



TANF Rapid Rehousing Evaluation Report



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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to provide data to inform the content of the Request for Grants (RFG) through which DWS will be soliciting proposals from community entities to provide rapid rehousing and homeless prevention services to TANF eligible families.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods descriptive study was conducted to learn about the experiences of both current TANF Rapid Rehousing (RR) service providers and recent recipients of RR funds. The research questions were broad yet focused on the step by step experience of administering and distributing TANF RR funds and participating in the program.

Study Sample: There were 13 agencies identified as having received TANF RR funds. Representatives from 11 of the 13 agencies were interviewed for the evaluation. In addition, the state contract monitor over most of the contracts was also interviewed. SRI was provided contact information for 50 individuals or families who had received housing assistance. Of this group, 25 were interviewed. All 13 agencies were represented in this sample.

Data Collection: All agency personnel and clients being asked to participate in the study were initially contacted by mail. Each person was invited to call in to schedule an interview or decline participation. Those who did not respond within a week after sending the letter were contacted by phone to determine willingness to participate.

Interviews with agency personnel were typically conducted over the telephone with only 1 visit occurring on site at their agency. The average length of the interviews was one hour. Interviews with participants were conducted over the phone and lasted an average of 16 minutes. TANF RR fund recipients received \$10 each in appreciation of their time.

FINDINGS

TANF RR Fund Recipients

Recipients of TANF RR funds participating in the study were from all around the state. Everyone was aware of the program although some needed a brief explanation to remind them of the program. Two participants indicated they had never received any months of assistance. This made follow-up questions difficult however we attempted to capture their stories as well.

As shown in Table 1, most recipients were still living in the place TANF RR had funded. However, of those who were not living in the same location, 3 had their RR funds cut off due to being over income yet they were not making enough to pay rent and thus lost their housing. The other 3 left due to family reasons.

Participants were also asked to discuss what had led to the need to seek housing assistance. While the reasons are many and complex, the most common reason was related to job loss. A third of the job loss was due to medical issues.

Table 1: TANF RR Participant Data

	N = 23
Average length of time since housing started	5.6 months Range: 2 - 9 months
Participant no longer receiving TANF RR funds	21 (91.3%)
Still living where they received TANF RR funds	17 (73.9%)
Referred to DWS for employment assistance	15 (65.2%)
Of this group, actually went to DWS after referral	11 (73.3%)
Reasons for needing to seek assistance:	
Job Loss	12 (52.0%)
Doubled Up with other families	7 (30.4%)
Had to move and needed new place	4 (17.4%)
Relationship ended	3 (13.0%)
Emergency expenses	2 (8.7%)
Kids being returned to home	1 (4.3%)
Where did you learn about the program?	
Referred by another agency	10 (40.0%)
A housing provider	6 (24.0%)
Friends	4 (16.0%)
DWS	3 (12.0%)
Family	2 (8.0%)

Most recipients had only a very short term relationship with the funding agency. Of the 25 participants, 7 mentioned some type of ongoing activity that could be identified as case management. Those receiving one time help with a deposit or one month of rent reported no additional services. Others referenced the monthly recertification meeting but this was simply to determine ongoing eligibility.

When asked to describe how the program had been explained to them, the idea that this was one time, limited funding was what stood out most. Several mentioned that the number of months of assistance was dependent on the availability of funds at the agency. One quarter of the respondents remember being told that they had to show how they could pay their own rent in the future. Only two specifically mentioned that “getting a job” was part of the program.

Respondents were asked to describe what they had to do in order to keep their housing assistance. There were 8 people who spoke of needing to go to DWS for services. There were also 11 individuals who indicated job search and/or job retention were the key parts of the

program, and 15 (65.2%) people who said the agency had talked with them or helped them in getting a job.

Most of the agencies that provided TANF RR funds are housing agencies. When asked what additional resources the TANF RR agency itself had provided, 13 (52%) people indicated rental assistance was the only resource provided. In addition, most people (15) had not received any other referrals to and other agencies.

Because the DWS referral is part of the employment pathway for most TANF RR recipients, participants were asked about this experience.

Table 2: Connections With DWS

	N = 23
Was referred to DWS for employment based services	15 (65.2%)
What was explained as the reason for the referral:	
It is mandatory – all are referred	4 (26.6%)
To help me get a job	5 (33.3%)
To improve my current employment	6 (40.0%)
Went to DWS after referred (N = 15)	11 (73.3%)
Was there a connection between agency and DWS (N = 11)	6 (54.5%)

Those who had engaged with DWS were asked how often they were required to meet with a DWS worker. The frequency of visits ranged from just once to daily (a Work Success participant). In addition, respondents were asked to describe the type of help they received from DWS. Many, 7 (46.6%), were just told to job search on the computer at DWS. A few others mentioned specific activities they found helpful such as the resume writing and interviewing skills workshops. One person mentioned the “Getting Started” booklet as a tool they took home, read and shared with family members.

