Management, Emergency Health Services, Emergency Mental Health Services, Transportation
	Emergency Shelter		Essential services: case management, child care, education services, employment assistance or job training, legal services, life skills training, mental health services, outpatient health services, substance abuse treatment services, transportation; Renovation, Shelter Operations, Assistance required under "URA"
	Rapid Re-housing		Housing relocation and Stabilization services: financial assistance - moving costs, rent application fees, security deposits, last month's rent, utility deposit, utility payments; services - housing search and placement, housing stability case management, mediation, legal services, credit repair; short (3 months)/ medium (4-24 months) rental assistance; six months of rental arrears
	Homeless Prevention	At risk of homelessness	

<b>State: Comprehensive Housing Grants (CHG)</b>	Permanent Supportive Housing	Literally homeless individuals with disabilities and families with one member who has a disability	Rental Assistance: Short (3 months), medium (six months), long (12 - 24 months) and unlimited assistance; reasonable storage costs, landlord incentives, emergency hotel/motel, security deposits, utility deposits, utility assistance, Facility Support (Emergency and Transitional Only and must not be combined with Rental Assistance) - utilities, maintenance, security and janitorial, off-site and residential facility management fees, facility specific insurance, accounting, marketing, Program Operations - housing search and stabilization, including case management, housing search and placement, outreach, costs of background checks/urinalysis/household credit checks, staff costs to issue rental assistance, costs attributed to case managers, outreach workers, and housing locators and other costs related to operation of program
	Rapid Re-housing Transitional Housing Emergency Shelter Program Operations	At risk of homelessness/Literally homeless individuals and families	
<b>State: Housing and Essential Needs (HEN)</b>	Rent and Utility Assistance	<b>Only</b> for Medical Care Services (MCS) recipients whose eligibility is determined by DSHS	Monthly rent, utilities, security deposits and fees, lot rent, cost of parking space, costs associated with credit checks, reasonable storage costs, landlord incentives, hotel/motel, rent arrears
	Program Operations		Costs attributed to outreach workers, housing locators and other costs related to operation of program
	Landlord Stability Funds		Up to three months of additional rent/utility assistance for clients previously assisted but no longer MCS eligible
	Essential Needs		Personal health and hygiene items and household cleaning supplies

<b>Local: SHB 2163</b>	Permanent Supportive Housing	Literally homeless individuals with disabilities and families with one member who has a disability	Rental Assistance: Short (3 months), medium (six months), long (12 - 24 months) and unlimited assistance; reasonable storage costs, landlord incentives, emergency hotel/motel, security deposits, utility deposits, utility assistance, Facility Support (Transitional and Permanent Supportive Only and must not be combined with Rental Assistance) - utilities, maintenance, security and janitorial, off-site and residential facility management fees, facility specific insurance, accounting, marketing, Program Operations - housing search and stabilization, including case management, housing search and placement, outreach, costs of background checks/urinalysis/household credit checks, staff costs to issue rental assistance, costs attributed to case managers, outreach workers, and housing locators and other costs related to operation of program; Supportive Services: Annual assessment of service needs, assistance with moving costs, case management, child care, education services, employment assistance or job training, food, housing search and counseling services, utility deposits, legal services, life skills training, mental health services, outpatient health services, outreach services, substance abuse treatment services, transportation.
	Rapid Re-housing Transitional Housing	Literally homeless individuals and families	
	Prevention and Diversion	At risk of homelessness	
	Program Operations	All populations	

These policies reference the HUD definition of homelessness as contained in the HEARTH Act. Table 2 below provides a brief synopsis of each category of homelessness, per HUD's definition.

**Table 2. HUD Definitions of Homelessness**

Category 1	Literally Homeless	Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night time residence, meaning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation;</li> <li>• Is living in a publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state and local government programs); <u>or</u></li> <li>• Is exiting an institution where (s)he has resided for 90 days or less <u>and</u> who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution</li> </ul>
Category 2	Imminent Risk of Homelessness	Individual or family who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence, provided that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residence will be lost within 14 days of the date of application for homeless assistance;</li> <li>• No subsequent residence has been identified; <b>and</b></li> <li>• The individual or family lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing</li> </ul>
Category 3	Homeless under other Federal statutes	Unaccompanied youth under 25 years of age, or families with children and youth, who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition, but who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are defined as homeless under the other listed federal statutes;</li> <li>• Have not had a lease, ownership interest, or occupancy agreement in permanent housing during the 60 days prior to the homeless assistance application;</li> <li>• Have experienced persistent instability as measured by two moves or more during in the preceding 60 days; <u>and</u></li> <li>• Can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time due to special needs or barriers</li> </ul>
Category 4	Fleeing/Attempting to Flee DV	Any individual or family who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence; <b>and</b></li> <li>• Has no other residence; <b>and</b></li> <li>• Lacks the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing</li> </ul>

The purpose of these policies and procedures is to provide guidance to providers and PCCC staff alike regarding implementation of specific programs funded by the County. These policies and procedures are made available to providers that receive County funds, and are incorporated, by reference, into provider contracts.

## II. Centralized Intake Policies and Procedures

*(Developed December 2012; Updated July 22, 2013)*

### A. Background

In 2009 the County held several focus groups of providers and homeless program participants to plan for the implementation of centralized intake. One of the provider focus groups was tasked with researching various types of coordinated assessment, and selecting the one that would be the most appropriate and effective in Pierce County. This group chose centralized intake, the most controlled form of coordinated assessment<sup>1</sup>.

The benefits of centralizing intake and assessment include

- reducing the amount of phone calls and legwork clients have to do to get into a program;
- closing side doors where households can get in ahead of households that have been waiting longer;
- decreasing the amount of time housing providers spend processing requests for assistance, and increasing the amount of time they can spend on direct service; and
- improved data collection and quality that allows for data driven decision making based on client-level and system-wide needs Because we will have a much better (although not perfect) sense of how many people are seeking assistance at any given time, and what they look like.

Access Point for Housing (AP4H), Pierce County's centralized intake for homeless programs, began in 2011. The vast majority of funding for AP4H comes from Pierce County 2163 dollars.

The Plan articulates a vision of a homeless system that

- re-houses or shelters people the moment they ask for help, where no one has to sleep outside who doesn't want to;
- permanently houses people as quickly and efficiently as possible; and
- effectively connects homeless households to mainstream self sufficiency services in order to minimize returns to the homeless system.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, coordinated assessment, also known as coordinated entry or coordinated intake, paves the way for more efficient homeless assistance systems by a) helping people move through the system faster (by reducing the amount of time people spend moving from program to program before finding the right match); b) reducing new entries into homelessness (by consistently offering prevention and diversion resources upfront, reducing the number of people entering the system unnecessarily); and c) improving data collection and quality and providing accurate information on what kind of assistance consumers need. Coordinated assessment is ideally a system-wide process and can serve any and all populations. Systems may accomplish coordinated assessment through the use of a centralized phone hotline (e.g. a 2-1-1), a single physical point of assessment (through an emergency shelter or a dedicated assessment center, for example) or a decentralized coordinated system (with multiple assessment points all employing the same assessment and referral process). Each of these models has its advantages and drawbacks. Each assessment point in a coordinated system handles assessment or screening of consumer need, data entry, referrals, and, potentially, program admissions. Ideally, these centers are the main access points for prevention and diversion services as well. Assessment center staff, after an initial assessment, should either provide the necessary prevention or diversion services or admit or refer a family to the program that is best equipped to get them into permanent housing as quickly as possible.

Centralized intake plays an essential role in that ideal system, and indeed in *getting to* that ideal system. The data generated from centralized intake describes who is getting what they need from our system, who isn't, and where we need to put our investments to realize our shared goal of ending homelessness.

Beginning in 2014, both the state and federal governments will require some form of coordinated assessment. Funding from Pierce County, and the Cities of Tacoma and Lakewood is contingent upon using centralized intake as stipulated in contracts with each entity.

