

## **JEFFERSON COUNTY HPRP-FUNDED PREVENTION PROGRAM**

Jefferson County's HPRP-funded prevention program provides financial assistance and case management services to households throughout the county. Households are screened for program eligibility through a centralized telephone hotline operated by Jefferson County staff. If a household is found eligible for assistance, the household is referred to a community organization for an assessment. Jefferson County contracts with six community organizations that are responsible for assessing households' needs, developing case plans, submitting eligibility and financial need documentation to Jefferson County staff, and providing financial assistance and case management services to households. Additionally, Jefferson County worked with the Department of Human Resources to target youth aging out of foster care with a portion of their HPRP homelessness resources. Length of stay in the program averaged 171 days, with a median 163 days.

### **Community Description**

Jefferson County has an estimated population of 662,200 people. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 15.2 percent of the general population and 13.1 percent of people age 18 through 64 are below the poverty level (2005-2009 ACS). Jefferson County participates in a three-county Continuum of Care. During the 2011 Point in Time (PIT) count, Birmingham/Jefferson, St. Clair, and Shelby Counties Continuum of Care (CoC) identified 348 persons in emergency shelters; 642 persons in transitional housing; 34 persons in safe havens; and 926 unsheltered persons (living in places not meant for human habitation, cars, encampments, or parks). Of these 1,950 homeless persons, 26 percent were persons in families and 74 percent were individuals or unaccompanied youth.

The Birmingham/Jefferson, St. Clair, and Shelby Counties CoC have more than 55 different homeless assistance programs. Service providers are located throughout Jefferson, St. Clair, and Shelby Counties, with the largest concentration of programs in the city of Birmingham. Specifically, this CoC has 12 emergency shelter programs, resulting in 330 beds; 31 transitional housing programs resulting in roughly 900 beds; 2 safe haven programs, resulting in more than 30 beds; and 14 permanent supporting housing programs resulting in approximately 1,336 beds.

In May 2007, the city of Birmingham's Department of Community Development and The Mayor's Commission to Prevent and End Chronic Homelessness developed a ten-year plan to end chronic homelessness in the Birmingham community. This plan focuses on creating and implementing practices and networks to provide housing and supportive service options for chronically homeless individuals.<sup>77</sup> In January 2008, Jefferson County adopted this ten-year plan to prevent and end chronic homelessness in collaboration with the city of Birmingham.

### **DESIGN AND SETUP OF HPRP PREVENTION**

The Jefferson County Office of Community and Economic Development administered the county's HPRP grant to residents living in Jefferson County, except for eight locations within the county that were covered by other awards. For the 3 years of HPRP, Jefferson County had a total of \$845,709 to administer.

---

<sup>77</sup> Executive Summary, Birmingham's Plan to Prevent and End Chronic Homelessness. 2007-2017.

Before HPRP, Jefferson County did not administer any homelessness prevention programs. The county relied on local not-for-profit agencies to provide financial assistance to households in economic crisis. Bridge Ministries, a recipient of ESG, CDBG, and FEMA funding, as well as funding from the city of Birmingham, Jefferson County, and private donors, was (and still is) the go-to agency in the community for households in need of financial assistance. This agency serves households from throughout the Jefferson County community and is known as *the agency that does not turn anyone away*. In addition to Bridge Ministries, the Birmingham Salvation Army provides households with financial assistance when funding is available. These programs did not have any influence on the development of Jefferson County's HPRP program

In September 2009, the Jefferson County Office of Community and Economic Development decided to participate in a three-way HPRP funding collaborative. Jefferson County, the city of Birmingham, and the state of Alabama pooled their HPRP resources and administered the funding through one organization, the Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity (JCCEO).

Even though three municipalities pooled their HPRP funding, there were restrictions on the population that each funding allocation could serve. Jefferson County's HPRP funds could only serve households residing in Jefferson County, but not in the city limits of Birmingham, Bessemer, Hoover, County Line, Sumiton, West Jefferson, Argo, or Helena. The city of Birmingham's HPRP funds could only serve households residing in the city of Birmingham. However, the state of Alabama's HPRP funding could be used for any resident of the state of Alabama, ultimately covering areas that were excluded in Jefferson County's funding. In addition to these funding restrictions, HUD developed a grant guideline that each grantee had to spend down its funding allocation by 60 percent by the end of Year 1. Therefore, JCCEO had to spend down the city, county, and state's HPRP funding allocation by 60 percent by the end of Year 1 in order to comply with HUD guidelines.

