Homelessness Prevention: A Case Study from Montgomery County, PA
Today’s Panelists

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Investing in Healthy Communities

Seeding great ideas
HealthSpark – Who we are

Private, independent foundation formed in 2002
One of nearly 50 hospital conversion foundations in Pennsylvania
Assets: $42 million  Average Annual Giving: $1.8 million
Geographic Focus: Montgomery County, Pennsylvania
Mission:

*HealthSpark Foundation invests in systems change opportunities in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania to enhance consumer access and leverage public and private resources promoting quality outcomes.*
HealthSpark – How we do our work?

Convene  Community “Crowdsourcing events”; focus groups; task forces; learning circles, etc.

Advocate  Through our membership organizations

Partner  Actively seek funding partnerships

Invest in research and capacity building opportunities
Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

One of four suburban counties surrounding City of Philadelphia
Second wealthiest county in Pennsylvania

• Median household income: $83,254
• Median property value: $299,700
• 72.5% of housing units are owner occupied
• Average monthly rental is $1,211 for a 2BR apartment; and $1,003 for a 1BR apartment.
• Population of 875,000 people
• Poverty rate: 6.6%
• Ranked #1 by County Health Rankings for Health Factors; #4 for Health Outcomes
How HealthSpark got involved in Homelessness

Community Needs assessment highlighted the housing/homeless system difficult to access and navigate
Responded to a faith-based shelter provider who asked for support to figure out how to improve access and outcomes
The request aligned with our mission – improve access & promote quality outcomes
That was 2007!
Examples of HealthSpark Investments

Situational Analysis of Existing Programs/Services
National scan of promising or best practices
Site visit to Alameda County – Housing Resource Center model
Pilots to learn about coordinated entry, strengths-based engagement and other evidence-based service models
Community/system capacity building grants
Building a vision for a public/private partnership
Created a funder collaborative of pooled funds
Supported development of a five-year strategic plan

.... All led to the launch of Your Way Home Montgomery County in 2014
What is Your Way Home?

• The county’s unified and coordinated housing crisis response system for families and individuals experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness.

• Embraces a “housing first” approach – first helping people find or maintain permanent housing with stability and then connecting them with community, health, human, and financial services they need to prevent future experiences of homelessness.

• Coordinated entry prioritizes rapid re-housing and diversion services based on vulnerability and need.

• Unified data system

• Dedicated county staff manages the system
Why Is YWH Important to HealthSpark?

It’s a systems change initiative – aligned with our interests in capacity building.

YWH is a public/private partnership formally launched in 2014 to make the experience of homelessness brief, rare and non-recurring.

YWH values are Housing First, progressive engagement, strength-based practices and equity.

A major shift in practice that evolved was prioritization to serve the most vulnerable first – the former system operated on a first-come, first-served basis.
YWH is a HealthSpark System and Provider-level Capacity Building Investment

Before YWH launched, providers did not use any evidence-based case management tools.

The community did not have a lot of data or use data to predict or model how service to the most vulnerable might work (or not).

Pilot projects to test new concepts.

Build the local field of learning about emerging industry trends.

Host site visits.

Support conference attendance and training opportunities.

Support the launch of a unified and coordinated entry system.
Providers, consumers and others complained the system was not responsive to everyone’s needs/issues. They asked, “Where’s the investment in prevention?”

HMIS data suggested using public funds to pay back rent to avoid eviction did not prevent entry into the system so this practice was ended.

Our public/private partnership had no clear path forward

YWH started to explore how other communities were developing eviction prevention practices and similar ‘upstream solutions’.

HealthSpark returned to a proven local strategy to study the opportunities through a national scan of “best practices”
YWH – Prevention Study

HealthSpark & YWH staff developed an RFP to inform:
• Policy & practice
• Identify potential sources of funding to support prevention work
Partnersed with FTEH to identify 8 experts
Received four proposals; three declined; one did not respond
As an independent contracting entity, the county avoided a need to follow normal procurement protocols
Core team of local stakeholders served as a project steering committee.

HealthSpark contributed ‘other system perspectives’ including food security, education, job training, and health to the discussions.

Lots communications to build “good will” among YWH providers, funders and other stakeholders.

HealthSpark hosted an informal evening with the consultant and other YWH philanthropic partners to nurture investment discussions to support a pilot prevention project.
Eviction and Homelessness Prevention
Best and Promising Practices - 2017

NATIONAL SCAN AND EMERGING VISION
Race, Gender, and Children

Almost half of the city’s evictions took place in predominantly black inner-city neighborhoods, where one renter-occupied household in 14 was evicted annually.

In black neighborhoods, women were more than twice as likely to be evicted as men.

Neighborhoods with a greater proportion of children have more evictions, even after controlling for their poverty rate, racial composition, percentage of female-headed households, and a number of other factors.

If a tenant lives with children, her or his odds of receiving an eviction judgment almost triple, even after taking into account how much is owed to the landlord, household income, and several other key factors.