## **B. Purpose**

The purpose of centralized intake is to provide one phone number that households can call when they become homeless. They are screened for eligibility, and then scheduled with an assessment to determine the best housing program match for their unique needs. Households are referred to the next available appropriate opening in the order they are assessed.

### What centralized intake DOES:

- Eligibility screening for shelter, transitional housing, rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing.
- Strengths and needs assessment.
- Matching and referring clients to program openings based on the strengths and needs assessment, and information they receive from providers.

### What centralized intake DOESN'T do:

- Screen and assess for homeless prevention (e.g. rental assistance to stay in a unit) or subsidized housing.
- Create new housing in our system.
- Guarantee a placement in a housing program.

## **C. Procedures**

Access Point 4 Housing and participating providers will follow the procedure outlined below for all households. This document is available on the centralized intake online document sharing application (Google Drive), and can be requested via email or hard copy from Pierce County Staff.

### **1. Clients**

- a. Clients call (253) 682-3401 (or are referred there by 2-1-1), and are screened for eligibility over the phone. Eligible clients will be scheduled for an in-person assessment within two to five business days. Clients not eligible for services by AP4H will be referred to other appropriate community resources.
- b. Eligibility. Individuals and families that are "literally homeless" (meeting HUD's Category 1 definition of homelessness [see Table 2]) OR at imminent risk of homelessness. For purposes of eligibility for centralized intake, "imminent risk of homelessness" means individuals and families that are able to document that they must leave their current nighttime residence within 72 hours, and include households that:
  - i. Have received a 3-day notice from the sheriff (writ of restitution). For more information on the eviction process, visit <http://www.tenantsunion.org/rights/group/C4/eviction-termination/>;

- ii. Are staying with family or friends AND can document that they must leave within 72 hours.
- c. Participation Requirement. All households (with the exception of households in domestic violence situations) must be assessed by centralized intake prior to program entry; or, in the case of households that are staying in emergency shelters that admit same-day, the assessment must occur as soon as possible after entry, and before being referred to another program.
- d. Clients can expect:
  - i. To be treated with respect and dignity.
  - ii. Their initial phone call for assistance to be answered live or returned within two business days.
  - iii. To be scheduled for an in-person, comprehensive, strengths- and needs-based assessment within two to five business days.
  - iv. To be matched to an appropriate program based upon their unique needs, and referred based on their priority status to openings in that program.
  - v. To wait until the system has the capacity to assist them, and to get help from an AP4H Navigator while they wait for an opening if their priority is lower and vacancy rates remain low.
- e. Responsibilities. Clients must:
  - i. Answer all questions truthfully and to the best of their ability.
  - ii. Bring the following documentation to the assessment:
    - Current income verification
    - Homeless certification from a shelter or other professional, a self certification of homelessness, or documentation described in sections II.1.b.i-ii. (This is generally for those living in places not meant for habitation or jeopardizing someone else's housing.)
    - Evidence of disability, for acceptance into permanent supportive housing.
  - iii. Keep their contact information current in order to be notified of available openings, and referred in a timely manner.

## 2. Providers

- a. Participation Requirements. Providers will participate in centralized intake as follows.
  - i. Time-limited housing programs that do not admit clients same-day MUST list ALL openings in the Daily Vacancy & Tracking Form on Google Drive, and can ONLY take clients that have been assessed by AP4H. Providers that are not complying with this requirement will be out of compliance with Pierce County, City of Tacoma, and City of Lakewood contracts that begin in 2014. Clients in a time-limited housing program that have been assessed by AP4H can go directly to a rapid re-housing, transitional or permanent supportive housing program in the community without going back to AP4H.
  - ii. The following providers MAY list openings in the Daily Vacancy & Tracking Form, and MAY take clients from AP4H, but are not required to do so:
    - Shelter programs that admit clients same-day;
    - Permanent supportive housing programs and time-limited housing programs that serve a specialized population AND must house only clients they currently serve through other programs in their agency; and
    - Domestic violence programs.
- b. Providers can expect:

- i. To receive a referral within two business days of posting an opening on the Daily Vacancy & Tracking Form. If AP4H cannot send a referral within two business days, AP4H will notify the provider of the situation.
    - ii. To have client records unlocked to them in HMIS at the time of referral.
    - iii. To hear back from AP4H housing specialists and navigators within one business day.
  - c. It is the providers' responsibility to:
    - i. Update their program's vacancies/openings as described on the Daily Vacancy & Tracking Form. This must be done either on a daily or weekly basis regardless of whether there are new openings to report.
    - ii. Confirm verbally or via e-mail that the AP4H Lead Navigator is aware of openings.
    - iii. Work with the AP4H Lead Navigator to fill openings that have been posted and unfilled for a week or more.
    - iv. Regularly update and make current all program eligibility guidelines and program contact information so that AP4H Housing Specialists can make the best referrals possible.
    - v. When a referral is received, respond via email to the AP4H Housing Specialist that made the referral within three business days, and indicate whether the referral is accepted, declined by provider, declined by client, or pending, or the provider is unable to contact the client. **In addition**, the provider must also indicate the status of the referral on the Referral Tracking Form Tab on the Daily Vacancy & Tracking Form.
    - vi. Inform AP4H when a referral packet and or any part of a client record in HMIS is incomplete.
    - vii. If the provider rejects a referral, describe in detail why and make any necessary changes to their eligibility information.
    - viii. Bring problems and suggestions for improvement to the monthly AP4H Town Hall meetings on the fourth Thursday of every month, or in person to AP4H leadership.
    - ix. Provide housing and tailored services to households referred by AP4H.

### 3. Access Point for Housing

- a. AP4H can expect:
  - i. That program eligibility information, staff contact information, and program openings are accurate and current.
- b. It is AP4H's responsibility to:
  - i. Answer client calls live or return them within two business days.
  - ii. Assess all eligible households within 2-5 business days.
  - iii. Make referrals within two business days of openings being posted on the Daily Vacancy & Tracking Form. If AP4H cannot send a referral within two business days, AP4H will notify the provider of the situation. (AP4H will unlock the client record in HMIS at the time of the referral).
  - iv. To the best of their ability, and with the information provided, refer clients in priority order to an opening that they qualify for and will meet their needs.

- v. Fill out Referral Tracking Tab on the Daily Vacancy & Tracking Form each time a referral is sent in response to an opening.
- vi. Respond within one business day to providers' questions, concerns and requests.
- vii. Provide sufficient staffing to perform these functions, and maintain up-to-date staff roles and contact information on Google Drive.
- viii. Continue to build partnerships with such entities as housing provider agencies, service provider agencies, workforce development agencies, public school districts, community and technical colleges, Washington State Children's Administration and public utilities.

#### 4. Screening

Access Point for Housing will:

- a. Perform an initial telephone screening in HMIS to determine if a household qualifies for an assessment as described above in the Client Eligibility section.
- b. Provide in-person screenings for individuals and families who do not have access to a telephone.
- c. Answer calls live or return calls within two business days.
- d. Refer households that do not qualify for an assessment to other appropriate programs and resources in the community, including the Landlord Liaison Program.
- e. Conduct the following for Housing and Essential Needs screening requests (both for re-housing and prevention):
  - i. perform initial verification of eligibility for all potential HEN recipients through DSHS's Benefit Verification System (BVS);
  - ii. re-screen and re-refer clients' to the specified provider as situations change and clients become homeless or at imminent risk.

#### 5. Assessment

- a. Within two to five business days of screening, AP4H will perform a comprehensive, strengths- and needs-based assessment for all eligible households in HMIS. This assessment has been developed with input from providers and approved by the County.
- b. The assessment will be conducted at the AP4H main office or one of at least two satellite offices in east and west Pierce County.
- c. Extended hours (beyond 8 am to 5 pm) must be available for households to access centralized intake outside of their workday.
- d. AP4H will provide assessments at secure, offsite locations for households that cannot get to the main or satellite offices for their face to face assessments.
- e. Households with limited and or unreliable phone access will be offered a free Community Voice Mail box and/or assistance establishing a free e-mail account at the time of assessment.
- f. When assessment volumes are low, AP4H will
  - i. Reach in to shelters that admit same-day, drop-in centers and or other appropriate venues to assess those who are not yet assessed and in the system;
  - ii. Follow up with households on the placement roster to re-establish eligibility.