During the first 8 months of this funding partnership, JCCEO spent very little of Jefferson County's HPRP funding.<sup>78</sup> In order to comply with HUD's HPRP guidelines, in April 2010, Jefferson County decided to terminate its contract with JCCEO and recapture the HPRP funds. However, JCCEO still operated its HPRP program with the city of Birmingham's and the state of Alabama's HPRP funds.

Within a few weeks of recapturing the county funding, Jefferson County staff assessed their inhouse resources and department staff to determine how they would design and implement an HPRP program. County staff decided that they would create an HPRP program where the county would operate a centralized intake system and then refer eligible households to providers in the area for service delivery.

Also, at that time, county staff explored the idea of targeting youth aging out of foster care with their HPRP homelessness resources. They contacted Alabama's Department of Human Resources (DHR) to research the housing outcomes of youth who aged out of the foster care system in Alabama. DHR explained that many youth exited foster care into homelessness or unstable living situations. After

---

<sup>78</sup> During the site visit, Jefferson County staff were unsure why JCCEO did not spend down the county funds during Year 1. Staff suspect that JCCEO prioritized spending down the state's funds first before spending Jefferson County's funding.

speaking with DHR, Jefferson County staff decided to target this population with a portion of its HPRP homelessness prevention funds, therefore providing resources that were otherwise not available to this population in their community.

Jefferson County has eight HPRP subgrantees. Six subgrantees (Bridge Ministries, First Light, The Dannon Project, YWCA, Pathways, and Neighborhood Housing Services of Birmingham) provide direct services to households. Originally, AIDS Alabama was a subgrantee with Jefferson County. However, this organization only provides assistance to individuals or families affected by HIV/AIDS and this service specialization was not needed during the course of the county’s HPRP program. Additionally, One Roof is the Birmingham/Jefferson, St. Clair, and Shelby Counties CoC’s lead agency. This agency provided HMIS support to Jefferson County and its subgrantees during program development and implementation.

Exhibit E.7: Jefferson County Subgrantees	
Agency/Person	Reimbursement Amount (as of February 21, 2012)
Bridge Ministries	\$104,900.40
First Light	\$95,478.70
Neighborhood Housing Services of Birmingham	\$164,102.53
Pathways	\$10,806.17
The Dannon Project	\$79,524.17
YWCA	\$73,579.41
AIDS Alabama <sup>79</sup>	\$0
One Roof	\$48,000.00

Subgrantees that provide direct services to clients are responsible for assessing households’ needs, developing case plans, submitting eligibility and financial need documentation to Jefferson County staff, and providing financial assistance and case management services to households. Subgrantees are also responsible for providing up-front financial assistance to households and are then reimbursed by the county.

One Roof, the CoC’s lead agency, is not responsible for providing direct services to households. This organization provided HMIS training and support for subgrantees’ staff and developed the residential mapping system in HMIS. Because Jefferson County’s HPRP program excludes eight distinct areas of the county, county intake workers need a way to determine if households are in a residential location that is eligible for the program. During the county’s design process, the CoC’s HMIS Administrator created a GIS mapping feature in HMIS that allows the county to screen households based on their residential location.

After staff designed the county’s HPRP program, they submitted their HPRP budget estimates to HUD, expecting to allocate 42 percent of funding towards homelessness prevention and 58 percent to rapid re-housing. However, during the time in which Jefferson County operated its HPRP program and delivered services, 76 percent of HPRP funding went to homelessness prevention and 24 percent of HPRP funding went to rapid re-housing. The increase in the percentage of funding that went towards homelessness prevention is attributed to the community demand for this type of service.

<sup>79</sup> AIDS Alabama did not serve any clients through Jefferson County’s HPRP program.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

### **Outreach**

After the county recaptured its HPRP funds, staff wanted to move quickly to design and implement the program. Staff at Jefferson County developed fliers and posters to distribute to the Department of Human Resources, utility companies, landlords, health care facilities, and homeless liaisons in the county schools. Additionally, they created a public service announcement explaining the HPRP program, types of assistance that households could receive, and who was eligible for program participation.