Of those who went to DWS, 6 (33.3%) did not remember receiving any explanation from DWS about why they were there, they just remembered being told to job search. From the participant perspective, the relationship between DWS and the agency basically involved DWS reporting attendance to the agency. Those who were referred to DWS but never went all indicated they had employment quickly and did not need any other assistance.

Current Situation and Moving Forward

Only one respondent was still receiving housing assistance at the time of the interview. Of the remaining 24, half were covering their own housing costs through earned income. For the others, 6 were living doubled up with family members, 2 were on Section 8 housing, one was being supported by their church and one had taken out payday loans. There were also 2 families who were not in stable housing.

Respondents were asked about the likelihood that they will need assistance in the future. Nearly half the respondents (45.8%) felt they had a better than 50/50 chance that they would not need housing assistance again in the near future. When asked “what would have to

happen so that you would not need to use housing assistance in the future” one-third felt confident relying on their current job. Another one-third recognized the need to secure more hours, find better wages or return to school to be able to get a better job. The final one-third was relying on the support of another and thus was focused on securing that relationship.

Finally, respondents were asked to share suggestions for improving the program in the future. Ideas for improvement focused on reducing some of the barriers to accessing the resources and adjusting the program to meet individual situations. Several others indicated they were unaware of the help and suffered for many months before learning about the program. Other comments reflected the stress of families in crisis and needing understanding of their feelings of stresses and being overwhelmed. As one person said,

- *They need to humanize it more. Just make it so you don't have to go through hoops only to get a "maybe" from someone. I understand that they have guidelines, and that's okay, but I wish it could be more by circumstances and have them ask "How can we help you?" It takes 3-4 days to even hear back from them and then they just say that they're too busy for me. They shouldn't make it so hard to get assistance, even like food stamps and Medicaid. My car is breaking down, I'm barely paying my utilities, I have \$5 to my name, and I don't get paid until next Friday.*

Others focused on wishing for more help in improving their employment situation even if they were already working. Comments included:

- *Do more to help people find better jobs. I admit they didn't make me look for work when I got the housing because I was already working part time and going to school full time but they should have a way to help even if you have a job if it doesn't pay enough. It is too stressful!*
- *Overall it really helped us. Unfortunately I need to just figure out better employment so I could make more. Maybe they could have the program last just a couple more months so you would be a little more stable and strong on your feet.*

In addition to the suggestions for improvement, many expressed gratitude for receiving the assistance.

- *I'm thankful that I'm not stuck in the welfare trap now and can be back on my feet. I wish they would do more though to keep you off of assistance, like maybe they could follow up with you for like a year and have better outcomes.*
- *We were so distraught! It was just so hopeful that we would finally have a home. It was so bad I can't even remember several months just before we started getting help. It was awful but now it is so good!*

TANF RR Agency Personnel

A total of 13 agencies are currently receiving TANF RR funds. Eleven of the contracts are monitored by a representative from the Housing and Community Development (HCD) division of DWS. Two additional contracts (Asian Association and The Road Home) are monitored by a TANF program specialist.

A representative from each agency was invited to participate in a conversation to learn more about the agencies' experiences with managing TANF RR funds. Interviews were conducted with at least one representative from 11 of the 13 agencies. In addition, the contract monitor

from HCD was also interviewed. Table 3 presents a summary of the findings relative to specific administrative practices within the agencies and will be discussed here.

Table 3: TANF RR Agency Practices

Age ncy	Assistance Type Given	DWS Meeting Prerequisite	Other funding available	Checks for duplicate resouces	Accept rate	Referral source
8	Prev. mostly; a little RR	Yes	xxx	Client track TEVs	60-70of apps 90% with all in	WOM; fam/frnds
13	Almost all prevention	Yes unless rent due that day	American Express	Docs from DWS, employers; landlords check past rent source	Pretty high; pre-screened by CM	IRC and CCS; in house
1	Mix of RR and prev.	Yes	CSBG – FEMA; extends TANF \$	Ask on app. We do Co. housing; DWS; people tell	80% after pre-screening;	Community agencies
11	Focus prev. also RR	No for first month; yes after	xxx	Self-declare; letter why past sup. ended	long	DWS; 211; our food bank; com. agency
10	Prevention mostly; a little RR	Yes except if near eviction	xxx	DWS; HMIS; ask fam who they have asked	40% don't meet criteria; do pre-screening	DWS; 211; walk-in; housing; fam/frnd; web
9	RR only; no Prev. per DWS policy	<i>Meeting must be set up prior to month 1</i>	Pamela Atkinson unified funds	HMIS; TEVS DVA fax [rp database; other com agencies	20% of those we talk to come back	DWS; 2 homeless shelters; fam/frnds
7	Mostly prev. but some RR	xxx	No other in area	Client track; housing letter; check other payer	90% or so; they know what it is ahead of time	Walk in ; another agency
6	Prevention only	No; pay until hear from DWS of NP	xxx	Landlord letter; who else paying rent; or dbled up with	Capacity limited; several exclusion processes then acceptance high	Our website advertise; other ag. TRH, LDS, YWCA
4	RR only	No; but usually do 90%	ESG	HMIS TANF; warrants; Pierpont Pyramid	75% elig. But lots don't follow through	Shelter/ motels; DWS; drug court; outside co.
3	Mix of RR and prevention	Yes	CDBG	HMIS; confirm with LL	95% after screening out;	25% EC; 25% Landlords; WOM; housing office; Other agencies
12	100% RR	No for first month; yes after	ESG; shelter plus care	Pierpont Pyramid; HMIS	55% of fam in shelter have done RR; nearly all qualify	DWS; other agencies; YWCA; CAP; VOA