## 6. Documentation

- a. Homeless Verification. Access Point 4 Housing will collect documentation of homelessness and transmit it to the receiving provider at the time of referral. All homeless verifications must include the zip code where the household stayed the night before and the zip code of the last permanent residence. Homeless certifications are good for 90 days, except when the household is entering a HUD Continuum of Care (COC) Supportive Housing Program (SHP). If a household has been on the placement roster for more than 90 days AND an opening comes up that is appropriate for them, AP4H will call to confirm homeless status and obtain a new verification form. HUD CoC SHP projects require homeless certifications to be no more than 24 hours old. Due to long waits to get into SHP programs, staffing limitations that prevent AP4H staff from keeping verifications current on a daily basis, and the inherent difficulty of maintaining contact with homeless households on the placement roster, SHP funded programs should fill all openings ONLY with shelter clients that have been assessed by AP4H. The following are acceptable forms of homeless verification:
  - i. For literally homeless households:
    - Written observation by an outreach worker or other professional; or
    - Written referral by another housing or services provider (such as a shelter); or
    - A three-day sheriff's notice (writ of restitution) as part of a legal eviction process; or
    - Certification by the individual or head of household seeking assistance stating that (s)he was living on the streets or in shelter, preferably accompanied by a third party verification such as those listed in items a.-c., above.
  - ii. For households staying with family or friends, a dated letter from the homeowner or leaseholder that the household in question must leave within 72 hours AND certification by the individual or head of household seeking assistance stating that (s)he will become homeless within 72 hours.
  - iii. For individuals exiting an institution, one of the forms of evidence above and:
    - Discharge paperwork or written/oral referral, or
    - Written record of intake worker's due diligence to obtain above evidence and certification by individual that they exited institution.
- b. Income. Clients must earn less than or equal to 50% of the Area Median Income as defined by HUD (<http://www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/il.html>).
  - i. AP4H will verify income eligibility and collect current income documentation at the time of assessment.
  - ii. All income documentation will be passed onto the provider accepting the household at the time of referral.

## 7. Matching

Assessed households will be matched to the appropriate program based on level of need and other criteria, including:

- a. Household type and size;
- b. Geographic location, including matching families with children to programs that can serve the family in the child's current school district, or other location they prefer such as near family and/or friends;
- c. Special populations, including but not limited to the following:

- i. Disability status
- ii. Domestic violence
- iii. Mental illness
- iv. Substance abuse
- v. Youth and young adults

## 8. Openings

- a. Expected openings. When a provider is aware that a unit or bed will become available, the time from the unit being vacated to the time a new client moves in should not exceed 14 days.
- b. Unexpected openings. When a client leaves a unit or bed unexpectedly and/or without notice, the time from the unit being vacated to the time a new client moves in should not exceed 30 days.
- c. Reverse referrals (a provider admitting a household prior to assessment at AP4H) should only happen when
  - vi. The provider has three or more openings that have been posted for over a week; AND
  - vii. Both the provider and centralized intake know there is an opening; AND
  - viii. There are NO households on the entire placement roster that meet the criteria.
  - ix. At that point, if the provider is aware of a household that DOES meet the criteria, the provider can fill the unit with that household, and get the household scheduled for an assessment by AP4H within three business days of program entry.
- d. Provider to provider referrals. If an agency wants to fill an opening with a client from another provider, the opening must be eligible for a reverse referral.

## 9. Prioritization

Priority for openings is given in the following order to households that are:

- a. Living outdoors with a child or pregnant—the younger the child, the more "in need;"
- b. Affected by a physical or developmental disability, or serious medical condition that could get worse if living outdoors, especially if a minor child in the household has the disabling or serious medical condition;
- c. Living outdoors;
- d. About to be released from a shelter with no other plans and will likely be homeless;
- e. In a shelter;
- f. In transitional housing.

## 10. Referrals

- a. When a provider reports an opening the AP4H Lead Navigator will prepare to refer two households for each opening based on eligibility criteria and date they were assessed.
- b. The AP4H Lead Navigator will contact each household to update their information and verify that the household is still eligible for the opening.
- c. If a household cannot be reached the AP4H Lead Navigator will move on to the next household on the list that is eligible for the opening listed.
- d. Once two eligible households are found a primary and secondary referral will be made. Both client records will be unlocked to the receiving provider in HMIS at this time. Each referral packet will include the following:

- i. Three Releases of Information (ROI)
  - ii. Current income documentation
  - iii. Homeless verification
  - iv. If the referral packet is incomplete, and or the provider is unable to access any part of the client record, the provider should notify the Director of Housing and Shelter Services at Associated Ministries.
- e. Providers must choose the primary referral first if the household meets the eligibility criteria outlined on the Daily Vacancy spreadsheet.
- f. When a household cannot be reached the provider may move on to the next referral according to the following:
  - i. If the provider has three or more openings, they may move on to the next referral within one business day of attempting to contact the first referral.
  - ii. If the provider has fewer than three openings, they may move on to the next referral within 2 business days of attempting to contact the first referral.
- g. If a household does not qualify or is declined for another reason, the receiving provider will work their way through the referrals in priority order until one household qualifies and is accepted. For each unqualified/ineligible household, the provider must supply a detailed description of why the household was not accepted in the Referral Tab of the Daily Vacancy spreadsheet.
  - i. For the safety of domestic violence survivors, providers should NOT list domestic violence as the reason on the spreadsheet for declining a referral when a household is declined because they are fleeing a domestic violence situation and the receiving provider is not equipped to handle such cases. The provider must communicate that to AP4H verbally.
- h. If all referrals do not qualify, the AP4H Lead Navigator will send another round of referrals, and the provider shall follow the process described above.
- i. A referral or acknowledgement of the opening must be entered on the Referral Tracking tab by AP4H staff within 2 business days of the opening being posted. Referrals must then be acknowledged (accepted, declined by provider, declined by client, pending, or unable to reach client) by the receiving provider within 3 business days.
- j. Once a household is determined eligible the receiving provider must complete the Referral Tracking tab for each referral sent, including those declined, and also e-mail the AP4H Lead Navigator who made the referral in order to close the process.
- k. Those households who did not qualify will be put back on the Placement Roster and will not lose their place.

### **III. Rapid Re-Housing Policies and Procedures (SHB 2163)**

*(Developed August 2012; Updated March 2013; Updated March 5, 2014)*

#### **A. Overview and Purpose**

Based on national research and promising practices, Pierce County Community Connections has invested SHB 2163 funds in rapid re-housing short term rental assistance for homeless families<sup>2</sup> in Pierce County. Rapid re-housing is a set of strategies that permanently houses families as quickly as possible where level and duration of support is tailored to meet the needs of each household. Each household has a lease in their name and is connected to mainstream self sufficiency services in the community. Providers are expected to remain engaged with the households from first contact to program exit, using a progressive engagement approach and tailoring services to the needs of the household in order to assist the household to maintain permanent housing.

The purpose of this document is to create a common set of policies, procedures and standards that will be used by all contractors providing rapid re-housing under SHB 2163. (For rapid re-housing policies funded by the Consolidated Homeless Grant, please see the State's CHG website:

<http://www.commerce.wa.gov/Programs/housing/Homeless/Pages/ConsolidatedStateHomelessGrantProgram.aspx>)

#### **B. Referral Process and Household Eligibility**

##### **1. Referral Process**

All households being referred for Rapid Re-Housing assistance must be assessed by Access Point 4 Housing, Pierce County's centralized intake for homeless housing programs, and follow the Centralized Intake Policies and Procedures in Section II above. While they may be identified through other sources, they will still require screening and assessment through Pierce County's centralized intake system. Other sources include:

- Shelter or transitional housing programs
- McKinney-Vento Liaisons in school districts
- Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)
- WorkForce Central
- Community and Technical Colleges
- Other community service providers

##### **2. Documentation**

Centralized intake is responsible for gathering documentation as outlined in section II.C.6 above. The receiving provider is responsible for confirming the household's homeless status as of the night before program entry/intake, and maintaining hard copies of the records. See the Section 2.C.6 of the Centralized Intake Policies and Procedures for acceptable forms of documentation of homelessness.

