

## Case Study: Pima County/City of Tucson

### Community Description

Pima County has an estimated population of 990,213 people and is approximately 9000 square miles. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, approximately 15.7 percent of the general population and 15.1 percent of people age 18 through 64 are below the poverty level (2005-2009 ACS). During the 2011 Point in Time (PIT) count, Tucson/Pima County Continuum of Care (CoC) identified 726 persons in emergency shelters; 1,161 persons in transitional housing; 15 persons in Safe Havens; and 724 unsheltered persons (living in places not meant for human habitation, cars, encampments, parks). Of these 2,626 homeless persons, 32 percent were persons in families and 68 percent were individuals or unaccompanied youth.

The city of Tucson/Pima County CoC has over 90 different homeless assistance programs. Service providers are located both in the city of Tucson and the rural areas of Pima County. Specifically, this CoC has 21 emergency shelter programs, resulting in over 600 beds; 50 transitional housing programs resulting in roughly 1,300 beds; and 25 permanent supporting housing programs resulting in approximately 1,050 beds.

In the spring of 2006, the Tucson Planning Council for the Homeless, along with the city of Tucson, Pima County, and the Arizona Department of Housing developed a *Plan to End Homelessness*. The plan focuses on recommendations to stakeholders on topics such as homeless prevention, employment, housing, supportive services, private sector engagement, transportation, collaboration and coordination, data gathering, education, and pilot projects. As noted in the plan's *Guiding Principles* section, city and county officials want to develop new housing models building on their network of existing emergency shelters and transition housing programs. However, they have a preference of expanding homeless prevention services because of their efficiency and cost effectiveness.<sup>1</sup>

### Design and Set Up of HPRP- Prevention

The city of Tucson's Housing and Community Development Department and Pima County's Department of Community Development and Neighborhood Conservation partnered to design and operate one HPRP program covering both the city of Tucson and Pima County. These governmental agencies decided to design a joint HPRP program because they felt a partnership would utilize the community's resources most efficiently and effectively. Over the course of three years, the city of Tucson will administer a total of \$2,534,340 and Pima County will administer a total of \$1,063,430 in HPRP funds.

The city of Tucson and Pima County have nine subgrantees under their combined HPRP program. Five subgrantees (Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation, CODAC Behavioral Health, Primavera Foundation, Money Management International, and Southern Arizona Legal Aid) provide direct services to clients to

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<sup>1</sup> Plan to End Homelessness. Pima County, Arizona. Spring 2006. Pg. 4.

form the HPRP partnership. Non-Profit Industries developed the web portal that subgrantees used to screen HPRP applicants. Bowman Systems and Symmetric Solutions provided both the HMIS system and user licenses, and technical assistance to subgrantees. Additionally, the city of Tucson/Pima County contracted with two local evaluators to examine the implementation and impacts of their HPRP program.

exhibit 2.1			
City of Tucson/Pima County Subgrantees			
Agency/Person	Award Amount with city of Tucson	Award Amount with Pima County	Total Award
Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation	\$2,090,117	\$856,833	\$2,946,950
Primavera Foundation	\$172,891	\$26,650	\$199,541
CODAC Behavioral Health	\$68,828	\$103,935	\$172,763
Southern Arizona Legal Aid	\$20,280	\$8,750	\$29,030
Money Management International	\$8,500	\$3,500	\$12,000
Non-Profit Industries	\$25,900	\$10,950	\$36,850
Symmetric Solutions	\$53,375	\$20,300	\$73,675
Bowman Systems	\$9,574	\$3,697	\$13,271
City of Tucson (phones and housing inspections) <sup>2</sup>	\$19,569	\$2,315	\$21,884
Evaluation Team (Leslie Carlson and Joanne Basta)	\$1,947	\$26,500	\$28,447

Source: The city of Tucson's Housing and Community Development Department and Pima County's Department of Community Development and Neighborhood Conservation, 2012

### Subgrantee Roles, Functions, and Responsibilities

Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation (SAAF), CODAC, and Primavera provide financial assistance and support services to HPRP clients. Staff roles are categorized into three categories: *Intake Specialists*, *Resource Specialists*, and *Contract Specialists*. *Intake Specialists* respond to requests and inquiries regarding HPRP assistance. They answer calls and e-mails about services offered and conduct an over-

<sup>2</sup> Staff from the city of Tucson conducted all housing inspections for Project Action.