Agency Interview Findings

All agencies currently receiving funding for TANF RR were invited to participate as partners in using TANF RR funds; that is, there was no competitive process. Each agency worked with its local DWS staff, forming a local partnership. This relationship was supported through interactions with a state representative monitoring the use of the funds.

TANF RR Agency and DWS Connections

Agency representatives (ARs) were asked to talk about their relationships and interactions with state personnel regarding the TANF RR funds. The two primary connections between agencies and DWS include the local office liaison and the state contract monitor. The local office liaison is assigned to meet with the RR participant and set up a plan for securing or improving employment. ARs often spoke of having a very close working relationship with these individuals and how important this connection is for the success of the program. Especially in areas with larger numbers of participants, ARs often speak with the liaison almost daily, others have a set weekly meeting to discuss common clients.

The role of the state contract monitor was also greatly appreciated by agency representatives. This person (Marion or Lani until very recently) provides several key services that were viewed as critical to program success. These included:

- intensive training at the beginning of the project to ensure we were running the program correctly and then training new agency personnel managing the RR funds
- updates and ongoing training on changes in policy and procedures
- a ready resource to answer questions regarding specific, unique cases
- support in implementing program improvements based on findings from the yearly monitoring sessions

The role of the state contract monitor was especially valuable when there were significant changes in policy around the TANF RR grant. The largest change seemed to focus on the inclusion of the employment pathway. Training around this and other significant changes was very important to make sure everyone was implementing the program as designed.

ARs were then asked to comment on the availability of DWS personnel at both the local and state level. Across the board everyone was pleased with the availability of the state contract monitors. Whether through emails or phone calls, questions were answered very quickly and completely. Follow-up on questions was also common to ensure things were going well. The availability of DWS personnel at the office level, however, was less consistent.

While most ARs felt like they were able to connect with the local DWS TANF RR liaison, some did not have the same experience. Several spoke about leaving multiple messages for the liaisons in an attempt to find out about benefit use, attendance at the required meeting or workshop, etc. Some ARs reported similar experiences for TANF RR participants who struggled to set up meetings with the liaison. There were also times when the RR person at DWS was unavailable and a family was in crisis. This lack of communication can create very expensive problems. Turnover among the DWS liaisons made developing stronger connections between the agencies more difficult.

In addition to sharing family information and engagement activities, some ARs wondered why the employment plan could not be shared. The ARs do not want to require too much of participants if they are already fully engaged with DWS. Sharing plans (both ways) would help the entities work together with the family to move toward self-sufficiency.

Program Entry and Eligibility

Referrals into the program came from multiple sources. (See Table 3) Housing agencies were more likely to get referrals from a wide range of sources. Other agencies with their own shelters or community outreach facilities were likely to work with internal referrals. Four of the 11 specifically mentioned receiving referrals from DWS. Some of the larger agencies only open their TANF RR funds at certain times of the month and then chose applications from the pool received during that period. The type of agency managing the RR funds also influenced the population served. Some agencies only provided funds for homelessness prevention while others provided funding only for those currently homeless (and even the definition of homeless varied between agencies). A few provided some funding to both. (See Table 3)

Several agencies use a specific pre-screening process to help ensure that potential participants do not go through the entire application process if they are screened out as ineligible. Agencies with multiple funding streams can sometimes screen applicants for several programs at the same time. If they are not eligible for one, they may be eligible for another or be a better match for another. Most of these initial meetings occur in the agency office. A couple of agencies use alternate methods for specific reasons including traveling to a local domestic violence shelter for anonymity and conducting phone interviews when the clients are located very miles from the office.

Eligibility for TANF RR varied widely by agency. This may be due to participants needing to meet both DWS and the specific agency guidelines to obtain and retain funding. Most ARs could quickly relay the general DWS criteria. The common criteria included the list of documents, eligible child, below income level, etc. Other criteria include where the family lives, the presence or absence of a disability, having an eviction notice in hand, etc.

While some eligibility criteria are relatively clear cut, others are more vague. Determining how likely a participant is to be able to take over rent in 4 months, determining if the crisis is “outside the participant’s control,” or that “if it is not for TANF they would be living on the street,” leaves the door open for broad interpretation. One AR spoke of going through a potential participant’s bank statement. She said, “If I see they spend it all on fast food then I don’t qualify them. I tell them ‘you are not vulnerable, it has been your choice.’” To determine true homelessness, another AR requires families saying they live in their car to take her outside “so I can see their pillows and belongings inside.”

