



## **EMPLOYMENT NAVIGATOR** CONNECTING HOMELESS FAMILIES TO WORKFORCE SYSTEMS

BUILDING CHANGES TRANSFORMS THE WAYS COMMUNITIES WORK TOGETHER TO END HOMELESSNESS

## About Building Changes

Building Changes is a nonprofit organization working to end homelessness across Washington state. We foster collaborative partnerships with government entities, community-based service providers, and private philanthropy and harness innovative, evidence-based strategies to collectively address the barriers to housing stability. We support our partners to do this work through our grantmaking, capacity building, and policy guidance. As a result, people at risk will avoid homelessness, and those who are homeless will be connected to services that move them into jobs and homes.

## About Our Approach

Building Changes is working to advance evidence-based, results-oriented solutions to ending homelessness. Our approach is a mix of both proven and promising practices, many of which are being implemented in communities across the country. We are learning as we go from our own programs and incorporating new ideas from other communities as we apply these strategies:

**Prevention:** Help people who are at risk of becoming homeless with services that stabilize them before they end up in shelter or on the streets.

**Coordinated Entry and Assessment:** For those who become homeless, simplify their access to housing and services by coordinating their applications and referring them to programs that have worked for people like them.

**Rapid Re-Housing and other Housing Resources:** Quickly provide the type, amount, and duration of housing assistance that each individual or family needs.

**Tailored Programs and Services:** Match the services to the particular individual's or family's needs instead of using one-size-fits all approaches.

**Economic Opportunities:** Help people stabilize their housing, long-term, by supporting educational and workforce development opportunities.

**Evaluation:** Collect data and continually evaluate the impact of these approaches in order to improve, and scan the country for innovative ideas to bring to our communities.

## About the Washington Families Fund

Building Changes oversees the Washington Families Fund, a unique public-private partnership created in 2004 by the Washington State Legislature. The Washington Families Fund is dedicated to reducing and ending family homelessness statewide by funding model programs and innovative strategies that address the problems of homelessness both at a systems and family level.

## About This Report

“Employment Navigator: Connecting Homeless Families to Workforce Systems” is one in a series of reports documenting the implementation of the Washington Families Fund Systems Initiative under way in three Washington State counties—King, Pierce, and Snohomish. Funded by Building Changes and by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, this initiative is part of a comprehensive systems change intervention designed to prevent and end family homelessness in our state. Each of these three counties has developed a plan to reduce homelessness by 50 percent by 2020.

These reports help funders, homeless housing and services providers, government entities, and stakeholders from other systems to learn from this work. See our Web site [www.BuildingChanges.org](http://www.BuildingChanges.org) for a library of additional resources, including case studies, best-practice reports, plans, and toolkits.

# Background

## Introduction

Vulnerable, unstably housed families face numerous barriers to employment that keep them in poverty and at risk of homelessness. In recent years, new cross-systems partnerships have resulted in effective strategies and programs that support families in becoming stable and improving their lives over the long-term. One such strategy is the Housing and Employment Navigator model, which packages workforce and housing services for homeless families. This model has been funded in part by the Washington Families Fund (WFF) and under way in counties across Washington State since 2010.

Housing and Employment Navigators' case management teams help families by facilitating connections between homeless assistance and housing, workforce systems, and the state Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) TANF. While promising, the implementation of the Navigator model has varied among participating counties, which has made it difficult to assess and understand its overall effectiveness. With the intent of creating a cross-system best practice that can be expanded and replicated to more regions across Washington State, Housing and Employment Navigator partners sought federal funding to develop and evaluate an updated model.

This paper provides background on how the Housing and Employment Navigator model was initially developed and a detailed overview of the emerging model currently under way. The hope is that this new model will yield important data and insights for building a best practice among the housing and homeless system, workforce development, and DSHS.

## Paving the Way

As early as 2005, Building Changes and its funding and provider partners recognized the importance of employment as a factor in stabilizing and increasing self-sufficiency among families who were experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. While Washington State and the Puget Sound region were known for innovative models and programs for addressing homelessness, at that time the region did not have a comprehensive plan for improving access to employment services for homeless people.