the-phone eligibility screening with applicants. If an applicant passes the *Intake Specialist's* eligibility screening, then the applicant is referred to a *Resource Specialist*. *Resource Specialists* conduct the intake and client assessment and deliver case management services to clients. They also insure that applicants provide all necessary documentation for eligibility. *Contract Specialists* review all necessary documentation that clients provide, including their lease agreements and eviction notices, and conduct rent reasonableness for all units in which they provide financial assistance. *Contract Specialists* administer all financial assistance to landlords and utility companies for HPRP households. SAAF was the only organization that employed contract specialists because the organization was able to deliver financial assistance to landlords and utilities companies quickly, sometimes in the same day.

Money Management International (MMI) provides financial education classed to all households that receive financial assistance through HPRP. Throughout the grant, there has been one MMI educator/trainer providing classes twice a month to program participants.

Southern Arizona Legal Aid reviews all lease agreements and eviction notices for the HPRP program. They examine these documents to ensure that landlords have followed proper protocol for the eviction process and have not over charged their tenants in eviction, rental, or service fees.

### **Pre-HPRP Experiences with Homelessness Prevention**

Prior to HPRP, Pima County relied on community action agencies to provide financial assistance to households struggling with economic hardships. Twelve community action agencies receive a monthly allocation from Pima County to provide emergency financial assistance to Pima County residents. Households can use this assistance towards rent or utilities, however, it can only be provided once a year. This once-a-year financial assistance is first-come, first-served based. If households are in need of financial assistance, they must call each of the community action agencies and inquire about their availability of funding. At that time, if an agency does not have available funding, staff will tell households to call another community action agency. Households can approach any of the community action agencies regardless of their residential location in Pima County, household composition, or type of financial assistance needed. In 2009, the city of Tucson's Human Services Planning Committee decided that their CDBG funding would be used to provide emergency financial assistance to economically struggling households. Additionally, this committee decided to use the city's General Fund money towards case management, education, job training, and youth services to compliment the financial assistance provided by the CDBG funding.

These programs did not have any influence on the development of the HPRP program for city of Tucson/Pima County.

### **Prevention vs. Rapid Rehousing**

In April 2009—after the HPRP awards were announced, but before they were awarded—the city and county brought approximately 20 community stakeholders together to begin planning for the use of HPRP funding. This group of stakeholders, known as the “design team”, was regarded as the homeless experts in the city and county. They represented service providers in various areas including domestic

violence agencies; family, youth, veteran, and elderly programs; the local food bank; the faith community; and rural community agencies.

In the summer of 2009, the design team hosted three public meetings to discuss the new HPRP program with city and county residents. During this time, many residents of Arizona were facing financial hardships and housing foreclosures. Some members of the design team and the public thought that HPRP funding should be used to prevent foreclosure in the county. However, because of HUD regulations, HPRP funding could not be used for foreclosure assistance. Other design team members thought that HPRP funding should be used to provide financial assistance and services to residents who were on the brink of homelessness but unaware of services that were available in the community. The design team recognized that the community already had housing programs and supportive services in place for the chronically homeless population and households needing transitional or permanent supportive housing. The design team decided to focus their HPRP efforts on assisting households who were in the process of being evicted from their rental housing and would be homeless “but for” this financial assistance.

Ultimately, the design team proposed that 75 percent of HPRP funding target homeless prevention services and 25 percent target rapid rehousing services. The city and county felt concerned that households in the community, who may have never accessed housing services in the past, might be weary of applying for financial assistance with the wording reference to *homelessness*. Therefore, in order to appeal to households, the city and county named their HPRP program “Project Action” to avoid the connotation of households being provided *homeless assistance*.

## Implementation

### Outreach

Staff from the city of Tucson and Pima County made a concerted effort to reach out to organizations and agencies across Pima County to inform the community about Project Action. Staff delivered presentations to school liaisons, domestic violence shelters, community action agencies, rural service networks, and other community groups highlighting the eligibility guidelines and types of services offered. Additionally, Project Action dedicated one resource specialist to work with Pima County’s rural community agencies by traveling to those areas and providing information about HPRP services. Through these efforts, awareness of Project Action quickly circulated around the city of Tucson and Pima County.

### Point of Entry

Throughout the grant period, Project Action received requests for assistance through two channels (1) a web portal with e-mail option and a toll free telephone number, and (2) referrals from community agencies.