It also became clear that the ARs do not all understand the TANF RR DWS criteria in the same way. One AR indicated that they are not allowed to serve anyone unless they are homeless, which to them did not include those who are behind on rent or doubled up with others. Other ARs very commonly help families in these types of situations.

The biggest challenge for most potential participants is securing documents, especially getting birth certificates and social security cards. Lack of documentation is a common reason for failing to receive RR funds. Several ARs wondered why DWS cannot provide copies of these

documents when they are in the participant's file. (Although one AR did say she was able to get documents by just having the client get a copy from DWS and bring it to her office. Others did not know this was possible.)

Overall, ARs feel the process of determining eligibility goes pretty well. It is very complicated, especially for a family in crisis and living in very unstable situations. Some ARs pro-actively assist participants in navigating the process while others simply give the family a list and ask them to return when they have everything on the list. It must be very overwhelming. As one AR said, "When I go through all that is required – most people don't come back."

Calculating an "acceptance rate" is challenging for two reasons, first, agencies have different definitions of when someone starts the process, and second there are multiple places where potential participants can fall out of the process. ARs described several phases through which participants may go depending on the agency. Some agencies describe the whole process to people before any application can be submitted. Others have all those seeking housing assistance complete a pre-screening tool prior to talking with them about the program. Some agencies receive so many requests that program capacity limits the number of pre-screened applicants who can be reviewed. There are also many potential participants that apply and are eligible but are never able to complete the extensive application process. As noted earlier, some families the agencies said were served never actually received any funding. Thus, there is a significant gap between the number found eligible and those who complete an application and receive funding.

People are generally determined ineligible due to income being a little too high, already on Section 8 housing, no end in sight to the crisis, disabled and rent too high, but most of these determinations happen prior to the family submitting an application. Several ARs did not perceive that they had ever found anyone "ineligible" because all families are pre-screened and thus only eligible families apply. When a family is found ineligible (or it is determined up front that they do not meet the eligibility criteria) most ARs attempt to help the family connect to another housing resource such as a church or other community agency.

ARs were asked to make suggestions for changing the eligibility determination process and criteria. All ARs indicated an appreciation of the employment focus for this funding source and thus the need to focus on capacity to work as an eligibility requirement. The most common desired change was easier access to DWS copies of birth certificates and social security cards where available. There was also interest in continued training so that eligibility criteria remain clear.

One final factor which should be acknowledged is the overall lack of affordable housing for TANF RR participants. Several ARs indicated that they have approved families for funding who were never able to find a place with rent low enough to be approved. It is not helpful to move a family into an apartment they will never be able to afford once the funding stops. As one AR noted, "I tell people you think the application is hard, wait till you look for a place to live! You really have to be at the right place at the right time."

Typical TANF RR Participants

There are a variety of agencies managing the TANF RR funds. The typical profile of TANF RR participants is generally determined by the population they serve at their agency overall and then filtered through the TANF RR eligibility criteria.

When asked to describe the profile of people or families served by TANF RR funds, there was some consensus on common characteristics. Most ARs indicated a large portion of the participants are single parents, many of whom had been working and supporting their families but then had some type of crisis. Many have been living doubled up with one or more other families and could no longer live there. Although not as many, there are two-parent families as well. These families can be easier to work with as there are more options for employment to show sustainability. Often these families have reduced hours at work or have been laid off recently. Medical issues or underemployment can impact the ability to keep up on rent. Thus the prevention cases are typically families who are behind on rent or are moving to someplace less expensive but still need help with the first month's rent and deposit.

Whether the family is headed by a single parent or two-parents, the most common event precipitating the need for help is job loss or significant extended reduction in hours. Families who live paycheck to paycheck can find themselves with no safety net when a crisis hits. Families who are doubled up with others often pay something to stay there. No income creates great strain and can lead to needing another housing option. If this cycle has been repeated, then returning for help again may not be an option. TANF RR is often truly a resource of last resort when all else has failed.

Proving that a family truly has no other resources is sometimes difficult. However, agencies do use outside resources to show there has been a good faith effort. Table 3 lists the types of checks agencies make to determine if other resources are being accessed. In some communities the TANF RR agency is the only provider of housing assistance. Several ARs also said they ask families about their other options and typically find them to be very straight forward in providing truthful answers.

Agency and DWS Case Management

The level of case management provided by the TANF RR agency varies widely depending on the capacity of the agency and the agency's view of their role in the process. All agencies are clearly responsible for determining eligibility and setting up the family in the TANF RR program. From here agency involvement varies widely. Some agencies work with participants several times a month at first then less often as they get settled. Most agencies require that each family meet with the agency monthly to "recertify" their eligibility for funding. Some require the family to attend various workshops on budgeting, tenants' rights, etc.