Building Changes sought out city, county, government, and workforce system partners and engaged a workgroup to gain understanding of how access to employment services, workforce programs, and other resources could be improved. Findings and recommendations from the workgroup's research, *Developing Community and Employment Pathways for Homeless Job Seekers in King County and Washington State*,<sup>1</sup> and later from five-year

---

<sup>1</sup> "Developing Community and Employment Pathways for Homeless Job Seekers in King County & Washington State: A Report of the Taking Health Care Home Initiative." Seattle-King County Taking Health Care Home, Seattle. February 2007.

outcomes from the Washington Families Fund Moderate-Needs Families programs,<sup>2</sup> revealed the following needs among families, the housing providers who served them, and the workforce system:

- **Families** who were stabilized in WFF housing experienced an increase in employment income from 20 percent at program entry to 36 percent at program exit. However, actual income increased from just \$891 a month to \$1,221 per month – an improvement, but not a wage allowing for family self-sufficiency. Two-thirds of these families were also receiving TANF, which meant they also were participating in WorkFirst.
- **Grantee providers** funded by WFF typically did not maintain strong connections to the workforce system and lacked the capacity to engage and support families in employment and training services. Both providers and families

were unfamiliar with all the resources available from the workforce, TANF, and education systems.

- **Local mainstream workforce systems** had homeless programs in place, but they were not focused on increasing access by homeless jobseekers to Workforce Investment Act (WIA) services or other sources of workforce funding, and in general, they were not structured to meet the complex needs of homeless families seeking employment and training.

Findings also illuminated what vulnerable families typically experience:

- Low rates of employment
- Wages and earnings below self-sufficiency levels
- Complicated lives and multiple barriers to permanent housing and employment
- Systems that are not aligned with each other to meet family needs

---

<sup>2</sup> “Washington Families Fund Five-Year Report 2004-2009.” Building Changes, Seattle. 2009

# Housing and Employment Navigators: Connecting Systems to Serve Families

Armed with this information Building Changes identified an opportunity for cross-systems partnerships that would apply some of the strategies and lessons learned from five years of Washington Families Fund (WFF) programming:

- Create focused outreach to families
- Utilize team case management to fit family needs
- Provide families with links to community resources, training, and employers

## King County—YWCA

Building Changes partnered with the Seattle-King County Workforce Development Council (WDC), one of the original partners in the *Employment Pathways* research project, to develop a program concept and the public-private funding model to support it. Together, using information and inspiration from a pilot program already under way and operated by a WDC grantee—the YWCA—they created the first formal Housing and Employment Navigator in King County.

This early Navigator model was designed to increase access to employment opportunities for adults in families that are experiencing homelessness and housing instability by working one-on-one with families and facilitating connections to housing, workforce services, education and training, and other support services. It also served to connect the housing and workforce systems and

expand their capacity to jointly serve and accommodate homeless families seeking employment.

The full partnership included King County Housing Authority, the WDC, WFF grantee providers, and the YWCA, which was given a three-year grant to support one Housing and Employment Navigator position co-located at different housing sites. The Navigator worked directly with WIA eligible homeless job seekers.

## Pierce County—WorkForce Central

In 2011, with funding from WFF and WIA, WorkForce Central (WFC), which oversees the “One Stop” systems and provides WIA services for the county, followed suit and created a full-time Housing and Employment Navigator to serve homeless families from the Pierce County Housing Authority’s Family Permanency Project. In the WFC model, the Navigator was employed by and based within the workforce services. WFC focused on a relationship with the local DSHS/TANF, which brought WorkFirst, Washington’s largest employment program for TANF recipients, to the table. Four transitional housing programs (Exodus House, YWCA, Phoenix House, and the Living Access Support Alliance) in that project made referrals to the Navigator. A designated TANF worker carried a special case load of families working with the Navigator and was part of a case

management team made up of the TANF worker, the Navigator, and the housing case manager.

In both King and Pierce counties, Building Changes partnered with the Navigators to provide training and technical assistance to the WorkSource staff.