### **Point of Entry**

Jefferson County receives requests for HPRP assistance through a Web portal with e-mail option and a telephone hotline.

During the design period, Jefferson County staff worked with the county's IT department to develop a Web portal where households could assess whether or not they were preliminarily eligible for HPRP services. The county wanted to make the Web portal user-friendly by creating easy-to-navigate drop-down boxes and only collecting basic eligibility criteria. The Web portal screens for a household's residential address, homelessness and housing status, possession of an eviction notice and/or utility shut off notice, and income. If a household is determined preliminarily eligible for HPRP services, the household is instructed to enter contact information in the Web portal. Then an automated e-mail, with this contact information, is sent to the county. The county then contacts the household to continue with a more detailed eligibility screening.

If the Web portal screening tool determines that a household is not eligible for HPRP services, a list of other community resources is provided on the website. These resources include community information on public housing authorities, landlords and apartment complexes, service organizations, employment services, legal aid, and health care facilities.

For households that do not have Internet access, the county also operates a telephone hotline specifically for HPRP assistance. This hotline is forwarded to three county intake workers.

Once households are connected to a county intake worker, either by calling the HPRP hotline or by the county intake worker responding to a Web portal e-mail, the intake worker conducts an eligibility screening. Jefferson County intake workers only complete HPRP eligibility screening over the telephone. Households cannot come into the office to be prescreened for program eligibility.

If a county intake worker determines that a household is ineligible for the county's HPRP program because of their housing location<sup>80</sup>, the intake worker refers the household to JCCEO's HPRP program. If an intake worker determines that a household is eligible for the county's HPRP program, the intake worker refers the household to a subgrantee for further screening, assessment, and service delivery. Subgrantees' case managers are responsible for contacting the household to schedule an appointment for further screening and assessment.

---

<sup>80</sup> Jefferson County's HPRP program required households to reside in Jefferson County, but not in the city limits of Birmingham, Bessemer, Hoover, County Line, Sumiton, West Jefferson, Argo, or Helena.

Households complete a further screening and assessment with subgrantees' case managers. Case managers screen all documentation that households provide in addition to what has been entered into HMIS by the county's intake workers. They examine this information to identify the household's economic crisis and if HPRP assistance will allow the household to achieve economic and housing stability. Case managers then upload all documentation into HMIS and complete a household assessment and case plan. The case plan includes housing and employment goals as well as the amount of financial assistance that a household should receive. This process can take up to 2 hours to complete.

If a case manager determines that a household is not eligible or would not benefit from HPRP assistance, the case manager will refer the household to other resources in the community. During our site visit, Jefferson County staff estimated that approximately 90 percent of households referred to case managers were ultimately eligible for HPRP assistance. However, interviewed case managers thought that only 30 to 50 percent of referred households were eligible for HPRP services.

The ultimate decision whether a household is eligible for HPRP assistance falls to county staff known as *certifiers*. After subgrantees' case managers create an assessment and case plan with households, they upload all the information into HMIS. Then case managers pass the case along to county certifiers. Certifiers examine all final documentation, along with looking at the household's housing situation, family resources, and employment history, to decide if a household is eligible for HPRP services. Jefferson County certifiers had a 24- to 48-hour window to provide a decision to case managers on a household's eligibility. However, some households needed additional or clarifying documentation or third party verification for program eligibility. Therefore, some decisions took longer than 48 hours.

After a certifier determines if a household is or is not eligible, the certifier contacts the case manager about the eligibility determination. The case manager then notifies the household and either proceeds with HPRP assistance or looks for alternative resources in the community for the household. During our site visit, case managers explained that the amount of time it took certifiers to make an eligibility decision about a household varied. Some case managers noted that a certifier's decision could take between two and five days, and in emergencies a decision might take a couple of hours. Other case managers stated that a certifier's decision could take up to 30 days. This delay resulted in some households being evicted from their homes.