While there is a common understanding that DWS manages all the employment resources and needs, other types of engagement with a family can be helpful. ARs were asked about the value of incorporating home visits into their case management process. A few indicated they lacked either the time or willingness (citing safety issues) to experience families in their homes, however several thought this might be a good way of connecting with family in a more relaxed environment. It would also allow the worker to experience the family's living situation and potential other needs, such as furniture, drapes, bedding, etc.

The intensity of case management also depended on the manner in which funding was distributed. One AR spoke of "typically" only giving one month of assistance so they could help more people. Another indicated they usually help with back rent and this often means 2 - 4 months or arrears at one time with no other contact or case management. Especially at the beginning, this case management work with families can be very time consuming.

ARs were asked to estimate how many hours per week they typically working on the TANF RR program. Responses to this question varied widely as grant sizes differ greatly. However several ARs indicated they spend much more time working with TANF RR clients than they are paid for by the grant. Typically they take money from other sources to cover this time. The application process, gathering documents, writing notes, etc. are very time consuming. Several ARs expressed confusion over what activities are covered by the TANF RR grant. Some said they are not paid for talking with people, explaining the program, doing pre-screening etc., but only are compensated when someone entered the program. Others work very intensively while there are funds available and then do little to nothing once the money runs out. The issue of grant funding for administrative activities was very confusing to several ARs.

One of the most important decisions that ARs are asked to make is determining whether or not a family must be referred to DWS for employment services. Several ARs indicated they do not actually make any decision but refer every family to DWS and let DWS decide what work needs to be done with the family. Some do this, as they said, so they do not “get in trouble” for not sending EVERYONE as the new rules require. Others indicated they like everyone to connect with DWS so the DWS liaison can make sure the family is receiving all available resources. One AR was frustrated that they did not have the authority to decide that a referral to DWS was unnecessary – such as when a person had full time family-sustaining work but needed just one month of help to bridge a period of recover from surgery.

Interestingly, several ARs had no problem sending or not sending some categories of families such as those receiving SSI/SSDI or the under employed. Overall, there were many different understandings of who should or should not be referred to DWS. It was common for ARs to report that when such questions arose they felt comfortable calling Lani and she could give them permission to make exceptions for unique cases. One AR felt the question asking when they might NOT refer a TANF RR participant to DWS was a bad question since “we only use TANF RR for those who are able to work – this question doesn’t apply!”

Employment Pathway

In general, ARs were very pleased with the employment pathway both in philosophy and in practice. As mentioned above, several of the ARs and DWS office liaisons communicate by email to track the activities of participants as they move between the programs. However, this process depends on each partner being able and willing to follow through very timely. This is especially true when the agency has decided not to distribute even the first month of funds until after the family meets with the DWS worker. (See Table 3)

Three of the 11 agencies reported problems with the DWS liaison not getting back to either clients or the AR in a timely manner. Agencies who only distribute funds after the family meets with DWS are waiting to hear from the DWS worker regarding participation. On the other hand, 2 agencies give the family the benefit of the doubt and trust that a family is meeting their DWS obligations unless it is reported otherwise. The problem here is that if a family has already received 3 or 4 months of assistance before the AR knows there is a participation problem, the agency case manager has little leverage to encourage participation. It is clear that very regular communication between the DWS liaison and the AR is critical to making the employment pathway successful. Several pairings are doing very well in this area and could serve as models for others strengthening their pathway.

All ARs believe that customers understand there is an employment part of the TANF RR program. Several ARs expressed frustration however that they were not very clear on what DWS is doing with families meeting with them for employment support. Some ARs have heard that DWS just notes the participants attendance and then has them job search on the computer many hours a day. Others asked for education or training assistance and DWS said these are not available. One AR made a suggestion that could help with this lack of clarity regarding what is happening at DWS.

“In the past we would also get a copy of the employment plan when we met for follow-up. Now we are encouraged NOT to request a copy of the employment plan. We are not sure why that is happening as the client also puts together a plan with us. It was really helpful to have a copy of the employment plan so that the two could be compared and we could make sure we were not pulling the client in too many directions and that the plans complimented each other. It is more scattered now. And without DWS giving them much direction other than just being told to go job search, there is less support.”

Given that there are releases of information on both sides, this seems like a logical request.

Because meeting with DWS is a requirement for receiving benefits, ARs know that if someone is not meeting with DWS, the next month's benefits are not to be issued. However, several ARs indicated they make several attempts to contact the families who are not following through to find out what else might be hindering participation. This practice helps those willing to engage, but struggling with other crises, to get the support needed to connect with DWS. Some agencies with multiple funding streams might move a family into a different program if they are in too much crisis at the moment to work with DWS. As long as the family is engaged in helping itself, the focus can shift from work first to housing stability. However most agencies managing TANF RR funds do rely on engagement with their agency and DWS as the primary factor related to termination. In fact, ARs overwhelmingly indicated that “termination” of a family from the TANF RR program is rare. The very challenging process for entering the program eliminates those unable to follow through on many activities. The meetings with DWS eliminate those not willing to engage in work activities. If a family makes it to the point of completing the application and meeting with DWS, they are likely to continue until they have used all their months of eligibility.