## Funding Approach

Building Changes blended funding from the workforce system and the housing services systems to support these initial programs. Local public housing authorities provided funding for project-based housing vouchers, which offered time-limited subsidized housing of typically 24 months. Building Changes, through WFF, supported housing case management offered by the housing programs. In both King and Pierce counties, the Navigator model was jointly funded by WFF and federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds.

## Early Outcomes and Learnings

From 2010 through 2012, the Housing and Employment Navigator model evolved into a team case management approach, involving the housing case manager, the Navigator, and the WorkFirst case manager for TANF recipients. This evolution came about with the recognition that 70 percent of the families participating in the program were DSHS/TANF recipients and needed to meet WorkFirst participation requirements. The Navigator offered individualized and flexible support to help parents served by partnering housing programs use the services available

from WorkSource One-Stop locations (federally funded to include WIA-funded employment services), WorkFirst services for TANF recipients, as well as options for sector training, educational programs, and job placement services. The Navigator model addressed systems inefficiencies by centralizing critical knowledge, skills, and activities and by bridging the gaps between the workforce system and social services agencies, colleges, and employers. Here are some of the outcomes from the early model.

### King County Navigator

- 45 percent of participants exited the program with job placements at the 33<sup>rd</sup> month of the project.<sup>3</sup>
- The hourly wage range was \$8.67 to \$15.00.<sup>4</sup>
- Retention services for exiting participants included: budgeting and money management, managing workplace stress, understanding employer expectations, and developing good work habits.

### Pierce County Navigator

- Two-thirds of families entered high-demand job/sector training.
- More than 90 percent enrolled in WIA.
- 40 percent of families were placed in jobs at the two-year point of the project.
- Joint team staffings included workforce, housing, and TANF.
- Hourly wage range was \$9.45 to \$19.98.

<sup>3</sup> “Employment Outcomes and Performance Benchmarks for Programs Serving Homeless Job Seekers: Report to the Butler Family Foundation.” The ICA Group, Massachusetts. 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

# Moving Forward: Creating a Housing and Employment Navigator Best Practice

Building on the success of the Navigator model in Pierce County and the strong emphasis on connecting all the systems touching families, as well as the funding and partnerships leveraged from the Washington Families Fund (WFF), WorkForce Central (WFC) sought and received a \$6M federal Department of Labor (DOL) Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) grant in 2012. The project's key goal is to demonstrate the impact of pairing effective housing interventions with proven workforce development strategies to improve service access and employment outcomes for families experiencing homelessness. The DOL grant allows for the expansion, replication, and evaluation of the Housing and Employment Navigator Program into geographically and demographically diverse Washington counties (Pierce, Skagit, Whatcom, and Yakima) over a 36-month period starting in 2013. Building Changes assisted WFC in formulating the DOL grant and is providing training, technical assistance, and project implementation with a focus on further developing the Housing and Employment Navigator model as a best practice.

The emerging Housing and Employment Navigator model integrates housing providers supported by WFF and partnerships with local workforce regions and DSHS to engage 360 homeless families served in these communities. The supporting organizations signed a Memorandum of Agreement

## **Workforce Innovation Fund (WIF) Goal<sup>5</sup>**

To support innovative approaches to the design and delivery of employment and training services that generate long-term improvements in the performance of the public workforce system, both in terms of outcomes for job seekers and employer customers and cost-effectiveness. Fund seeks to:

- Re-tool service delivery strategies and/or policy and administrative systems and processes to improve outcomes for workforce system customers; and
- Evaluate the effectiveness of such activities.

demonstrating their commitment to the project (see Appendix for complete list of partners).

The emerging Navigator model will offer a consistent cross-systems approach to engaging and assisting homeless families with resources and strategies that will lead to housing and employment stability. Project outcomes will be thoroughly assessed through a formal evaluation conducted by an external evaluator. By creating and evaluating a clearly defined model that operates in the same way across multiple regions, Building Changes and its partners will be able to identify the extent to which the Navigator model works and why, and derive learnings for a best practice that can be replicated statewide.

