

Memo

Date: 04/02/2019

To: County and Tribal Directors, Managers and Supervisors

From: Marvin Davis, Deputy Director, Child Safety and Permanency Division

RE: Housing Resources

This memo provides guidance to county social service and tribal staff on best practice for connecting families experiencing a lack of housing stability with resources to find and secure housing. Please ensure this memo is shared with your child welfare/child protection staff.

The purpose of this memo is to:

- Highlight the positive impact housing stability has on families involved in the child welfare system
- Stress the importance of understanding a family's housing stability when families begin case plans, and on their exit from services
- Encourage use of a housing transition plan with families
- Provide housing resources.

The Importance of Housing Stability

A stable home environment directly supports child welfare's goals of safety, permanency, and well-being for children, youth and families, such as:

- Parents who have a stable home become better parents
- Having a home provides a base of stability benefiting all family membersⁱ
- Having a place to call home improves overall health outcomes, increases participation in the workforce, reduces criminal justice involvement, and increases educational outcomes for children and adults
- Children from families with a stable home do better in school
- Children reunited with their families who have a home are less likely to re-enter the foster care system
- Children with a home flourish in their development and are healthier later in lifeⁱⁱ
- Families with a home are more likely to remain stably housed over time.

It is paramount for caseworkers to:

- 1) **Ask** families when they enter the child welfare system about their housing status
- 2) **Create** transition plans, including housing resources for families to help them move to and maintain housing stability

- 3) **Provide** housing resources for all families exiting child welfare, whether they appear to need it or not
- 4) **Do not** exit families to homelessness.

The Impact of Lack of Housing Stability

Lack of stable housing is often a precipitating factor for a family's involvement with the child welfare system, a significant impediment to ending a family's involvement with child welfare, and a threat to child well-being. As many as 30 percent of children in foster care are there primarily due to lack of housing,ⁱⁱⁱ with homelessness or lack of stable housing as the most frequently cited barrier to reunification for families with children in out-of-home care. Families overwhelmed by lack of housing stability have less energy to give to other services they may be receiving. Because these families are already stretched thin, it can be difficult for child protective services staff to engage families' protective capacities, address immediate safety concerns, and ongoing risk of child maltreatment. It may also be equally difficult for families to recognize and employ their strengths and maintain community and cultural connections. Intervention consistent with best practice as identified in Minnesota Child Welfare: A Framework for Competent Child Welfare Practice at https://cascw.umn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Competencies_temp.pdf, becomes almost impossible.

The Shift from Housing Stability to Instability

Multiple factors can create lack of housing stability for families, including fleeing domestic violence or family conflict. Victims of domestic violence and their children risk becoming homeless due to isolation from support networks and being cut off from financial resources by their abuser. More than 80 percent of women with children who were homeless experienced domestic violence.

Another driving factor leading to lack of housing stability is the shortage of affordable rental housing. When families live with disparity regarding income to rent, they pay too large a share of their income for rent; even a minor crisis or setback, such as a reduction in work hours or an unexpected expense, can be de-stabilizing and result in loss of housing. Well over half of the lowest-income families in Minnesota spend more than 50 percent of their income on providing a home.^{iv} Families who are unable to pay rent may double up and live with family or friends out of economic necessity. While these arrangements may be supportive, they can also be stressful because of lack of privacy, permanence, autonomy, and may result in overcrowding, conflict, exploitation and frequent moves.^v

Frequent moves play on the vulnerability of children, negatively impacting their well-being. After adjusting for demographic variables, the average number of childhood moves was greater for those who were exposed to any type of adverse childhood experiences, including child abuse and neglect, witnessing domestic violence and other experiences. As the frequency of residential moves increases, the likelihood for adverse childhood experiences also increased. Similarly, as the number of adverse experiences increased, the number of moves during childhood increased. There is a strong relationship between the number of moves during childhood and the odds for reporting negative health outcomes, including depression, smoking, attempted suicide, alcoholism and teen pregnancy.^{vi}

The Impact of Stable Housing on Casework

Housing stability provides a platform for positive outcomes for children and families, and for caseworkers as they partner to work through the complexities that brought families into the child welfare system.

Effective social service responses identify those families experiencing lack of housing stability. The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges passed a resolution calling for juvenile courts to ensure families appearing in their courts who are impacted by lack of housing stability are identified and connected to appropriate services to improve overall outcomes.^{vii} Best practice includes:

- Asking families when they enter the child welfare system about their housing status. Possible questions could include:
 - Do you have any concerns about your current home? Do you have a lease? Own a home? Or staying with family and friends?
 - Do you need assistance paying rent?
- Creating transition plans that include housing resources to help families move to and maintain housing stability.
- Providing housing resources for all families exiting child welfare, whether they appear to need it or not.

More promising outcomes are achieved when parents are engaged as partners with the child welfare system. Families are best served by interventions that:

- Engage protective capacities
- Recognize and employ family strengths
- Maintain community and cultural connections
- Address immediate safety concerns and ongoing risks of child maltreatment.^{viii}

Asking about housing stability and connecting families to housing resources encompass all of these intervention strategies.