When asked what improvement they would suggest regarding the employment pathway, ARs focused on:

- streamlining the documentation process;
- better training on what DWS does with families so we can communicate this to the families ahead of time;
- the need for more specific information on what is expected of families and of them;
- improving the quality of employment supports and services families receive at DWS;
- giving the ARs more authority to decide who should or should not be referred to DWS;
- providing access to employment plans for better service coordination and helping families be successful where possible in completing the plan.

What is Success?

For DWS the goal of the employment pathway (and the entire TANF RR program) is to have participants reach self-sufficiency (i.e. being able to continue paying their own rent and utilities) at the end of their TANF RR funding. While some ARs had additional components to add, all agreed this too is their definition of success in TANF RR.

Many of the ARs reported very few TANF RR participants ever returning to their agency seeking housing assistance and this was a positive experience. A few families have needed a couple more months of assistance and have been extended using funds from other sources, but this is rare. A few recognized that just because people were not returning to their agency did not mean that everyone had remained successful. Families may have had to leave the area or they just knew they could no longer receive any assistance. Several ARs indicated a desire to find ways to better track the long term outcomes of TANF RR participants to see if more could be learned about what works.

Given the high levels of “success,” it is good to note what ARs experience as the most critical parts of the program that support this success. Almost all the ARs indicated that having the employment pathway, requiring participation and providing employment supports were key to the program’s success. The next most often mentioned factor was the 4 months of support. This element is critical to not just helping a family “stand up again after falling down”, but to then re-stabilize, remain upright and move forward.

Areas for Improvement

ARs were asked to describe any aspects of the program that “get in the way or make managing this funding source challenging.” A couple of ARs indicated that it is mostly the clients that get in the way of their own progress, however, the most common response focused on confusion over the rules and regulations around the funding. What are suggestions and what are rules? How do we know when the criteria changes (and it changes a lot)? Where do we have discretion? Even some basic rules are unclear. “When do we start billing for a client? When we start working with them or when they are housed? We usually don’t get someone housed the first day we work with them.” The answers are not always consistent depending on who one talks to at DWS.

Another area of improvement included ARs getting a better understanding of what is happening with TANF RR participants at DWS. As one person said, “They only have to meet with the DWS EC once; it is not very organized and planned after that and it feels very wide open. Maybe people should have to meet a little more often to make sure things are on track and we could help with that.” Not all ARs were aware of e-share and how to use it to access client data. Those who are aware of this resource find it most helpful.

This interest in what is happening at DWS is not limited to the RR employment activities. ARs would like to know much more about how DWS works. ARs asked questions such as: How does DWS emergency assistance work? What are the time limits on resources and what are the maximums allowed for assistance? How can I get my clients into training? What training is available and what are the rules around getting this help? TANF RR participants and other agency participants often become the most regular source of information regarding DWS. In

addition, ARs could communicate the resources and services available at their agencies so DWS could also make appropriate referrals to them.

To deal with such questions, ARs were hopeful about possibly having more regular contact with the DWS coordinator to have a forum for asking these questions both about the program and other DWS services.

Moving Forward

At the end of the conversation, each AR was asked to make suggestions for improving the program in the future. Several ARs simply reiterated comments made earlier in the interview and expressed gratitude for the program in general. In addition, there were some new ideas.

Several ARs were aware that the RFG is coming out in the next few months. Suggestions relative to the new funding include requests for additional funding to better meet the needs of those moving toward employment. ARs working with some of the shelters talked about the possibility of having some flexibility, especially with people who are dealing with high risk factors. The “progressive employment empowerment model” was suggested as a way to keep focused on employment while keeping the pace of change manageable for very challenged families. Workers in these agencies would and should be required to take a very active role in providing more intensive case management services to support success.

ARs who are aware of the emphasis on taking two-generation approaches to ending poverty asked about creating opportunities for children in this process. While there were no solid ideas presented, just beginning to think about how children are affected by homelessness and how their experience could be managed better in this process would be helpful.

DISCUSSION

The TANF RR program has provided many families with the opportunity to stabilize in housing and return to the self-sufficiency they have known in the past. In general, both ARs and program participants were very pleased with the program and grateful to have the resources available. There was also general consensus that having a program focused on employment and stabilizing families so that they can take responsibility for themselves and their families is a good thing.

As preparations are made for releasing the RFG, the question becomes how can the information from these findings be incorporated into the next round of funding for the TANF RR program? To assist with this process, a list of questions, needs and conflicting information regarding the program will be listed below. DWS will have the challenge of determining how each of these questions can or should be addressed in the RFG or in subsequent training and monitoring activities.

Eligibility

- There is a great need to create and maintain a clear pathway for communicating changes in policy and to ensure that agencies are trained and up to date on changes.