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<sup>2</sup> Through December 31, 2013, the use of 2163 funds for rapid re-housing is restricted to families with children. Pierce County intends to expand rapid re-housing to all populations in 2014.

### 3. Homeless Management Information System

All rapid re-housing clients, except clients fleeing domestic violence and/or coming to the program from a domestic violence shelter, must be entered into HMIS using the Service Transaction method and HUD data entry type. There are no bed lists for this program.

Households will be entered into HMIS within five (5) business days of intake, and their entry date will be the date of intake. For CHG, and CHG Ending Family Homelessness funded programs, the program entry date in HMIS can be no more than 5 days prior to the household entering the unit. All households will be exited from HMIS within 30 days of the last service transaction.

If a former rapid re-housing household needs rent or other financial assistance after exiting the program, and the provider can document that the household will lose their primary nighttime residence within 14 days without additional assistance, no subsequent residence has been identified; and the household lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing, the household can be re-entered into the program as a prevention client, meaning, their Housing Status is "Imminently losing their housing."

### 4. Eligibility

For 2163-funded projects, eligible households must:

- a. Meet Category 1 or 4 of the HUD homeless definition; or be able to document that they will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence provided that:
  - i. Residence will be lost within 72 hours of the date of application for homeless assistance (e.g. a Sheriff's notice to vacate);
  - ii. No subsequent residence has been identified; and
  - iii. The individual or family lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing.
- b. Have a combined household income at entry and at recertification that is no more than 50% of the Area Median Income.
- c. Have a reasonable plan to be able to maintain housing after assistance ends. A reasonable plan may include a 12 month budget, the financial assistance worksheet, and or a narrative description of changes in household circumstances that will allow them to maintain housing after assistance ends.

For Tacoma Housing Authority-Funded projects only:

- a. Households served by THA rental assistance funding may only be served within the Tacoma City limits.
- b. Assisted household(s) must include at least one (1) minor child.
- c. No member of the household can have been convicted of drug related criminal activity for production or manufacturing of methamphetamines.
- d. No member of the household can be subject to a registration requirement under a state sex offender registration.
- e. Household must be comprised of U.S. Citizens, U.S. Nationals, or non-citizens with eligible immigration per THA's Administrative plan. If not, the household assistance should be pro-rated.
- f. The household must be at or below 50% AMI at the time they are admitted to the program.
- g. Household cannot be residing in subsidized housing or receiving a duplicate housing subsidy.

## C. General Operating Standards

### 1. Progressive Engagement

Providers will determine the amount of rent and utility assistance and/or supportive services households will receive using the progressive engagement approach. Households will be asked to identify the minimum amount and duration of assistance needed to achieve housing stability. Unless the requested amount exceeds the County's standards (to be published by Pierce County each year), or the requested duration is longer than six months, the provider should begin with the amount identified by the household. If it becomes clear after 90 days that the amount and/or duration are not enough, the household will be reassessed, and the amount and duration of assistance may be adjusted with permission from Pierce County. If it becomes clear that a rapid re-housing intervention is insufficient and or inappropriate for a particular household, the provider will work with centralized intake and/or other housing providers to find a more suitable program.

### 2. Service Requirements

The following service components are required:

- a. Employment and Education. Working age and work-able members of each household must be assessed and connected to the appropriate workforce development and or education services.
- b. Case Manager Contact. Case managers must have at least monthly contact with participants to assist in assuring long-term housing stability. This contact can be via e-mail, phone, or in-person contact. Reciprocated and unreciprocated contacts must be documented. Households cannot be terminated for being unresponsive, but the agency can choose not to extend assistance past the initial duration agreed upon by the household and the case manager.

### 3. Re-Housing Standard Timeframe

Households should be housed within 30 days of acceptance into the program.

### 4. Lease Terms

Wherever possible, participants must enter into an initial lease with the landlord of at least six months which is terminable for cause. The leases must be automatically renewable upon expiration for terms that are a minimum of one month long, except on prior notice by either party. If a six month lease is a barrier to re-housing the household within 30 days, the participant may enter into a shorter term lease with the landlord. Providers should take advantage of the Landlord Liaison Project Risk Reduction Fund when possible.

### 5. Housing Quality Standards

Housing for which rental assistance is paid with Rapid Re-Housing funds must meet HUD housing quality standards (HQS) under 24 CFR 982.401(j). Before any assistance will be provided on behalf of a program participant, the unit must pass a HQS Inspection. Assistance will not be provided for units that fail to meet HQS, unless the owner corrects any deficiencies within 30 days from the date of the initial inspection and the inspector verifies that all deficiencies have been corrected.

## **6. Lead Based Paint**

Units to be occupied by households with child(ren) age 6 or under must pass a lead based paint visual assessment.

## **7. Suitable Dwelling Size**

The dwelling unit must have at least one bedroom or living/sleeping room for each two persons.

- a. Children of the opposite sex, other than very young children, may not be required to occupy the same bedroom or living/sleeping room.
- b. If household composition changes during the term of assistance, providers may relocate the household to a more appropriately sized unit. The household must still have access to appropriate supportive services.
- c. Reasonable exceptions can be made, based on professional judgment, in cases where large families will not be able to afford such a large unit after the assistance ends.

## **8. Combining Households**

On a case by case basis, an eligible household may identify and combine with another household, at entry or mid-program, provided that:

- a. The eligible family will be added to the lease in cases where the receiving household is a leaseholder; or, in cases where the receiving household is a homeowner, the eligible household will have their own lease with the homeowner; and
- b. The living situation does not jeopardize either family's safety or ability to comply with lease requirements; and
- c. The combined income of both or all households does not exceed the limits set forth in section III.B.5.

## **9. Ongoing Assessment of Supportive Services**

To the extent practicable, each program must provide supportive services for residents and homeless clients using the program, which may be designed by the provider or participants. At the time of eligibility reassessment, each provider of assistance must conduct an assessment of the supportive services needed by the residents, the availability of such services, and the coordination of services needed to ensure long-term housing stability and must make adjustments, as appropriate.

## **10. Changes in Circumstances.**

Participants must notify the provider of changes in the participant's income or other circumstances (e.g., changes in household composition) that affect the participant's need or eligibility for assistance.

## **11. Eligibility and Supportive Service Needs Reassessment.**

Reassessment of eligibility and needs will occur every 90 days from the date of program entry, or when a participant notifies a provider of any changes described in item IV.b. above. When households are determined to be over income, rent assistance can be extended for up to an additional 3 months and case management can continue for up to an additional 6 months, *except for ESG- and THA funded projects.*

## **12. Hardship Policy.**

A hardship policy has been established that defines the circumstances under which households may request an extension to the term limit of 12 months. Families that would like to request a term limit extension need to apply forty-five (45) days prior to the end of term. Requests must consist of an Extension Request Form, a current (within the last 14-30 days) Reassessment of Eligibility and Need Form, and a copy of the household's plan to maintain housing after the proposed extension of assistance ends. A committee that includes a representative from PCCC, the rapid re-housing collaborative coordinator, the servicing provider, and a neutral third party will be established to review each request and the household will be provided an opportunity to present justification for their request. If approved by the committee, an extension up to an additional 12 months may be granted to the family.

## **13. Termination.**

The provider may only terminate assistance to a household if the household reveals information after program entry that makes them ineligible for the program. In the case of eviction by the landlord, the agency may continue to provide assistance to a household in a new unit. Households cannot be terminated for being unresponsive, but the agency can choose not to extend assistance past the initial duration agreed upon by the household and the case manager. Attempts should be made by the provider to assist the household in avoiding a return to homelessness.