During the design period, the city and county worked with a subgrantee (Non-Profit Industries) on developing a web portal where households could assess whether or not they were preliminarily eligible

for HPRP services. The web portal screened for a household's residential address, homelessness and housing status, possession of an eviction notice and/or utility shut off notice, length of time as a resident of Pima County<sup>3</sup>, and total gross income. If a household was determined preliminarily eligible for HPRP services, the household was instructed to either call the toll free Project Action telephone number and leave a message or send an e-mail to the Project Action e-mail address with contact information. An intake specialist would then contact the household and continue with a more detailed eligibility assessment. For households that did not have internet access, the toll free telephone number also asked a series of questions so households could assess if they were preliminarily eligible for HPRP services.

If the web portal screening tool determined that a household was not eligible for HPRP services, a list of other community resources was provided on the website. These resources included community information on food assistance, public benefits, employment and training opportunities, health care services, and legal aid.

As previously noted, Project Action also accepts referrals from community organizations, specifically Southern Arizona Legal Aid, the Primavera Foundation, and agencies in the rural areas of Pima County. These agencies refer clients to resource specialists if they think the household qualifies for Project Action's assistance. Additionally, during year two, one resource specialist was placed at Legal Aid once a week to meet with Legal Aid's clients to screen for eligibility and provide information about Project Action.

During the design period, the city and county wanted to be mindful of serving households in the rural areas of Pima County. Therefore, Project Action dedicates one resource specialist from CODAC to serve in this capacity. This resource specialist, known as the "circuit rider", works with food banks, medical agencies, school liaisons, parent organizations, and rural agency committees in Pima County's rural areas to get client referrals for Project Action. If a rural agency refers a household to this resource specialist, she conducts an eligibility screening over the telephone. If the household is determined to be eligible, then the resource specialist travels to the household's location and completes a full assessment, intake, and reviews eligibility documentation.

## Eligibility

In addition to HUD's required HPRP eligibility criteria, the city of Tucson/Pima County added additional criteria. To be eligible for HPRP assistance, applicants needed:

- To have been a resident of Pima County for at least three months;
- To have less than \$3,000 in the household's bank account;
- To have an eviction notice and written lease agreement; and,
- To have had a sudden or significant loss of income.

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<sup>3</sup> In order to be eligible for HPRP services, applicants needed to have been a Pima County resident for at least three months.

During the site visit, Project Action staff explained that a high number of residents move from larger cities around the southwest area (Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Phoenix, etc.) to Pima County because of loss of housing and/or employment. Because of this, staff from the city and county wanted to restrict HPRP assistance to residents who have lived in Pima County for at least three months.

Additionally, Project Action staff wanted to insure that HPRP assistance was going to reach households that had a sudden or significant loss of income that recently occurred. They did not want to assist households who experienced on-going, long-term financial instability. They wanted to target households where short-term financial assistance would assist them to achieve self-sufficiency and housing stability.

Staff at Project Action described a ‘sudden or significant loss of income’ as:

- Unforeseen financial set back or life change;
- Loss of job or reduced hours;
- Medical issues;
- Medical bills cause inability to pay other bills;
- Car repairs;
- Financial aid disrupted;
- Divorce or break-up of relationship;
- Death in family; and
- Loss of roommate or other living arrangements.<sup>4</sup>

In summary, households could first access the web portal or call the toll free number for initial eligibility screening. If households met initial eligibility parameters, they were told to leave a message or e-mail Project Action and a Project Action representative would contact them. Then an intake specialist would contact the household and complete a more detailed screening, examining a household’s needs, housing situation, and income resources. If a household met Project Action’s program qualifications, the intake specialist would schedule an appointment for the household to meet with a resource specialist.

## Screening

During the first four months of program implementation (December 2009- March 2010), Project Action did not have intake specialists. Households would e-mail Project Action or call the toll free telephone number to leave a message and a resource specialist would follow-up with them. Therefore, resource specialists were managing all applicant eligibility screenings, intakes, and case management. Due to the community’s demand for HPRP services during this time, applicants waited between four and six weeks to be contacted by a Project Action resource specialist. Project Action staff, along with the city and county, decided that they needed an additional layer of staffing primarily responsible for contacting the applicants and conducting an eligibility screening. When intake specialists were added, the applicant wait time decreased exponentially to between two to four days.