- Determine if DWS can provide copies of BC and Social Security cards (if they have them) to TANF RR agencies so families do not get dropped due to not having these documents.
- How much discretion do individual agencies have in determining their own criteria for eligibility? Does that include deciding whether or not to do either prevention or RR or both?
- What happens when an agency's criteria and DWS criteria do not match? Does one take precedence?
- What are the rules around when a family member must be sent to DWS? Are there exceptions? Who gets to decide is an exception can be made?
- Should there be a policy in place requiring acceptance into TANF RR if a customer is sent from DWS to a TANF RR funded agency?
- What kind of recourse might a family have if they feel like they have been denied funding inappropriately?

DWS Activities

- How can the DWS employment plan activities required of TANF RR participants be shared with the ARs so they can support participants in successfully completing these activities?
- Is there any type of monitoring that can be done to ensure DWS is *actively* working with TANF RR recipients in their job search efforts? Or possibly exploring training options, etc.
- DWS on-site personnel need training on what information they can share with ARs
- ARs request that the DWS office liaison be better trained and kept up to date on the program parameters, policies and procedures of TANF RR. They should also be very knowledgeable of other DWS resources and be aware of passing on information to the agency so they can help clients (even beyond RR participants) access DWS resources.
- Can a pathway be established which requires the DWS case worker to get in touch with the AR timely if a customer is not participating? This would help agency better know if the next month of funding should be provided.

Ongoing training of TANF RR ARs

- Is it possible to write into the RFG a set of "required activities" for all TANF RR ARs? These might include activities such as quarterly conference calls for communicating policy changes, program issues, and even sharing best practices? It might even be helpful to require attendance at a session, perhaps linked to the homeless summit, where TANF ARs can meet each other and discuss program issues.
- Expand knowledge of and access to e-share. Those who use it, love it.
- Looking at the larger picture it seems that much more time is spent with the family determining eligibility than in ongoing case management; is that the way TANF RR is supposed to function?

- Is there space in the program to allow a DWS RR case manager and the agency case manager to work together (with the family) in creating a plan that both matches the goal of the program and respects the unique situation of specific clients?

Use of Funds

- There is uncertainty as to when the money starts to count against the family; if we pay an application fee in one month, that month counts against the family; is that true? If we do case management for one month prior to the family getting into housing does that count as one of their 4 months?

- Another part of the question above is when an agency can start billing TANF RR for time spent with a client? Do pre-screening sessions count? How is that tracked?

Outcomes

- DWS measures a lot more outcomes than are on the contracts right now; how are the outcomes being measured clearly communicated to the agencies providing the resources so they better understand the focus of the grant and what needs to be tracked?

- Determining a common definition to identify when a participant has “entered” the program will be necessary to calculate participation rates

Agency Interview Questions

- How did you first learn about the funding available from DWS for RR?
- What made you decide to accept the funding focused on providing RR?
- Once you received the money, describe your ongoing connection with DWS?
(Also Lani – Housing and Community Development/DWS)
- How accessible were the DWS people when you needed them to answer questions regarding the funding?

Entry

- How do you receive referrals/participants into the program?
- If defined, what is the profile of a person or family that you serve?
- How did you determine this profile?
- What typically happens that results in a family needing to access your RR resources?
- What steps do you go through to make sure the family or individual is not already receiving resources elsewhere?
- Does enrollment in the program typically happen where the client was living or in the agency office?
- What is your process for determining eligibility?
- How has that gone for you?
- What is the general rate of acceptance?
- What happens if someone is found ineligible?
- Any concerns about it or changes you would like to see made to eligibility criteria, process?

Work with Client Agency/DWS

- Describe your case management process:
 - Caseload size?
 - Typical activities/types of services provided to clients?
- What was the process for evaluating whether or not an individual must be referred to DWS for employment services?
- What are the types of circumstances in which customers are not referred to DWS?
- When a family is determined eligible for TANF Rapid Rehousing funding the contractor must refer all adult work eligible (physically and mentally capable of working, legally able to work, and not on the SSI track) household members to the Department of Workforce Service (DWS) Rapid Rehousing Employment Specialist
- When a client is required work with DWS, how has the “employment pathway” worked for you? How have the different parts worked for you:
 - referral process
 - being informed of participation
 - awareness of job search and employment activities?
- What were the consequences of not following through with DWS?
 - What happens with the customer? What are next steps?
- Do you believe customers understand the job search component of the RR program?
Why or why not?
- What is your termination policy?
 - How has it been used over the past year?
 - Any concerns about it or changes you would like to see made

- Were any terminated? How did that go?
- What could be incorporated into the program that would help you know what DWS has available to clients so you could make a referral?
- Once the family is in the program, what value might there be in doing some type of work with the family in their home? [Assessment for additional resources needed, etc.]
- What is the quality of the communication is there between DWS and your agency/caseworkers?
 - How has that working relationship in general been for you?
 - How could be improved to be more effective for you and clients?
- What suggestions do you have for change in the employment pathway process for DWS or for what is expected of participants?