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see: [http://www.doleta.gov/workforce\\_innovation/](http://www.doleta.gov/workforce_innovation/)



## Program Goals

Over the 36-month service period of the project, partners hope to demonstrate the effectiveness and sustainability of this approach in serving individuals and families.

- To assist families in obtaining the employment, education, and job training needed to establish a career path toward economic stability, while preventing a return to homelessness
- To demonstrate the impact of pairing effective housing interventions with proven workforce development strategies to improve service access and employment outcomes for families experiencing homelessness
- To develop evidence-based practices in workforce development that can be effectively replicated across Washington State

## Key Program Elements

- Each of three WDC regions employs two FTE Housing and Employment Navigators for a total of six full-time employees, project wide, to serve families referred by partnering housing providers.
- One hundred and twenty families receive Navigator services per region, with an annual total of a minimum of 360 families for the project over three years.
- Housing and Employment Navigators lead a cross-systems team that includes local housing providers and TANF/WorkFirst services.
- Evaluation of the model

## Key Partners and Their Roles

The Navigator model relies on a team approach that combines the skills and resources of government agencies, housing providers, DSHS, and the workforce system in engaging families at various points of the employability, readiness, employment, and employment retention spectrum.

### Workforce Consortium: WorkForce Central, Northwest Workforce Council, and South Central Workforce Council

Each of three workforce partners:

- Employs and supervises two Housing and Employment Navigators
- Convenes the Navigator team to provide joint planning, service coordination, resource sharing, and ongoing communication
- Engages and accesses a full spectrum of employment and training options (WorkFirst, community and vocational technical colleges, Employment Security, WIA contractors, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation [DVR], and community-based programs)
- Ensures that referred families are WIA eligible, can be enrolled in WIA, and access WIA formula funds for training based on client needs on a case-by-case basis

### Impact

- Reduce system complexities and improve access for clients
- Increase coordination between multiple agencies serving homeless adults
- Leverage external partnerships and private funding
- Achieve cross-systems outcomes of stable housing, full employment, and reduced reliance on public benefits



## **Housing and Employment Navigator Expertise and Role**

- Navigators have expertise and skill sets combining housing, social service, and workforce systems, including knowledge of:
  - Educational, sector, and job training programs; including financial aid options, enrollment procedures, and connected career opportunities
  - Employment resources, job readiness and search; placement and retention services
  - Public benefits (TANF, food, childcare, Social Security, and subsidized housing) and the impact of earned income
  - Vocational services and career planning
  - Homeless housing resources
  - Social services, including mental health, domestic violence, and drug and alcohol counseling

## **Housing Providers**

- Generate referrals to Housing and Employment Navigator
- Participate in Navigator team for joint planning, service coordination, resource sharing, and ongoing communication
- Engage and support families around housing, family stability, employment and training services, and goals
- Provide housing case management

## **Department of Social & Health Services (DSHS)**

WorkFirst is the single biggest employment program for homeless families in the state.

- Assigns DSHS/TANF case manager to a specialized case load, which includes families working with the Navigator
- Participates in Navigator team and shares resources and support services
- Coordinates TANF/WorkFirst services and the transition from public benefits to earned income through employment

## **Building Changes**

Building Changes will contribute to the development of the Navigator model as a best practice through:

- Training and technical assistance (for planning, development, and implementation) to the three WDCs, housing partners, DSHS/TANF, and the community and technical colleges
- Integration of the housing system—in particular WFF grantees—with the project model
- Monitoring the model for consistent delivery
- Assistance with the evaluation strategy

## **Evaluator**

Marc Bolan Consulting will use a common evaluation methodology across all three regions to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the initiative. The components of the Navigator model will remain consistent even though the three areas serve clients with unique geographic, demographic, and economic characteristics (veterans, ESL, single families, etc.).

The evaluation and research will engage with 720 families. Included in the evaluation strategy will be a random assignment of families referred by housing partners to a control group that will not be served by the Navigator. These control group families will continue with the housing and/or DSHS and workforce services they are currently receiving.

