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Center for Social Policy: Reshaping Poverty Policy for and with Families and Communities

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Center for Social Policy: Reshaping Poverty Policy for and with Families and Communities

Goal: Improve the lives of those living in poverty in Boston and MA by advancing changes in public supports and business practices.

Interconnectedness of housing, child care, employment, social policies/practices, and business practices; government investments and streamlining and coordination of government programs

Primary Focus

Strategy

Change state public support policies and practices

Change public perceptions: Reframe poverty solutions

Change business practices

Outputs

Idea generation through frequent and real-time issuing of facts: what needs fixing and policy fix ideas

Build public support and political will for public and business changes

Identify levers and supporters for change in the business community (via core partnership with College of Management)

Activities

Collaboration, white papers, idea briefs

Data: conventional ‘big data’ & unconventional

Media Relationships

Cross-sector, Cross-class Dialogues

Executive Education Seminars

Business Leadership Group

Short-Term Outcomes

Governor uses recommendations

Government adopts coordination of public resources

Policy fixes for cliff effects

Long-Term Impact

Governor uses recommendations

Government adopts coordination of public resources

Policy fixes for cliff effects

Evaluations:

Housing/Homelessness

Moving Home Evaluation

New Lease for Families Evaluation

Hope VI-Old Colony Evaluation

On Solid Ground: Homelessness in MA

Research Findings
Center for Social Policy:
Reshaping Poverty Policy for and with Families and Communities

Merging Knowledge Project

Constituent Advisors:
Draws on insights of those most directly impacted by economic hardship and social exclusion for policy and practice ideas and based within CSP.

ATD Fourth World:
A network of people in poverty and those from other backgrounds who work in partnership towards overcoming the exclusion and injustice of persistent poverty.

Emerging Leaders Program:
Brings together future leaders from across sectors and the Boston-area to provide collaborative leadership training led by UMass Boston's College of Management.

Julia Tripp participated at the United Nations panel “Participatory Monitoring and Accountability: Critical Components for the Post-2015 Development Agenda”. She talked about the importance of participatory action research and creating a more inclusive world.

Watch a Participant Speak at UN!
“People in poverty cannot be viewed through a lens that only sees what is lacking, but rather through a lens that also sees the knowledge gained through their life experiences.”
- Derek Morris, a participant in Emerging Leaders and our Boston Merging Knowledge project, speaking at the UN on October 17 2014.
About
The “On Solid Ground” report documents the impact of the Commonwealth’s housing shortage on families with extremely low incomes and outlines the critical components of a preventative approach to family homelessness and income insecurity. It is a blueprint for change, offering specific, evidence-based policy recommendations to the new governor, legislators, service providers, the private sector, and the public at large.

The project builds on the collaborative work of the cross-policy coalition already in place, led by Citizens’ Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) and Homes for Families (HFF) and involving, in addition to CSP, an advocacy coalition with 18 participating organizations representing childcare, housing, homelessness, education, employment, public health, hunger, legal services, public income support areas and faith-based communities.

Findings of Our Mixed-Methods Research

✓ Analyzed contextual forces that influence the extent and increase of extremely low income families without stable housing in Massachusetts:
  • 75% increase in usage of family shelters on a given day since 2007;
  • Steady increase in student homelessness over past decade;
✓ Analyzed the characteristics of extremely low-income (ELI) families in Massachusetts:
  • ELI families include almost 112,000 school age children and 61,000 under age 5;
  • 85% of ELI families have school age children and 45% have children under the age of 5;
  • Children 5 years and younger make up nearly half of the total child population in State’s Emergency Assistance (EA) system.
✓ Analysis of hardship, eligibility, and coverage gap among Massachusetts families (2008-2013)
✓ Analyzed trends in state supports for economically vulnerable families such as policies directed to low-income working families; direct cash assistance benefits; other direct benefits and subsidies; programs to support affordable housing; and resources that help shore up families encountering difficult times.
✓ Conducted 12 focus groups all across the state with families, front-line staff, and property owners who have direct experiences with the EA system.
✓ Analyzed other state approaches to program eligibility and integration issues to bolster prevention of family homelessness.
✓ Outlined and proposed three possible projects for the next administration all aimed at increasing families’ access to public resources needed to avoid housing income catastrophe.