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<sup>4</sup> List provided by Project Action

## Assessment

Households complete an intake and needs assessment with Project Action's resource specialists. Intake includes collecting information such as household composition; income, benefit, and employment information; housing status; and possession of an eviction notice and/or utility shut-off notice. Resource specialists review all household documentation and upload it to HMIS. Finally, resource specialists inform households of program guidelines and expectations, such as the requirement to participate in monthly case management and keep a record of completed employment applications.

The final review of a household's documentation is conducted by the contract specialists. Contract specialists complete rent reasonableness for all housing units and work with Legal Aid to evaluate lease agreements and eviction notices. Lawyers at Southern Arizona Legal Aid specifically examine these documents for unjustified charges on the eviction notice, falsified lease information, or mistakes that landlords make. Legal Aid staff informed the site visit team that approximately 75 percent of all leases and eviction notices they review have items that need clarification or further investigation.

Once all documentation is finalized, contract specialists approve the household for program participation and process financial assistance.

## Decision-making Based on Screening and Assessment

If households meet all eligibility requirements and are referred to an appointment with resource specialists, they will likely receive HPRP assistance. During our site visit, resource specialists thought that approximately 90 percent of households that were referred to them received assistance. Resource specialists also noted that they use their own judgment whether a household would be homeless "but for" this assistance, relying on the documentation that a household provides. Resource specialists examine income statements, utility and eviction notices, bank statements, and other household expenses, as well as, assessing the household's sudden and significant loss of income to determine HPRP eligibility. However, resource specialists often consult each other to review cases and households' documentation during weekly meetings. During our site visit, Project Action staff stated that their decision-making process goes through many stages and has several checks in place.

## Prevention Activities

Under Project Action, households may receive financial assistance for rental payments, security and utility deposits, rental and utility arrearages, utility payments, moving cost assistance, motel/ hotel vouchers, and storage. Housing stabilization services include case management, linkage to other community services and mainstream agencies, legal services, and employment referrals.

## Housing and Utility Assistance

As noted above, HPRP financial assistance includes current rental and utility payments, as well as arrearages. Project Action caps the amount of financial assistance households can receive based on the number of household members. Individuals are allowed up to \$4,000. Households with two to three members are allowed up to \$6,000 and households with four or more members are allowed up to \$10,000. This set amount of financial assistance per household includes current rental and utility

payments, as well as arrearages. Financial assistance can last up to 12 months. If a resource specialist assesses that a household needs financial assistance beyond 12 months, they will ask for their supervisor's approval for an extension. This extension cannot exceed 18 months of assistance allowed by HUD. Households are reassessed for program eligibility every three months.

During our site visit, one resource specialist thought that households received financial assistance (and accompanying case management services) for approximately six months and most households received the maximum amount of financial assistance in which they qualified.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, up until August 2011, if a household exited the program without receiving their maximum allocated amount of financial assistance, they were allowed to re-enroll in the program to receive the remaining balance. Given the demand for HPRP services, the program staff decided it was not fair to let people use the program a second time at the cost of crowding out first time applicants for the program, so it was not allowed after August 2011.<sup>6</sup>

During the first four months of program implementation, Project Action allowed all households a maximum of \$8,000 over 12 months. However in March 2010, staff determined if they continued with this financial assistance model, all funding would be quickly spent. Therefore, they developed an alternative approach based on the number members in the household. Project Action staff explained that assistance ends for clients at various points in time, including:

- Clients exhausting the maximum amount of funding that they could receive or the time they could receive assistance;
- Clients not being eligible for assistance at reassessment; or,
- Clients self-determining that they no longer needed assistance.

### Other Supports and Services

Resource specialists 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. Project Action requires households to meet with resource specialists at least once a month to check in on their housing stability and employment search. However, most households check in with their resource specialist more than once a month. During our site visit, a resource specialist stated that on average she has contact with her clients three times a month. Case management services are usually not provided after financial assistance ends. This is mostly due to the large case load (roughly 30 to 40 clients) that resource specialists maintain.

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<sup>5</sup> Notes for the Project Action Community Stakeholder meeting in February 8, 2012 indicate that the median length of time in the program was 122 days (approximately 4 months) and that the mode was 91 days. However, the information noted that it included 69 VASH clients that received move-in deposit assistance only and thus were only served for 1 or 2 months. So the median for non-VASH households is greater than 4 months.