Post RR

- For DWS “self-sufficiency” is defined as being able to continue rent and utility payments after four months of assistance.
- How well does this match where your clients are at when they leave RR?
- As far as you are concerned, what defines “success” in RR?
- What are the critical parts of the program that support success for your clients receiving RR funding?

General Questions:

What aspects of the program, as you understand it, get in the way or make managing this funding source challenging? For example:

- reporting requirements?
- limitations on use of funds?
- interactions with DWS case workers?
- How has it been reaching the Outcomes required by your contract? How realistic are these outcomes?
- What other types of funding do you have for housing? How are these used in conjunction with the TANF RR funds?
- If changes were to be made in the future what would you recommend?
- What are some unique community issues around housing in your area?
- About how much time per week or month does it take to administer this program in your area?
- How would you describe the “ideal family” for the RR program?
- What do you see as the overall purpose of RR and how well is this purpose being met with this program?
- Given your understanding of the rules and parameters around using the funding? [scope of service, participant characteristics required, limitations of funding etc.] anything you wish were different?
- What suggestions do you have for improving the program for agencies that may want to participate in the future?

TANF RR Participant Survey

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to learn more about the experiences of those who participated in the Rapid Rehousing program and to use this information to make improvements to the program. Your views are very important. We will use this information to make recommendations to the Department of Workforce Services and managers of the local Rapid Rehousing programs on how they can improve their services.

Introduction (READ):

This survey is focused on the Rapid Rehousing program where families can get help with paying rent or getting a place to live if they are homeless.

- A1. Does the Rapid Rehousing program sound familiar to you?
1 - Yes (GO TO A2) 0 - No (continue) 2 - Unsure (continue)

A1a. If no or unsure, explain program further.

Does that sound familiar?

- 1 - Yes (Go to A2) 0 - Still no (continue) 2 - Still unsure (continue)
[Orient R to the time frame to see if this helps the recall.]

- A2. Our information shows that you received housing assistance earlier this year?
Does that sound right to you?

- 1- Yes (go to A2) 0 - No (If no, confirm name, etc.)

A3. What agency did you work with to receive Rapid Rehousing?

A4. In what month did you start receiving RR assistance?

A5. Has that assistance ended or are you still receiving assistance?

- 1 - Ended/ or ends this month (Go to A6) 2 - Continuing past this month (cont.)

A5_1. How many more months will you receive assistance before it ends?
_____ months

A6. Are you living in the original place where you first started receiving RR assistance?

- 1 - Yes (GO TO B1) 0 - No (continue)

A6_a. If not, where were you living when you started receiving RR assistance?
(That is the place RR was paying for)

A6_b. What happened that you needed to leave that original RR location?

Housing Troubles

B1. So, thinking back to when you started to try and get help with housing, what happened that made it so you needed this type of help?

B2. How did you find out that this type of help was available at [...Name of agency...]?

B3. How would you describe your relationship with [...Name of agency...]?

(long-term, short-term, case management, ongoing contact?):

- B4. When asking for help with housing, how was the program explained to you?
(length of time, approximate amount, scope of coverage, etc.)
- B5. What activities (if any) did or do you have to do in order to keep your housing assistance?
- B6. Did the agency talk to you about or help you with looking for a job?
1 – Yes 0 – No 2 – I don't remember

Once you were in housing:

- C1. In addition to the RR funding of your housing, what additional types of assistance did you receive from [...Name of Agency....]?
- C2. What other types of referrals or resources did you receive from [...Name of Agency...]?
Describe:
- C3. After you started getting RR rent assistance, were you ever referred to DWS for help finding a job (or help improving your employment situation)?
1 – Yes (continue) 0 – No (Go to D1)
- C3a. What did [..Name of Agency..] say was the reason you were referred to DWS?
- C3a_1. Did you go to DWS after you were referred?
1 – Yes (continue) 0 – No (Go to C4.)
- C3a_2. About how often did you meet with DWS?
- C3a_3. What kind of help did you receive from DWS?
- C3a_4. What did the DWS worker explain to you about the requirements of the RR program?
- C3a_5. Was there any communication between the people helping you with housing and the work you were doing with DWS?
1 – Yes (continue) 0 – No (Go to C3a_6)
- C3a_5a. If yes, please explain:
- C3a_6. What else can/could DWS provide that would be of help to you as part of the RR program?
(Go to D1)
- C4. What was the main reason you never went to DWS after you were referred?

Next Steps:

- D1. What would have to happen (or maybe is already happening) that will make it so you do not need help with housing again in the near future?
- D2. How likely do you think it is that you will need assistance with housing in the future?
- D3. How would you describe your housing situation in the time since you ended the RR program – up to and including your current situation?
D3a. How are you managing your housing costs on your own today?
GO TO D5
- D4. If still receiving assistance:
- D4_1a. What is your plan for managing your housing costs after your assistance ends?
- D4_1b. What kind of help are you getting to help you prepare for losing the assistance?
- D5. What suggestions do you have for improving the program for those who may participate in the future?
- D6. Any other comments you would like to make about your experience with the RR program that should be considered in the future?