## **14. Due Process.**

In terminating assistance or denying an extension to a program participant, the provider must provide a formal process that recognizes the rights of individuals receiving assistance under the due process of law. This process, at a minimum, must consist of:

- a. Providing the program participant with a written copy of the program rules and the termination process before the participant begins to receive assistance;
- b. Written notice to the program participant containing a clear statement of the reasons for termination or denial of extension;
- c. A review of the decision, in which the program participant is given the opportunity to present written or oral objections before a person other than the person (or a subordinate of that person) who made or approved the termination or denial of extension decision; and
- d. Prompt written notice of the final decision to the program participant.
- e. Additionally, the provider must attempt (and document that attempt) to assist the participant in finding additional resources to decrease the likelihood that they will become homeless as a result of termination or denial of extension. This assistance must be documented and made available to Pierce County staff during site visits, monitorings, and audits.

## **D. Eligible Program Activities**

### **1. Housing Relocation and Stabilization Services:**

- a. Financial Assistance: Funds which are paid to housing owners, utility companies, or other third parties. *Does not include rental assistance.* Eligible costs include:

1. Moving Costs. Reasonable one-time moving costs are eligible and include truck rental, hiring a moving company and up to three months of storage fees.
  2. Hotel/Motel Vouchers. See section V. Pierce County Hotel/Motel Voucher Policy.
  3. Rent Application Fees. Payment of an application fee that is charged by the owner to all applicants is eligible.
  4. Security Deposit. Rapid Re-Housing funds may be used for security deposits in an amount not to exceed 2 months of rent. Rapid Re-Housing funds may be used for security deposits in conjunction with other local, state or federal housing subsidy or rental assistance, such as Tenant-Based Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers.
  5. Last month's rent: An advance payment of the last month's rent may be provided to the landlord, in addition to the security deposit and payment of first month's rent.
  6. Utility deposit. This form of assistance consists of paying for utility deposits. Utility deposits must be a one-time fee, paid to utility companies.
  7. Outside Utility Assistance. Program staff will help households obtain outside utility assistance if they are unable to pay for the utilities themselves. In cases where the household is unable to locate other utility assistance, Rapid Re-Housing funds can be used if the household demonstrates a clear need for assistance (i.e. utility shut-off notice, monthly budget indicating the inability to pay utilities). If Rapid Re-Housing funds are used, the payment should take into consideration the previous utility allowance given to the household in the client contribution calculation for rent.
  8. Arrears. Up to six months of payment towards rent/utility arrears may be provided. If a household is more than two (2) months in arrears, program staff should attempt to negotiate a payment plan and/or identify other community resources to assist the household. Payments should be made directly to the utility company. In cases where a client's account has been sent to collections, and their utilities cannot be reinstated without paying the arrears, the provider may make the payment to the collections agency.
  9. Tacoma Housing Authority Funding. In addition to rental assistance, items 1-4, 6 and 7 are eligible activities for Tacoma Housing Authority funded projects.
- b. Services: Services should be targeted at removing the household's unique, immediate barrier(s) to re-housing.
1. Housing Search & Placement. Costs of assisting eligible program participants to locate, obtain, and retain suitable housing are eligible. Eligible costs include:

- Supplemental assessment of housing barriers, needs and preferences to be used as a supplement centralized intake comprehensive assessment.
  - Development of an action plan for locating housing
  - Housing search and outreach to and negotiation with owner
  - Assistance with submitting rental applications and understanding leases
  - Assessment of housing for compliance with Pierce County Rapid Re-Housing requirements for habitability, lead based paint, and rent reasonableness
  - Assistance with obtaining utilities and making moving arrangements
  - Tenant counseling
2. Housing Stability Case Management: Assessing, arranging, coordinating, and monitoring the delivery of individualized services to facilitate housing stability. Eligible costs include:
- Using centralized intake to conduct the initial comprehensive assessment, and receive referrals
  - Reassessing eligibility and supportive service needs.
  - Counseling and life coaching
  - Developing, securing and coordinating services including Federal, state, and local benefits
  - Monitoring and evaluating program participant progress
  - Providing information and referrals to other providers
  - Developing an individualized housing and service plan, including planning a path to permanent housing stability
  - Entering client data into HMIS
  - Supportive services may be provided for up to 6 months after the client exits the program.
3. Mediation: Mediation between the program participant and the owner or person(s) with whom the program participant is living, to prevent the program participant from losing permanent housing in which they currently reside. Eligible costs include:
- Time and/or services associated with mediation services
4. Legal Services: Legal services necessary to resolve a legal problem that prohibits the program participant from obtaining or maintaining permanent housing. Eligible costs include:
- Hourly fees for legal advice and representation
  - Fees based on the actual service performed (i.e. fee for service), but only if the cost would be less than the cost of hourly fees
  - Client intake, preparation of cases for trial, provision of legal advice, representation at hearings, and counseling
  - Filing fees and other necessary court costs
  - Program employees' salaries and other costs necessary to perform the services, if the program is a legal services provider and performs the services itself

- Legal representation and advice pertaining to the following subjects: landlord/tenant matters, child support, guardianship, paternity, emancipation, legal separation, resolution of outstanding criminal warrants, orders of protection and other civil remedies for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking, appeal of veterans and public benefit claim disputes
5. Credit Repair: Services necessary to assist program participants with critical skills related to household budgeting, managing money, accessing a free personal credit report, and resolving personal credit problems (assistance cannot include the payment or modification of debt). Eligible costs include:
    - Credit counseling
    - Other related services
  6. Child care. When the household is ineligible for DSHS Working Connections Child Care, the costs of providing child-care vouchers, for children from families experiencing homelessness, including providing meals and snacks, and comprehensive and coordinated developmental activities, are eligible.
  7. Education and Employment Services. Wherever possible, providers should connect households with education and employment services that exist in the community. When such services are not available or appropriate for the household, the provider may use Rapid Re-Housing funding to assist the household in pursuing education and employment opportunities that will result in the household being able to maintain housing after assistance ends.
  8. Life skills training. The costs of teaching critical life management skills that may never have been learned or have been lost during the course of physical or mental illness, domestic violence, substance abuse, and homelessness are eligible. *These services must be assessed as necessary to assist the program participant to obtain and maintain housing in the community.* Component life skills training are the budgeting of resources and money management, household management, conflict management, shopping for food and other needed items, nutrition, the use of public transportation, and parent training.
  9. License Fees. Fees to obtain or reinstate driver licenses or professional licenses are an eligible expense if such licenses are necessary to obtain and or maintain housing stability and or employment.
  10. Mental health services. Eligible costs are the direct outpatient treatment of mental health conditions that are provided by licensed professionals for household members that are ineligible for existing community mental health programs. Component services are crisis interventions; counseling; individual, family, or group therapy sessions; the prescription of psychotropic medications or explanations about the use and management of medications; and combinations of therapeutic approaches to address multiple problems.

11. Outpatient health services. Eligible costs are the direct outpatient treatment of medical conditions for household members that are ineligible for existing community health care services when such treatment is necessary to obtain and maintain housing, and when provided by licensed medical professionals, including:
- Providing an analysis or assessment of an individual's health problems and the development of a treatment plan;
  - Assisting individuals to understand their health needs;
  - Providing directly or assisting individuals to obtain and utilize appropriate medical treatment;
  - Preventive medical care and health maintenance services, including in-home health services and emergency medical services;
  - Provision of appropriate medication;
  - Providing follow-up services; and
  - Preventive and non-cosmetic dental care.
12. Substance abuse treatment services. The costs of program participant intake and assessment, outpatient treatment, group and individual counseling, and drug testing are eligible when the household member is ineligible for existing community substance abuse treatment programs. Inpatient detoxification and other inpatient drug or alcohol treatment are ineligible.
13. Transportation. Eligible costs are:
- The costs of program participant's travel on public transportation to and from medical care, employment, child care, or other services eligible under this section.
  - Mileage allowance for service workers to visit program participants;
  - If public transportation options are not sufficient within the area, the provider may make a one-time payment on behalf of a program participant needing car repairs or maintenance required to operate a personal vehicle, subject to the following:
    - One-time emergency gas payment;
    - Payments for car repairs or maintenance on behalf of the program participant may not exceed \$500 or 10 percent of the Blue Book value of the vehicle, whichever is greater (Blue Book refers to the guidebook that compiles and quotes prices for new and used automobiles and other vehicles of all makes, models, and types);
    - Payments for car repairs or maintenance must be paid by the provider directly to the third party that repairs or maintains the car; and
    - The provider may require program participants to share in the cost of car repairs or maintenance as a condition of receiving assistance with car repairs or maintenance.