<sup>6</sup> Notes for the Project Action Community Stakeholder meeting in February 8, 2012 indicated that 15 household returned to Project Action for a second round of Assistance as of August 2011.

Resource specialists work with households to determine what services and benefits they are eligible for in the community outside HPRP. They often refer household members to Pima County's One-Stop, which provides career development services and training for youth and adults.

Additionally, in order to receive financial assistance from Project Action, households must attend a two-hour financial education class with Money Management International (MMI) within one month of receiving assistance. This class explores topics such as:

- Money and credit;
- Financial goals;
- Wants vs. needs;
- Insurance;
- Budgeting and income;
- Debt;
- Savings; and
- Credit, credit reports, and credit scores.

When interviewing resource specialists during our site visit, they noted that their clients had very positive reactions to this class and were interested in taking more financial education classes.

## Data and Monitoring

HMIS has provided Project Action with the ability to share data between subgrantees, the city and county, and the evaluation team. During the site visit, mostly all Project Action staff noted that HMIS was a great tool to use for communication between subgrantees and allowed them to serve households quicker.

As noted earlier, the city of Tucson/Pima County hired an evaluation team to regularly examine client-level data and conduct several studies exploring different components of their implementation of HPRP.

In addition to reporting on quarterly HMIS data for households receiving HPRP services, the evaluation team is in the process of conducting three studies.<sup>7</sup>

### (1) Client Survey

- This survey is intended for program participants that have received financial assistance and case management services for at least three months.
- Survey questions focus on client satisfaction and client perceptions of increased knowledge and increased stability.

### (2) Case Management Study

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<sup>7</sup> All information regarding city of Tucson/Pima County's evaluation efforts were provided by the grantees and the local evaluation team.



- Evaluation questions include:
  - What kind of case management services were provided to Project Action clients?
  - In what way did these services function as an intervention to assist clients to strengthen their self-sufficiency and housing stability?
- Data sources include:
  - HMIS case notes;
  - Focus group with resource specialists; and,
  - Client survey data

(3) Follow-up study to clients that have exited the program

- Evaluation questions include:
  - What is the housing status of Project Action clients six months after program exit?<sup>8</sup>
- Preliminary findings include:
  - 10.8 percent of respondents were living in temporary situations (mostly living temporarily with friends and family); and,
  - 89.2 percent were living in relatively permanent situations

## Plans for Future Prevention Programming

At this time, the city of Tucson and Pima County do not have plans to continue Project Action after HPRP funding ends in June 2012. They do not believe that the ESG funding they expect to receive will be large enough to continue operating a program like Project Action. Pima County will most likely return to using the community action agencies as a means for homeless prevention.

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<sup>8</sup> The evaluation team contacted 102 out of 166 households, a 61.4 percent response rate.

### Pima County and the City of Tucson, AZ

<b>Exhibit 1. HPRP Funded Prevention Program</b>				
	# Persons	Percent of Total Persons	# Households	Percent of Total Households
Total Served*	447	100%	168	100%
Persons in Families	362	81%	-	-
Adults without children	85	19%	-	-
HPRP Services				
Rental Assistance	-	-	148	88%
Case Management	-	-	161	96%
Security / Utility deposits	-	-	52	31%
Outreach and Engagement	-	-	73	43%
Utility Payments	-	-	127	76%
Housing Search/ Placement	-	-	18	11%
Legal Services	-	-	10	6%
Credit Repair	-	-	66	39%
Motel & Hotel Vouchers	-	-	3	2%
Moving Cost Assistance	-	-	29	17%
Length of Stay in Program**				
Average	129	-	-	-
Median	130	-	-	-
Destination***				
Total Leavers	246	100%	-	-
Homeless	0	0%	-	-
Institutional Setting	0	0%	-	-
Permanent housing w/ subsidy	19	8%	-	-
Permanent housing without subsidy	207	84%	-	-
Family or friends	16	7%	-	-
Source: Annual Performance Report Data – Program Start through 9/30/2010				
*Total Served numbers may not add to 100% because the “children only” and “unknown” categories are not included in this table				
**Length of Stay numbers are approximate, calculated using a weighted average over multiple programs				
***Destination numbers may not add to total leavers because the “other”, “hotel/motel”, “unknown”, and “deceased” categories are not included in this table				