The evaluation will assess:

- Comparative outcomes
  - Employment rates
  - Permanent housing rates
  - Reliance on public benefits for both groups
  - Use of different programs and services

- Process
  - Delivery of model in regions to target populations
- Systems Impact
  - How the Navigator is affecting other support systems (e.g. DSHS, housing providers)

## Family Eligibility

Families eligible for Navigator services range from those who have not yet attained a GED/high school diploma and/or have very little work history to those who are considering sector training or who are under employed. Eligibility criteria include:

- Head of household is at least 18 years old; family has at least one dependent member under age 18; or household member is pregnant
- Currently receiving homeless housing services—emergency shelter, rapid re-housing, transitional housing and permanent supported housing—or another homeless housing service, such as families at imminent risk/on the wait list for housing and who are receiving case management services
- Economically disadvantaged (e.g. receives TANF, SNAP or SSI, or has no income of any kind)
- Registered for Selective Service (males only) unless born prior to 1960
- Eligible for employment in the United States
- Client has the goal of obtaining employment
- Client is engaged in case management/support services

- Housing situation is stable and does not present a significant barrier to employability
- Identified mental health, drug/alcohol, or physical health conditions are being addressed and do not present a significant barrier to employability
- Identified legal issues (if any) are being addressed and do not present a significant barrier to employability (no pending court dates, for example)

## Goals and Outcomes

Navigator desired outcomes:

- Reduce system complexities and improve access for clients
- Increase cooperation between multiple agencies serving homeless adults
- Leverage external partnerships and private funding

The Navigator model expects families to achieve the following outcomes over the 36-month service period:

- Earn GED or gain ABE, I-BEST skills
- Earn employer recognized credential
- Gain permanent employment; employment advancement
- Retain employment; six months
- Obtain stable permanent housing
- Reduced reliance on public assistance such as TANF, SNAP, and housing subsidy
- Increase self-efficacy and belief in personal future success
- Increase self-navigation abilities
- Increase awareness, access, and utilization of available services

## Looking Ahead

At publication of this report, the Navigator model has been tested on a limited scale within select Washington State counties. Going forward, the DOL-funded model, with its strong focus on research and evaluation, will provide Building Changes with an opportunity to further test, develop, and improve the Housing and Employment Navigator approach to aligning systems and developing partnerships that better serve families with access to employment resources.

With this new model, Building Changes hopes to identify effective strategies and best practices that can be incorporated more broadly into the mainstream systems and programs interacting with families—workforce, housing, and TANF—and increase their capacity to serve homeless families so that they obtain permanent housing, employment stability, and economic security. Workforce and housing services, such as TANF and WorkFirst, WIA, Rapid Re-housing, homeless prevention, supportive housing, as well as connections with community and technical colleges may all experience changes.

Partnerships and collaborations among these systems are a key component of this model. Building Changes will continue to develop these partnerships, sharing with them cross-systems data, resources, and expertise as well as client and service outcomes.



## Appendix: Housing and Employment Navigator Partners

Yakima County	Pierce County	Whatcom/Skagit Counties
<i>Workforce</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South Central Workforce Council (People for People)</li> <li>• Housing and Employment – Navigators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WorkForce Central</li> <li>• Housing and Employment – Navigators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northwest Workforce Council</li> <li>• Housing and Employment – Navigators</li> </ul>
<i>Housing</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yakima Neighborhood Health Services</li> <li>• YWCA of Yakima</li> <li>• Triumph Treatment Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping Hand House</li> <li>• Catholic Community Services/Phoenix Housing Network</li> <li>• Mercy Housing</li> <li>• The Rescue Mission</li> <li>• Tacoma Housing Authority; Salishan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity Council; Bellingham</li> <li>• Skagit CAP; Mt. Vernon</li> </ul>
<i>DSHS</i>		
TANF/WorkFirst staff	TANF/WorkFirst staff	TANF/WorkFirst staff
<i>Technical Assistance &amp; Training</i>		
Building Changes	Building Changes	Building Changes
<i>Evaluation</i>		
Bolan Consulting	Bolan Consulting	Bolan Consulting