Consequences of Eviction

Eviction almost always leads to increased residential instability and homelessness, as well as to a downward move: a relocation to a disadvantaged neighborhood and/or to substandard housing.

Families lose many of their possessions — including beds and furniture — after being evicted.
Targeting Resources – by risk category

Universe of households who are at risk of homelessness are:
- paying more than ½ income for housing
- vulnerable to financial crisis
- living in shared housing

Greatest risk of homelessness – diversion + ongoing housing supports

At imminent risk of eviction – legal and social services + housing supports

Housing instability – multiple risk factors – prevention + housing supports

Housing insecure – housing supports
Targeting Resources – by segmenting inflow from systems
**Key Terms:**

**Homelessness Prevention:** is a range of types of assistance that is aimed at helping households avoid eviction or homelessness.

**Diversion:** is a type of targeted homelessness prevention assistance aimed at helping households stay safely in current housing or, if that is not possible, move to other housing without requiring a shelter stay first. Priority is given to households who are most likely to be admitted to shelters or be unsheltered if not for this assistance.
My thoughts: an emerging premise

If you have a high functioning crisis response system (effective at diversion, targeting/matching interventions, with mostly successful exits to stable housing) that has demonstrated results (low unsheltered and declining annual PIT count)

Housing stability is the primary goal of homelessness prevention.

Look upstream and determine opportunity(ies) for prevention (homelessness and/or eviction)

- What are greatest needs?
- What populations are most likely to become homeless?
- Which populations are most costly if they do become homeless?
- Where is there energy and interest for vulnerable populations?
- What impacts might create political will?
- Are there any financial resources or partnerships that might coalesce?
- How will we measure impact?
Upstream prevention strategies

Community-wide

- Affordable housing campaign – preserve and create new affordable rental housing for extremely low income households
- Broad-based emergency financial assistance and services
- Court-based eviction prevention
- Public housing eviction prevention
- Universal screener with targeted prevention services
- Target high cost and vulnerable people
  - Frequent users of jail, hospitals, detox, etc.
  - Support youth transitioning from foster care
  - Support elderly households to stay in home via home modification and home-based services
- Target vulnerable children and families
  - Public and assisted housing eviction prevention services
  - School based supports
  - Train family and child providers to provide housing stabilization service

Highly-targeted
Your Way Home is functioning well – reducing overall homelessness, excellent diversion outcomes, strong cross-sector collaboration

Population who experiences homelessness is disproportionately Black or African American and are usually families with children.

Two zip codes represent over 60% of evictions

683 children were homeless under the Education definition and served by Montgomery County schools.

CONCEPTS

1) **Service-connected households** to leverage unified Montgomery County human services
   a) Broad based screen for risk of homelessness
   b) Targeted, e.g. youth transition from foster care, frail elderly, etc.

2) **Court and legal services models**: eviction court, housing court, legal aid – *geographically targeted*

3) **Programs for families that are identified by schools** -- *geographically targeted*
Programs for families that are identified by schools

**Selection Criteria:**
- Focus on McKinney-Vento eligible students (homeless per ED definition)
- Low barrier eligibility (i.e. income not required)
- Strong housing stability outcomes

**Communities selected:**
- Greater Cincinnati, OH/KY
- Greater Phoenix, AZ

**Keys:**
- Partnership with schools to help children succeed academically
- Comprehensive approach
- Two-Generation services (2-Gen)

**Challenge:** inadequate income and lack of affordable rental housing

**Components:**
- Case management
- School services
- Housing relocation
- Emergency financial assistance
- Employment, income and benefits
- Money management
- Referrals for legal representation
Service-connected households – screen for risk of homelessness

• **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs** (VA) developed a “universal screener” to identify Veterans housing instability among those who accessed VA healthcare. Veterans who were assessed as housing unstable were referred to specialized VA homeless prevention services.

• **Los Angeles County** The Economic Roundtable developed recommendations for screening and assessment, “trip wires”, and timely services that include employment and prevention assistance based on a comprehensive evaluation of data on households receiving public assistance. The review included data on health, mental health, justice system, education, child welfare, and labor market outcomes. The recommendations were not implemented.

• **New York City** – NYU School of Medicine is conducting cross-system collaboration to develop a homelessness prevention screening tool for emergency department patients
  * **Other health screeners:** Children’s HealthWatch developed a HungerVital Signs screener.
Court and legal services models: eviction court, housing court, legal aid

Communities reviewed:
- Baltimore, MD
- Cleveland, OH
- Columbus, OH
- Bronx, NY
- Portland, ME
- Washington, DC

**Keys to success:**
- Court partnership with services based in courthouse
- Immediate intervention
- Prevent future recurrence