Low income families are more likely to engage when systems serving them are responsive to the needs of those experiencing a housing crisis. While all low-income populations face barriers to applying for, retaining, and using services provided by mainstream programs, barriers are compounded by the inherent conditions of homelessness, such as transience, instability and lack of basic resources. The underlying structure and operations of mainstream programs are often not conducive to ensuring the unique needs of those experiencing homelessness are met. More promising results are achieved by interventions grounded in these five foundational practices:

1. Understanding the housing status of individuals being served
2. Actively reaching out to those experiencing homelessness
3. Limiting requirements for in-person appointments at a particular location or office
4. Assisting with the process of gathering required verifications or documentation
5. Allowing for multiple methods to communicate about benefits and services.^{ix}

Housing Resources for Caseworkers and Families

All Minnesota counties are allocated state and federal funds used to help families pay for rent, bills, emergency needs, transportation, deposit on an apartment and others. There are different eligibility requirements for each of the programs. Caseworkers are encouraged to reach out to staff and leadership in their county that administers emergency cash grants and prevention dollars.

A bulletin published by the Child Welfare Information Gateway, [Building Partnerships to Support Stable Housing for Child Welfare-Involved Families and Youth](#), includes information on housing resources and tips for collaborating with housing and homeless services systems. It is at:

https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/bulletins_housing.pdf. The bulletin highlights child welfare and housing success stories in Grantee Spotlights.

- Minnesota has 10 Continuum of Care (CoC) coordinators familiar with housing resources, each assigned to a region. A map showing the counties in each region is at: [Continuum of Care Map](#)

By learning about housing resources in a given area, workers can better assist families with these issues. For example, if the head of household of a family has a disability, they may be eligible for housing-related income supports. More information on Minnesota housing resources is at <https://mn.hb101.org/>.

- To learn about homelessness resources, contact the CoC coordinator in your region. See below for contact information or [Continuum of Care Contact List and Meeting Calendar](#)

Hennepin County

Laura A DeRosier
218.391.6734
Laura.DeRosier@hennepin.us

Ramsey County

Loni Aadalen
651.266.4116
loni.Aadalen@CO.RAMSEY.MN.US

River Valleys CoC

Southeast Minnesota

Jennifer Prins
507.732.8577
jprins@threeriverscap.org

Suburban Metro Area CoC (SMAC)

Dakota, Anoka, Washington, Scott, Carver counties

Abby Guilford
763.458.9790
abby@mesh-mn.org

Northeast Minnesota CoC

Patty Beech
218.525.4957
pattybeechconsulting@gmail.com

Central Minnesota CoC

Tammy Smith
320.258.0674
tsmith@cmhp.net

Northwest Minnesota CoC

Cory Boushee
218.759.2057
coryb@nwmf.org

West Central Minnesota CoC

Carla Solem
701.306.1944
h2hcoordinator@gmail.com

St. Louis County CoC

Courtney Cochran

Phone: 218-725-5158
cochranc@stlouiscountymn.gov

Justin Vorbach
507.530.2942
justinv@swmhp.org

Southwest Minnesota CoC

Many housing resources are online, and listed in the **Minnesota Housing Resources** document attached to this memo. Provide a copy of this document to families. Fill in the Coordinated Entry System agency for the county where a family lives. Explore online resources with families. Encourage families to highlight and make notes on the resource list that interest them. Ensure families keep this highlighted copy so they can find online resources when needed.

For more information, contact Paul Minehart at 651-431-6059, or paul.minehart@state.mn.us.

ⁱ Ryan, & Schuerman, *Matching Family Problems with Specific Family Preservation Services: A Study of Service Effectiveness*. The 26 Children and Youth Services Review, 347, 372 (2004). Cited in: Dworsky, (2014) Families at the Nexus of Housing and Child Welfare. Chapin Hall, University of Chicago. Accessed from: <https://firstfocus.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Families-at-the-Nexus-of-Housing-and-Child-Welfare.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Metis Associates (2010), Keeping Families Together: An evaluation of implementation and outcomes of a pilot of supportive housing models for families involved in the child welfare system: https://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Report_KFTFindingsreport.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Harburger, D.S., White, R.A. (2004) Reunifying Families, Cutting Costs: Housing-Child Welfare Partnerships for Permanency Supportive Housing. *Child Welfare*, 83, 493: <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ696573>

^{iv} U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2010-2014 CHAS (Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy) data: <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/cp.html> cited in The Governor's Task Force on Housing (2018) "More Places to Call Home: Investing in Minnesota's Future. Report of the Governor's Task Force on Housing." Accessed at: http://mn.gov/gov-stat/pdf/Housing%20Task%20Force%20Report_FINAL.pdf

^v Bush, H. and Shinn, M., "Families' Experiences of Doubling Up After Homelessness," *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research*, vol. 19, number 3, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research (2017).

^{vi} Dong, M. et al "Childhood residential mobility and multiple health risks during adolescence and adulthood: the hidden role of adverse childhood experiences." *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* (Dec. 2005); 159(12):1104-10. Cited in: United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (2018). "Homelessness in America: Focus on Families with Children." Accessed from: https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Homelessness_in_America_Families_with_Children.pdf

^{vii} National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, *Resolution Addressing the Needs of Homeless Youth and Families in Juvenile and Family Courts*, 69 Juv. & Fam. Ct. J. 35 (2018). Accessed from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jfcj.12103>

^{viii} Minnesota Child Welfare: A Framework for Competent Child Welfare Practice: https://casw.umn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Competencies_temp.pdf

^{ix} Heading Home Together: Minnesota's 2018-2020 Action Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, Appendix C. Accessed from: <http://www.mnhousing.gov/wcs/Satellite?c=Page&cid=1363021705011&pagename=External%2FPage%2FEXTStandardLayout>