14. Tacoma Housing Authority Funding. Supportive services and staffing are NOT eligible program activities for Tacoma Housing Authority Funding.

## 2. Rental Assistance:

- b. Amount of Assistance. Short term, shallow subsidy rental assistance for approximately 6-9 months, and approximately \$500 per household per month. Duration of Rental Assistance. The standard duration of rental assistance will be six to nine months. If the lease is dated on or before the 14<sup>th</sup> of the month, it will be considered one full month of rental assistance. If the lease is dated on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month or later, the following month (the first full month of the lease) will be considered the first month of rental assistance.
- d. Dual Subsidy. Rapid Re-Housing monthly rental assistance cannot be used with any other local, state or federal housing subsidy or rental assistance. For example, monthly rapid re-housing monthly rental assistance cannot be used in combination with a Section 8 Voucher. However, rapid re-housing move-in assistance can be used to assist a household get into a unit for which they have a Section 8 Voucher.
- e. Fair Market Rent. The total monthly amount of rent *and* utility costs for each unit must not exceed HUD Fair Market Rents for the year in which the contract begins.
- f. Household Contribution. After the first month, each household is required to contribute at least 30% of their current income toward their rent each month and cover 100% of their utilities. This amount needs to be clearly documented and includes a utility allowance if they pay for utilities directly. The actual contribution will be determined monthly, based on each household's specific situation and financial resources. Program staff will help households obtain outside utility assistance if they are unable to pay for the utilities themselves (i.e. no income). In rare cases where the household is unable to locate other utility assistance, 2163 funds can be used if the household demonstrates a clear need for assistance (i.e. utility shut-off notice, monthly budget indicating the inability to pay utilities, etc. and list of community resources they attempted to obtain) and the Housing Retention Specialist supports providing utility assistance. If 2163 funds are used, the payment should take into consideration the utility allowance given to the household in the client contribution calculation for rent.
- g. Rent Reasonableness. Rapid Re-Housing funds will only provide rental assistance for a unit if the rent is reasonable. The provider must determine whether the rent charged for the unit receiving rental assistance is reasonable in relation to rents being charged for comparable unassisted units, taking into account the location, size, type, quality, amenities, facilities, and management and maintenance of each unit. Reasonable rent must not exceed rents currently being charged by the same owner for comparable unassisted units.

## E. Coordination Among Providers

Programs receiving funding for rapid re-housing assistance will be expected to:

- 1. Use the centralized intake system to get referrals;
- 2. Coordinate with emergency shelters to identify and serve eligible households;
- 3. For providers that serve school aged youth or children that are homeless:
  - a. Providers must demonstrate that they collaborate with local school districts to identify homeless families and inform them of their eligibility for McKinney Vento education services.

- b. Providers must consider the education needs of children when considering the placement in emergency or transitional housing and is to the extent practicable, placing families with children close to their school of origin so as not to disrupt the children's education.
  - c. Provider policies and practices must be consistent with the McKinney Vento Act and other laws related to the provision of educational and related services to households experiencing homelessness.
  - d. Providers must designate a staff person to ensure that children are enrolled in school and connected to appropriate services in the community, including early childhood programs such as Head Start, Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and McKinney Vento education services.
4. Use the County-funded Landlord Liaison Project as a tool to assist in finding housing for clients; and
5. Work with the Rapid Re-Housing Collaborative Coordinator who will:
- a. Convene the collaborative partners on a regular basis. Based on the knowledge from the Collaborative partners, identify problems and identify solutions, and propose changes to the rapid re-housing policies and/or program design that improve access to housing;
  - b. Maintain all policy documents and forms associated with rapid re-housing;
  - c. Serve as a rapid re-housing specialist, and a conduit for best practices in rapid re-housing to get to rapid re-housing providers;
  - d. Coordinate line staff training opportunities on the main components of rapid re-housing, including but not limited to:
    - i. Progressive engagement
    - ii. Motivational interviewing
    - iii. Trauma-informed care
    - iv. Housing stabilization
    - v. Connections to education and employment
    - vi. Working with landlords;
  - e. Provide technical assistance to rapid re-housing case managers on the mechanics of rapid re-housing, including filling vacancies, intake, housing search and placement, HQS inspections, and case management standards;
  - f. Monitor numbers served against projected numbers served; monitor vacancies and ensure that any agencies with high vacancy rates are prioritized for referrals from centralized intake, shelters or transitional housing programs.
  - g. Serve as a liaison between the collaborative partners, centralized intake, shelters, and the Landlord Liaison Project to facilitate the rapid movement of households from homelessness to permanent housing;
  - h. Work with the Landlord Liaison Project and any other relevant partners to work on strategies to minimize the time it takes to get a household into a unit;
  - i. Initiate and facilitate connections to education and employment opportunities and resources in the community, and make those available to the collaborative partners;
  - j. Follow up with clients and or landlords at three, six and 12 months post program exit to measure housing stability;
  - k. Serve as a resource to rapid re-housing providers to facilitate the successful implementation of rapid re-housing county wide. The successful implementation of rapid re-housing county-wide includes but is not limited to all rapid re-housing providers meeting or exceeding:

- i. projected caseload numbers/numbers served;
  - ii. CoC and other performance goals for rapid re-housing programs;
  - iii. cost effectiveness benchmarks (cost per exit to permanent housing); and
  - iv. case management standards as defined by the Collaborative;
- l. Coordinate the collection of outcome data, and provide quarterly reports (format to be agreed upon by the Coordinator and the County) to the County and the Collaborative partners on the following outputs and outcomes for each individual provider and as a group:
  - i. Number and type of households served quarterly and annually;
  - ii. Minimum, maximum and average monthly rental assistance amounts and duration;
  - iii. Housing stability at three, six and 12 months post program exit;
  - iv. Minimum, maximum and average length of time from intake to permanently housed;
  - v. Average length of stay in shelter prior to entering permanent housing;
- m. In the quarterly report, track outputs and outcomes against performance goals, critically assess any discrepancies, and develop strategies to achieve or propose changes to unmet goals. Also track and find trends among households who need longer than twelve months of assistance; and
- n. Provide quarterly reports on the Coordinator's activities and accomplishments.

## **IV. Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults**

*(Developed August 2012, Last Updated March 2013)*

### **A. Overview and Purpose**

#### **1. Population Served**

Youth (ages 13-17) and young adults (ages 18-24) who are unaccompanied by a parent or guardian and are without shelter where appropriate care and supervision are available, whose parent or guardian is unable or unwilling to provide shelter and care, or who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Undocumented unaccompanied youth and young adults may also be served under these provisions except where exclusions are noted.

#### **2. Overview**

The Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children, Youth, and Families emphasizes that youth who run away from home are often mistakenly portrayed as juvenile delinquents. In contrast, such behaviors often reflect society's failure to develop adequate support for youth and families troubled by economic difficulties, alcohol or drug abuse, mental health issues, sexuality and sexual abuse, and violence. Moreover, many youth leave their family of origin in order to extricate themselves from further physical and sexual abuse, strained relationships, addiction(s) of a family member, and/or parental neglect. Numerous studies consistently indicate that 60-80% of youth and young adults living in shelters and interim facilities have been physically or sexually abused by a family member or guardian, with another 20% experiencing several years of family violence. In addition, it is important to note that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Questioning, and Intersexed, as well as African American youth and young adults are disproportionately impacted when compared to other groups.