Youth aging out of foster care uses a different process. DHR provides a Jefferson County case manager with a list of young people who are about to exit the foster care system. This case manager contacts them to inquire if they are interested in the county's HPRP program. If they are interested in program participation, then the case managers conduct an eligibility screening. This eligibility screening includes inquiring about their biological family, income and employment, expenses, and possible housing options. Since September 2010, DHR has provided Jefferson County a list of 10 young people who are about to age out of foster care. During our site visit, five such young people were participating in the county's HPRP program. County staff explained that the remaining five who were not participating in the program either could not be contacted, were not eligible, or had stable living situations upon exit from foster care.

### **Intake: Eligibility and Assessment**

Jefferson County follows HUD's required eligibility criteria for HPRP program participation. However, in order to be eligible for the county's HPRP program, households need to reside in Jefferson County, but not in the city limits of Birmingham, Bessemer, Hoover, County Line, Sumiton, West Jefferson, Argo, or Helena. Households living in these excluded areas need to apply for HPRP assistance through JCCEO. Additionally, households can only be eligible for utility assistance if they have already applied for energy assistance through LIHEAP and did not receive it.

Intake workers collect housing information, type of assistance requested, housing status, household composition, total income, and why the household is in a current economic crisis. They examine this information to determine if a household is preliminarily eligible for HPRP services. If a household is determined to be preliminarily eligible, it is referred to a case manager. If a household is determined to be ineligible for HPRP services, the intake worker will refer the household to other community resources. During our interview, county staff thought that roughly 60 percent of households that complete a preliminary screening with an intake worker are eligible to be referred to subgrantees' case managers.

A case manager examines all documentation that a household provides, as well as identifies the household's economic crisis and if HPRP assistance will allow the household to achieve economic and housing stability. Households are provided a list of documents to bring into the initial appointment with a case manager. This list includes identification for all household members, the lease agreement, the eviction notice, any statement of income, notices of benefits received, and utility disconnection notices. All documents provide information to understand the household's financial situation. Based on the documentation that the household provides and the household's reason for incurring housing and economic instability, a case manager develops the household's assessment and reason for needing HPRP assistance. Then, the case manager determines how much financial assistance should be provided based on the household's rental and utility arrearages, payments due, and employment status. Additionally, the case manager works with the household to develop a case plan that outlines employment and housing goals and other items for the household to work on while receiving financial assistance.

### **"But For" and "Sustainability" Rules**

Understanding whether a household would be homeless "but for this assistance" rests on the household's overall situation and documentation provided. Jefferson County staff did not set any criteria for determining if a household would be homeless without HPRP assistance. Case managers and county certifiers examine the household's finances, employment status, housing situation, and all documentation that the household provides to determine if a household would be homeless but for HPRP assistance. Ultimately, case managers and county certifiers use their own judgment to decide if a household should receive HPRP assistance.

### **Prevention Activities**

Under Jefferson County's HPRP program, households may receive financial assistance for rental payments, security and utility deposits, rental and utility arrearages, utility payments, moving cost assistance, and motel/hotel vouchers. Housing stabilization services include case management, linkage to other community services and mainstream agencies, credit counseling services, and workforce development and training referrals.

**Financial Assistance.** As noted above, HPRP financial assistance includes current rental and utility payments, as well as arrearages. Jefferson County staff did not develop criteria for the maximum amount of financial assistance that households could receive. Case managers are responsible for working with households to determine how much financial assistance is needed and for how long. Each month case managers need to submit documentation to county certifiers for the amount of financial assistance that a household needs. Case managers determine how much financial assistance a household needs by the amount of rent or utility payments that a household owes and employment status for household members. Households are reassessed for program eligibility every 3 months.

During our site visit, one case manager estimated that most of her households received financial assistance for approximately 6 months. Another case manager explained that most of her households received financial assistance for approximately 12 months. In fact, before the county's funding ending in October 2011, only three of her households had exited the program. Several case managers also noted that they ended assistance for some households because they were not actively searching for employment or working towards self-sufficiency.

Case managers at subgrantees explained that assistance ends for households at various points in time, including:

- Households achieving financial self-sufficiency and no longer needing assistance either through self-determination or reassessment;
- Households not following case plans and case managers ending assistance; or
- Households no longer being able to receive assistance because of the program's end in October 2011.

**Case Management.** Case managers approach case management on a case-by-case basis. Staff members explained that some clients need case management contact daily, weekly, or monthly while others require fewer contacts. Jefferson County did not develop a case management requirement for households receiving HPRP assistance. However, most households check in with their case managers at least once a month, if not more.