**Components:**
- Court promotes services and process
- Legal representation
  - Lawyer for the Day
  - Legal Aid
- Tenant information and education
- Mediation
- Emergency financial assistance
- Income and benefits
- Money management
- Addressing housing conditions
  - Coordination with code enforcement
  - Address home repairs
- Process improvements
YOUR WAY HOME
MONTGOMERY COUNTY

www.yourwayhome.org
Your Way Home is the county’s public-private partnership to end homelessness, and the county’s unified homeless crisis response system

Partnership structure
- Your Way Home Advisory Council
- Lead public agency - Montgomery County Office of Housing and Community Development
- Lead private agency - Montgomery County Foundation; holds the Your Way Home Initiative Fund

Impact
- Since 2014, Your Way Home has reduced homelessness by 37% (from 464 persons counted during the Point in Time Count in 2013 to 292 persons counted in 2018)
- 80%+ success rate in diversion
- 2,000 people served in Your Way Home system annually
**Project concept:** Provide free, limited legal representation and social services to tenants facing eviction in a geographically-targeted area of the county.

**Key partners:**
- local Bar Association and Foundation
- Legal Aid
- Court administration
- Social services partner

**Project budget:**
$130,000 for 6 six month pilot project to serve 120 households
FROM IDEA TO IMPLEMENTATION

1. Identify partners & recruit champions
2. Develop shared vision
3. Identify & design project components
4. Obtain funding
5. Project launch
6. Learn & adapt
Legal representation
- Pro bono services provided by volunteers
- Bar Association recruits, trains, and organizes volunteers
- Free CLE’s offered for lawyers who sign up for 1 shift

Social services
- Case manager provides intake & assessment
- Housing Stability Plans & Budgets
- Distributes financial assistance if appropriate
- Follow-up for 30 days
OUR IMPACT

- Tenant entered court with a $5,000 judgement against him and his family of six.

- Tenant was undocumented and spoke little English.

- Pro-bono lawyer learned the tenant was forced to move out due to uninhabitable living conditions. Upon further review, the lawyer realized the lease was invalid – there was no case against this tenant.

- Judge dismissed the judgement against the tenant and his family and saved them from paying $5,000 and a black mark on their record.

“PEOPLE IN HIS POSITION OFTEN GET STEAMROLLED. THIS PROGRAM PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE TO BE HEARD IN A JUST-FASHION – IT GIVES THEM A FAIR SHAKE.”

- VOLUNTEER LAWYER
What is the role of philanthropy in prevention work?
**Be a catalyst for prevention**

**Catalytic philanthropists** should, “gather knowledge about the problem they are tackling and use this knowledge to inform their own actions and motivate the actions of others. Making knowledge actionable requires more than just gathering and reporting data. The information must also carry emotional appeal to capture people’s attention and practical recommendations that can inspire them to action.”

Philanthropy’s tool box

- Convening
- Advocacy
- Partnership
- Funding
Convening

- Mobilize key community leaders who will be necessary for success.
  - Prevention requires partnerships beyond the existent CoC partners and philanthropy can open the door to new partnerships.
  - Offer to convene cross-sector key leaders on behalf of the CoC to participate.
  - Engage public sector leaders, especially those that the CoC has not been able to cultivate and engage.
- Host community conversations and forums to explore findings and gather input. Engage public leaders in these events. Offer practical ways that all can participate.
- Convene other funders to engage the community dialogue about the need for homelessness prevention and solutions. These can be both informal, social gatherings to more highly structured events with formal presentations.
- Create a funders collaborative.
Advocacy

◦ Encourage public-sector participation in administrative data matching to use data from multiple systems of care to identify where people who become homeless come from, what services they use, what types of households they are.
◦ Research promising best practices and evidenced-based tools and share this information with the CoC and policymakers.
◦ Invest in and encourage other philanthropic partners to invest in housing stabilization supports, rental assistance, and legal services and support the costs of the pilot evaluation.
◦ Offer public testimony about the needs and solutions.
◦ Philanthropy can hold the line on the need to be responsible for “results” not just “feel-good” work. Prevention requires a data disciplined approach to be ensure effectiveness and efficiency.
Partnership

◦ Commit senior staff time to work with the CoC leadership and to participate in the project planning and implementation phases. Be an active and supportive partner and thought leader.
◦ Work with the CoC to understand how well the homeless crisis response system is currently functioning on key performance measures. Review current diversion assistance practices to be sure that it is widely available for those who at greatest risk of imminent homelessness.
◦ Identify local, regional and national experts whose work may help inform the CoC of opportunities.
Funding

- Allocate general operating support, service/program and capacity-building grants to organizations working to deepen impact around “upstream” prevention.
- Support an external system review.
- Invest in and require an outcome driven evaluation for pilot project(s).
- Issue matching grant challenges.
- Invest in and support HMIS and community data reviews and the dissemination of findings to determine greatest needs and potential for impact.
Q&A
Upcoming Opportunities to Learn & Engage

Book Talk:
Richard Rothstein’s The Color of Law
April 4
1pm EST/ 10am PST

For more information: Stephanie Chan– stephanie@funderstogether.org
Q&A
Thank You!

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