#### **3. Purpose**

This document includes policies that will serve as a framework for providing safe and high quality housing and supportive services (scattered-site independent apartment vouchers, host homes, and shared housing) to youth and young adults experiencing homelessness that is a constellation of affordable housing, intensive strengths-based case management, self-sufficiency services, trauma-informed care, and positive youth development approaches.

### **B. Referral Process and Eligibility**

#### **1. Referral and Assessment Process**

The following outlines the referral process for unaccompanied youth and young adults requiring assistance with re-housing.

- a. Centralized Intake. Except as explicitly noted, all housing service referrals for unaccompanied youth and young adults must be screened and assessed through Pierce County's centralized intake as described in Section II above.
- b. Screening and Assessment. Unaccompanied youth and young adults must willingly engage with centralized intake for a screening and an in-person comprehensive

strengths-based assessment in order to determine eligibility, and, when appropriate, alternate referrals if ineligible for this program. If there is a housing crisis during a non-business day, Mary Grant with Camp Fire USA (253.310.622), the outreach worker for Pierce County, is the contact person.

Whenever possible, unaccompanied youth will be re-housed within the catchment area of their school of origin.

## 2. Prioritization

Within available resources, assessments and referrals will be prioritized based on the HUD definition of homelessness (see Table 2) categories 1, 2, 3 and 4.

The following ***are not*** fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence:

- a. A supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations;
- b. An institution or a publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations;
- c. Transitional housing or interim housing;
- d. A temporary placement with a peer, friend, or family member that has not offered permanent residence, a residential lease, or temporary lodging for more than 14 days; or
- e. A public or private place not designed for, nor ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings

## 3. Documentation

It is important to create low barriers of entry for this highly vulnerable population. AP4H is responsible for gathering documentation of homelessness status. It is important to note that unaccompanied youth under the age of 18 will require a *Voluntary Placement Agreement* (VLPA) signed by a parent/guardian or proof of emancipation. Youth lacking this requirement may be referred to a street outreach worker (Camp Fire USA), a McKinney-Vento Liaison (if attending public school), a licensed local community service provider, and/or Child Protective Services (with youth consent and awareness due to the high risk of flight and disengagement). If the youth presents harm to self or others, crisis intervention services and or Child Protective Services must be contacted immediately. Below is a list of alternatives that may substitute for documentation when unavailable:

- a. Written observation by a McKinney-Vento Liaison, school district employee, or outreach worker; or
- b. Written referral by another housing or service provider; or
- c. Certification by the individual seeking assistance stating that (s)he was living on the streets, in a shelter, or a written notification from the proprietor of a temporary residence stating that the individual seeking assistance can no longer stay at that residence.

For individuals exiting an institution, one of the forms of evidence above and:

- a. Discharge paperwork or written/oral referral, or
- b. Written record of intake worker's due diligence to obtain above evidence and certification by individual that they exited institution.

#### 4. General Eligibility

Eligible unaccompanied youth and young adults must:

- a. Be under the age of 25. Youth under the age of 18 and above the age of 12 must obtain a signed *Voluntary Placement Agreement* from a parent, guardian, or proof of emancipation before receiving housing services.
- b. Have a household income that is 30% or less of the Area Median Income, as established by HUD.
  - i. Once a participant starts receiving an income at or above 50% of the Area Median Income, the participant will be ready to transition into self-sufficiency, and will no longer be eligible for a rental subsidy in order to maintain housing.
- c. Fall under the Category 1, 2, 3 or 4 of the HUD definition of homelessness (see Table 2). Please note that a minimum of 75% of housing services must be prioritized for category 1, 2, and 4 with a maximum of 25% for category 3.

#### 5. Special Eligibility – Tacoma Housing Authority

In addition to the general eligibility, above, these requirements apply only to rental assistance made available through funding by the Tacoma Housing Authority. Eligible participants must meet the following qualifications:

- a. Households served by THA rental assistance funding may only be served within the Tacoma City limits.
- b. No member of the household has been convicted of drug related criminal activity for production or manufacturing of methamphetamines.
- c. No member of the household can be subject to lifetime registration requirement under a state sex offender registration
- d. Household must be comprised of U.S. Citizens, U.S. Nationals, or non-citizens with eligible immigration per THA's Administrative plan. If not, the household assistance should be pro-rated.
- e. The household must be at or below 50% AMI at the time they are admitted to the program.
- f. Household cannot be residing in subsidized housing or receiving a duplicate housing subsidy.
- g. Eligible activities include security deposits, credit screening fees, utility deposits, utility payments, moving cost assistance, and motel/hotel vouchers.

#### 6. Special Eligibility - Host Homes

In addition to the general eligibility criteria described above, the following apply:

- a. Providers must conduct background-checks, and relevant screenings and assessments of potential host participant(s) (landlord) and the youth/young adult(s) (tenant)
  - i. A felony or a record of child or elder abuse would disqualify a potential host participant (landlord).
  - ii. A felony or a record of child or elder abuse would not disqualify a youth/young adult (tenant) from participating in the program in situations where there are: i) no minors or vulnerable adults living in the home; ii) the landlord agrees to lease to the youth/young adult being fully aware of the background-check results; and iii) the landlord indemnifies the placement provider of any liability.

- b. The lease arrangement will afford the youth or young adult the rights of tenancy per the full extent of the law.
- c. Participants must be in some form of educational or occupational training program and or working

## 7. Special Eligibility - Shared Housing

In addition to the general eligibility criteria described above, the following apply:

- a. Participants must be in some form of educational or occupational training program and or working.

## C. Program Costs Paid by Participant

### 1. Household Contribution

The household share of rent and monthly utility costs should be at least 30% of their current gross monthly income.

- a. The rent and utility amount needs to be clearly documented.
- b. The total rent and utility amount must cover 100% of the utilities if utilities are not included in the monthly rent amount and the household pays for utilities directly.
- c. The actual household contribution will be determined quarterly, based on each household's specific situation and financial resources

In rare cases where the household is unable to locate other utility assistance, 2163 funds can be used if the household demonstrates a clear need for assistance (i.e. utility shut-off notice, monthly budget indicating the inability to pay utilities). If 2163 funds are used, the payment should take into consideration the previous utility allowance given to the household in the client contribution calculation for rent.

### 2. Calculating Income

The definition of income is a household's income at the time they are seeking assistance. Accordingly, documents and information collected to verify income should be dated within 30 days. However, for public assistance benefits, (e.g., SSI, food stamps), a benefits statement received any time within the twelve months prior to the time of application and reflecting current benefits received by a household is allowed. A copy of a recent bank statement indicating direct deposit is also acceptable.

To calculate average income over a fixed period of time, add the gross amount earned in each payment period that is documented and divide by the number of payment periods. Depending on pay periods (hourly, weekly, bi-weekly, semi-monthly, or monthly), the following calculations convert the average wage into annual income:

- a. Hourly wage multiplied by hours worked per week multiplied by 52 weeks
- b. Weekly wage multiplied by 52 weeks
- c. Bi-Weekly (every other week) wage multiplied by 26 bi-weekly periods
- d. Semi-monthly wage (twice a month) multiplied by 24 semi-monthly periods
- e. Monthly wage multiplied by 12 months

## **D. Duration of Housing or Rental Services**

The duration of housing or rental assistance provided to program participants will be determined by the following guidelines:

### **1. Standard Duration**

The standard duration of housing or rental assistance is up to 24 months. Total duration can be affected by household composition, need, age, and income. However, the goal of the system is to help the program participant move out of homelessness (including transitional housing and shelters) as quickly as possible.

### **2. Changes in Circumstances**

Participants must notify the provider of changes in the participant's income or other circumstances (e.g., changes in household composition, need, age, etc.) that affect the participant's need for assistance.

### **3. Eligibility Reassessment**

Reassessment of eligibility occurs 90 days after initial move-in and thereafter every six months, or when a participant notifies a provider of a change of household composition, need, income, and or age.

### **4. Extension Requests**

On a case-by-case basis, service providers may request an extension in assistance. Requests will be made in writing to the Pierce County Community Connections Homelessness Program Administrator. Youth and young adult participants may not request an extension after the participant reaches 26 years of age.