For more information, contact CSP’s director Arthur MacEwan: Arthur.Macewan@umb.edu
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Moving Home Initiative

The Bowery Residents’ Committee (BRC) in New York City (NYC) is one of the largest, most comprehensive social service agencies in NYC, offering a client-focused continuum of 27 programs that serve 2,600 individuals daily. Launched in 2007, BRC’s Moving Home initiative applies an individualized, low-threshold model to transitioning chronically homeless men and women from the streets to permanent housing. The program was inspired by the Housing First model to house and support people in their transition to stable housing and possible access to employment.

Goals and Approaches

Partnership Goals

- To assess retention in permanent housing for participants 3, 6, and 12 months after entry into housing.
- To explore correlations between housing status at the 12-month follow-up and personal characteristics and institutional context variables (e.g. access to housing vouchers).
- Assess the effectiveness of this particular model for supporting families with transition to housing stability.
- Draw lessons from this NYC-based experience for other homeless service programs in Massachusetts and elsewhere.

Approaches

Examine multilevel factors affecting housing:
- Analysis of participant housing status and personal characteristics.
- Analysis of the context for low-cost housing and the subsidies available.

CSP Evaluators

François Carré: francoise.carre@umb.edu
Karen Monaghan: karenmonaghan@hotmail.com

Evaluating innovative programs helps us inform policy decisions, replication or expansion efforts, or changes in practice.
New Lease for Homeless Families

New Lease for Homeless Families will connect 200 or more homeless families to affordable housing units provided by private and non-profit property owners over a two-year period. The infrastructure will then be in place to continue matching homeless families coming out of shelter to affordable housing units, which may change the larger systems of reducing family homelessness in Massachusetts.

Partners
New Lease for Homeless Families
The Citizens Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA)
DHCD
HomeStart

CSP Evaluators
Mary Coonan: coonanma@comcast.net
Marija Bingulac: marija.bingulac001@umb.edu

Goals and Approaches
Evaluate through the lens of systems-change, with a focus on:
1. measuring the effectiveness of housing interventions;
2. the extent to which stakeholders institutionalize these practices;
3. and the feasibility of extrapolating these interventions to a larger level.

Mixed-methods Approach
• Quantitative data analysis
• Qualitative interviews

Process Evaluation
• Extent to which participating agencies, landlords, and DHCD participated in the program as designed and anticipated.

Outcomes Evaluation
• Standardization of housing admission process.
• Centralized communication across all parties.
• Enhanced stabilization services.
• Flexible use of the emergency fund.

A Three Year Period
• Ample opportunity to test different types of housing subsidies, account for a rolling enrollment, and for partnership deepening and development.

We design these evaluations to answer questions like:
What works and for whom?
Center for Social Policy: Evaluation of New Lease for Homeless Families

Mind Maps
Evaluation Role with HOPE VI

CSP continues its ongoing evaluation role with HOPE VI, a federally funded program operated by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. HOPE VI allows public housing authorities to apply for funding to redevelop severely distressed housing developments. The Old Colony development is currently the most physically distressed site in the BHA's federal portfolio, with aged systems and infrastructure and high annual energy and water costs.

Redevelopment focuses on:
- physical improvements;
- management improvements;
- social and community services to address residents' needs.

Phase one will include building up to 150 new housing units and a new community center, as part of the plan for physical transformation matched by a comprehensive program of Community and Supportive Services.

CSP Evaluator: Mary Coonan, coonanma@comcast.net

Background

The Boston Housing Authority is the largest landlord in Boston and the largest public housing authority in New England. As such, the BHA houses approximately 10 percent of the city's residents through its programs. In addition to providing conventional public housing, the Boston Housing Authority also provides affordable housing through the administration of several rental assistance programs.

Approaches

The planning process includes participation from key stakeholders, such as Old Colony residents and the broader South Boston neighborhood.
- Qualitative interviews with core partnering and second tier partnering agencies.
- Focus groups with residents moving into/out of Old Colony, the resident Task Force, and residents serving as community outreach workers.
- Participation data at the community center.
- On-going technical assistance.

Contributions

The evaluation contributes to knowledge about how best to affect the housing transition with emphasis on how partner agencies can work collaboratively in this effort. Partner agencies have developed close working relationships to support families with relocation, income stability, and community development. Residents are scheduled to begin moving back into the refurbished housing in early summer.

We focus on improving the lives of those outside the circles of power by engaging constituents "to build knowledge from the ground up."