Case managers work with households to develop housing and employment goals to achieve self-sufficiency. Case managers often refer clients to the Jefferson County Workforce Initiative and the Birmingham Career Center. An interviewed case manager noted that she works with households to register for online accounts with the utility companies; therefore households always have access to their account and billing information.

Case management services are not provided after financial assistance ends. However, some case managers remain in contact with households to assist them with service referrals or community resources.

Jefferson County has one case manager who works with youth who aged out of foster care and are receiving HPRP assistance. This case manager focuses on housing stability, education, and employment goals with youth. She often refers the youth to job fairs, workforce development programs, and financial education classes. She finds that many youth do not have any experience developing household budgets and expense estimates, which is a critical skill for housing stability and self-sufficiency.

## **DATA AND MONITORING**

HMIS has provided Jefferson County with the ability to share data among county intake workers, subgrantee staff, and county certifiers. All subgrantees used HMIS before the HPRP program. Intake workers, case managers, and certifiers enter all HUD required data elements into HMIS, in addition to case plans, throughout the process of screening, determining eligibility, and providing financial assistance and case management.

Jefferson County uses the Annual Performance Report (APR) and Quarterly Performance Report (QPR) to gauge outcomes for households. County staff are planning to conduct HPRP assessments with program participating households, landlords, and utility companies.

## **PLANS FOR THE FUTURE**

Jefferson County plans to use ESG funds to continue providing a homelessness prevention program. They intend to continue using the HPRP hotline and Web portal to direct households to homelessness prevention assistance. However, ESG funding that will be dedicated to homelessness prevention efforts is significantly less than HPRP funding. County staff estimate that they will only be able to assist approximately 13 households for 3 months of financial assistance each with ESG funding. They plan on targeting households with children and youth aging out of foster care.

Bridge Ministries plans on continuing to provide financial assistance to households in economic crisis as they did before HPRP.

**Exhibit E.8: Jefferson County, Alabama, Prevention Overview, Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program**

	Persons		Households	
	#	%	#	%
Total served Year 1 <sup>a</sup>	49	100	16	100
Persons in families	42	86	—	—
Adults without children	5	10	—	—
Total served Year 2 <sup>a</sup>	307	100	115	100
Persons in families	265	86	—	—
Adults without children	42	14	—	—
HPRP services				
Rental assistance	—	—	91	77
Case management	—	—	109	93
Security/utility deposits	—	—	25	21
Outreach and engagement	—	—	81	69
Utility payments	—	—	71	61
Housing search/ placement	—	—	18	15
Legal services	—	—	13	11
Credit repair	—	—	3	3
Motel and hotel vouchers	—	—	2	2
Moving cost assistance	—	—	1	1
Destination <sup>b</sup>				
Total leavers	210	100	—	—
Homeless	14	6	—	—
Intitutional setting	0	0	—	—
Permanent housing with subsidy	2	1	—	—
Permanent housing without subsidy	189	90	—	—
Family or friends	5	2	—	—

Source: Jefferson County Office of Community and Economic Development Annual Performance Report Data, 2009 program start through September 30, 2011.

— not applicable

<sup>a</sup>Total served numbers may not add to 100 percent because the “children only” and “unknown” categories are not included in this table. Numbers may add to greater than 100 percent due to data reporting errors.

<sup>b</sup>Destination numbers may not add to total leavers because the “other,” “hotel/motel,” “unknown,” and “deceased” categories are not included in this table.

“Homeless” includes the following destinations: emergency shelter, TH for homeless persons, staying with friends (temporary tenure), staying with family (temporary tenure), place not meant for human habitation, safe haven, and hotel or motel paid by client.

“Institutional setting” includes foster care, psychiatric facility, substance abuse or detox facility, hospital (non-psychiatric), and jail or prison.

“Permanent housing” with subsidy includes housing owned by client with ongoing subsidy, rental by client with VASH subsidy, rental by client with other ongoing subsidy, and Permanent Supportive Housing for Homeless Persons.

“Permanent housing” without subsidy includes housing owned by client without ongoing subsidy and rental by client with no ongoing subsidy.

“Family or friends” includes living with family, permanent tenure or living with friends, permanent tenure.