### **5. Extensions Beyond 24 Months**

For youth and young adults with extensions beyond 24 months, a reassessment of eligibility will occur every three months.

### **6. Termination**

The provider may terminate assistance to a program participant who violates program requirements or conditions of occupancy, but the provider must make a vigorous and documented attempt to find an alternative placement for the program participant being terminated. Termination under this section does not bar the provider from providing further assistance later to the same participant.

### **7. Due Process**

In terminating assistance to a program participant, the provider must have a formal process that recognizes the rights of individuals receiving assistance under the due process of law. This process, at a minimum, must consist of:

- a. Providing the program participant with a written copy of the program rules and the termination process before the participant begins to receive assistance;
- b. Written notice to the program participant containing a clear statement of the reasons for termination;

- c. A review of the decision, in which the program participant is given the opportunity to present written or oral objections before a person other than the individual (or a subordinate of that individual) who made or approved the termination decision;
- d. Prompt written notice of the final decision to the program participant with assistance and referrals to other services that are relevant given the client's needs.

## **E. Coordination Among Providers**

Programs receiving Rapid Re-Housing funding for unaccompanied youth and young adults will be expected to:

- a. Attend monthly Youth Coalition meetings in order to augment collaboration, resource and information sharing, and improvements to service delivery;
- b. Encourage youth and young adult participants to enroll in the Pierce County Youth and Young Adult Advisory Council;
- c. Use the centralized intake system to get referrals;
- d. Attend regular coordination meetings with the unaccompanied youth and young adult providers funded under this policy; and
- e. Coordinate closely with Camp Fire USA, McKinney-Vento Liaisons, Youth Street Outreach Programs, and other emergency shelters and providers throughout Pierce County serving youth and young adults to better identify and serve eligible youth and young adults in Pierce County.

## **F. Mandatory Program Activities**

The three housing options (host homes, shared housing, and scattered-site apartments) and self-sufficiency training must be in alignment with the essential components, mission, and principles of the Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults' Continuum of Care Matrix (see the Pierce County Community Connections, Homeless Programs website for additional information). In addition, all housing and supportive services must ensure culturally competent service to otherwise disproportionately represented youth and young adults such as African Americans and sexual minorities. Each provider must have a cultural competency plan per contractual requirements. This includes the hiring of case managers and staff that reflect the racial, cultural, ethnic, and sexual orientation diversity of clients.

Coordination and case management, at a minimum, will include: periodic assessment of individual youth and young adult participant needs; the identification of necessary basic needs, resources, and supports to meet the best interest of youth and young adult participants; the creation of a written, individual plan with input and agreement by youth and young adult participants; referrals to appropriate services and resources; advocacy for youth and young adult participants in order to remove barriers to resources and services; and the keeping of written records showing progress toward self-sufficiency goals in the individual plan. Lastly, case managers must have an educational/occupational component included in every individualized housing stability plan for program participants. Providers shall:

### **1. Host Homes**

- a. Provide coordination and intensive case management to unaccompanied youth and young adults referred to a host home with a caring adult that has a room available for rent. Both proprietor and youth and young adult must decide if they want to enter into the housing agreement together.

- b. Mediate potential conflicts between the host (landlord) and the unaccompanied youth and young adult (tenant).
- c. Provide regular support and technical assistance to the host families to ensure they have the adequate tools to mentor youth and young adults without taking on a parental role.
- d. Distribute up to \$400 monthly subsidy to participating host families on behalf of youth and young adult to cover both rent and utilities (after participant's contribution).
- e. Conduct background checks, relevant screenings and assessments of potential host participant(s) and the youth and young adult(s).
- f. Schedule inspections to ensure housing meets HUD quality standards (HQS) under 24 CFR 982.401(j).

## **2. Shared Housing Sites**

- a. Include intensive case management, one live-in residential aid per house, utility costs to operate the homes, and any necessary upkeep and maintenance to ensure housing meets HUD housing quality standards (HQS) under 24 CFR 982.401(j).

## **3. Scattered Site Rental Assistance**

- a. Provide case management for participants living in scattered site units (independent living).
- b. See Section B.5. for special requirements governing THA-funded rental assistance.

## **4. Self-Sufficiency Training**

- a. Provide ongoing self-sufficiency training is for qualifying participating youth and young adults as needed, but not limited to financial literacy, navigating and connecting to benefits, life skills development, goal setting training, and employment and education assistance. (Note that youth enrolled in high school may not need to attend self-sufficiency training but will still be eligible for any incentives promoting academic engagement).
- b. Administer self-sufficiency modules at least four times a month with a quarterly incentive program that encourages participation.

## **5. Transportation**

Case management for the various housing programs will provide participants with bus passes in order to remove barriers to participation. Please note that students enrolled in public school, and who are McKinney-Vento eligible, should have bus passes paid through the school districts' Title 1 or Title X program when feasible.

# **G. General Operating Standards**

## **1. Lease**

Participants enrolled into a host home or independent living site must enter into an initial lease, terminable for cause, of at least six months. Leases for all terms longer than one month must be automatically renewable upon expiration, except on prior 20-day notice by either party.

## **2. Housing Quality Standards**

Housing for which rental assistance is paid with funds provided by Pierce County must meet HUD housing quality standards under 24 CFR 982.401(j). Before any assistance will be provided on behalf of a program participant, the provider must ensure that an HQS inspection is performed. Assistance will not be provided for units that fail to meet HQS, unless the owner corrects any deficiencies within 30 days from the date of the initial inspection and the inspector verifies that all deficiencies have been corrected.

## **3. Suitable Dwelling Size**

The dwelling unit must have at least one bedroom or living/sleeping room for each two persons.

- a. Children of the opposite sex, other than very young children, may not be required to occupy the same bedroom or living/sleeping room.
- b. If household composition changes during the term of assistance, providers may relocate the household to a more appropriately sized unit. The household must still have access to appropriate supportive services.
- c. Reasonable exceptions can be made, based on professional judgment, in cases where large families will not be able to afford such a large unit after the assistance ends.

## **4. Ongoing Assessment of Supportive Services**

To the extent practicable, each project must provide supportive services for residents of the project and homeless persons using the project, which may be designed by the provider or participants. Each provider of assistance must conduct a quarterly assessment of the supportive services needed by the residents of the project, the availability of such services, and the coordination of services needed by the residents of the project, the availability of such services, and the coordination of services needed to ensure long-term housing stability and must make adjustments, as appropriate.

# **IV. Pierce County Hotel/Motel Voucher Policy**

*(Developed April 2013)*

Pierce County 2163 and Consolidated Homeless Grant funds may be used to place an unsheltered household in a hotel or motel for the period of time between requesting a Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection for a unit identified for that household, and up to one day after the unit passes inspection. The length of stay in the hotel or motel while awaiting successful completion of the HQS inspection shall not exceed 30 days. For 2163 Rapid Re-Housing Programs, the cost of the motel stay shall be counted towards the household's total financial assistance limits. The County will reimburse the contractor for room and tax only. Sheltered households are not eligible.

The purpose of this policy is to facilitate permanent housing attainment for unsheltered households, and minimize the harm and trauma of being unsheltered. It may not be used as long term shelter, or as a replacement for permanent housing.

This policy is retroactively effective beginning January 1, 2013.

In order to be reimbursed under this policy for HQS-related hotel/motel stays incurred on or after January 1, 2013, room and tax for hotel/motel stays must be identified in the project budget on file with the County. If it is not currently identified in the project budget, the provider must submit a budget amendment for approval by the county that identifies:

- room and tax for HQS-related hotel/motel stays as an activity of this project;
- the amount of money projected to be spent on this activity; and
- what budgeted activity the provider will take money from to fund room and tax for HQS-related hotel/motel stays.

Once the budget amendment is submitted and approved, the provider may submit an invoice for HQS-related hotel/motel stays incurred between January 1, 2013 and the date the budget amendment is approved. Costs for HQS-related hotel/motel stays incurred after the budget amendment is submitted and approved can be included in the regular monthly invoice process.