

---

# PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

A summit on integrating employment and housing strategies to prevent and end homelessness

## Community Profile

**Instructions: *In not more than 5 pages total, please complete each section to the best of your ability. The questions within each section are to guide your narrative; however it is not expected that every community will be able to answer every question. This document will ultimately be published and widely disseminated. We encourage you to use narrative language that is easy to understand to describe your community efforts. This is the first draft of the document with subsequent revisions expected as we move through the pre-summit planning process and following the Summit.***

### **COMMUNITY: HAMPDEN COUNTY COC& THREE COUNTY COC DESCRIPTION**

**What specific strategies are used for identifying, reaching and serving people experiencing homelessness? What is the approach to providing an employment, training, and career pathway at both the community and project levels, including any best practices that are used? What is the target population including general demographics?**

Western Massachusetts is a large, geographically diverse region of Massachusetts consisting of Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire Counties. The region is the most rural in the state while having two of its poorest cities: Springfield and Holyoke. Like the rest of the state, Western Massachusetts has experienced an increase in homelessness in recent years even while the nation overall is experiencing a decline. Homelessness in Western MA has increased 10% since last year and 13% over the past 5 years. Several factors disproportionately impact the region, including: a higher rate of families in poverty than the state overall, with our major metropolitan area of Springfield, MA having one of the highest rates in the country (44%); high rates of teen pregnancies, with Holyoke, MA having the highest teen pregnancy rate in the state; the highest rate in the state of homeless families living in overflow hotels/motels, where lengths of stay are longer than in shelter settings while services are fewer; and higher rates of chronic homelessness than the rest of the state (16% vs. 11%). Our approach is based on two core concepts: (1) individualized employment plans that address the specific needs of each homeless job seeker and (2) flexible funds to meet those needs. Our target populations are homeless and formerly homeless families, families at risk of eviction, and homeless individuals including those in motel, shelter, places not fit for human habitation, those recently housed with short term rental subsidies and those accessing eviction prevention funds.

### **COLLABORATION**

**What partners (government, nonprofit, and private sector) are participating? What does each partner add to the project? How do you work together? How did the collaboration begin? How is the collaboration being funded and sustained?**

Western Massachusetts' employment efforts on behalf of homeless individuals and families span dozens of providers through private, public and quasi-public funding, all working collaboratively under the coordinating umbrella of the Secure Jobs Advisory Council, facilitated by the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness. The region's employment efforts for homeless families and individuals include participation of all four county career centers, early

# PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

A summit on integrating employment and housing strategies to prevent and end homelessness

## *Community Profile*

education and child care organizations, shelter and housing providers, community colleges, Regional Employment Boards and multiple state agencies that intersect with the job seeking homeless population.

This initiative began with the vision of the Paul and Phyllis Fireman Foundation, a long-time state partner on family homelessness initiatives, and their initial funding of a Western Massachusetts planning grant to respond to employment needs for homeless families and individuals in Spring, 2012. Based on that plan's recommendations, The Fireman Foundation launched the Secure Jobs pilot project, with Western Massachusetts being one of five awardees state-wide. That initiative's success inspired the complementary publicly funded efforts now underway.

Funded partners include the following non-profit organizations: Berkshire Works Career Center, CareerPoint Career Center, Construct, Inc., Corporation for Public Management, FutureWorks Career Center, Hampshire/Franklin Career Center, HAPHousing, and ServiceNet provide case management, job readiness, job development, and job retention services. Playful Minds LC and Square One provide child care and partner in developing career pathways to the early education and care career field. Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness provides extensive coordination and oversees the Secure Jobs Advisory Council and maintains the online presence for the Western Massachusetts secure Jobs collaborations

<http://westernmasshousingfirst.org/blog/secure-jobs-connect/>

Corporation for Public Management provides data coordination, hosts the Secure Jobs data base and coordinates child care resources with partner and state agencies. MA Department of Housing and Community Development, MA Labor and Workforce Development, MA Department of Transitional Assistance and MA Department of Early Education and Care are all critical partners in the effort.

Funding is provided by the Paul and Phyllis Fireman Foundation, Commonwealth Corporation through the MA Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, and the MA Department of Housing and Community Development, in addition to private and leveraged resources.

The keys to sustaining this partnership are communication and collaboration. Secure Jobs programs optimize coordination of services throughout a client's journey to full employment. The Secure Jobs Advisory Council meets monthly to review and evaluate outcomes and ensure that all Secure Jobs programs are maximizing resources, building on successful strategies, and troubleshooting challenges. On an operational level, in-person, telephone, and email communications between all workforce development sub-contractors, and shelter and housing stabilization staff are continuous in order to monitor clients' progress and overcome barriers.

## **Innovation**

**How is this project innovative or improved from earlier approaches? How is it making partners collaborate in a way that they have not done before? Do you have any documentation of impact of innovative and promising practices, however preliminary? If yes, can you provide a link?**

The Secure Jobs model, based on an unprecedented level of collaboration and flexibility in meeting clients' needs, is an extremely successful innovation. Each program brings new partners to the table in unique partnerships. With the most recent state funding, we now have every Career Center in our four county region invested in the effort. Their partnership includes the

# PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

A summit on integrating employment and housing strategies to prevent and end homelessness

## *Community Profile*

innovative approach of co-locating career center and program staff to meet the complex case management needs and overcome employment barriers that frequently arise.

The collaboration between HAPHousing and Corporation for Public Management in its implementation of the Secure Jobs program offers a powerful example of what resource allocation and service coordination can produce. First, HAPHousing elected to allocate MA DHCD Stabilization funds to employment efforts for homeless families, building on the Fireman Foundation's private investment and CPM's program model. Secondly, it and CPM devised a comprehensive referral system with the local career centers that directed clients to the appropriate program and career center depending on their job readiness. Finally, through ongoing communication and coordinated case management, they supported 191 homeless parents into employment over a 1 year period. Please go to: <http://westernmasshousingfirst.org/blog/secure-jobs-connect/sjc-progress-report/> for the final progress report of this particular initiative.

Additional innovations pertain to child care, a critical need for employment success. Working in collaboration with child care partners, the Secure Jobs model allocates funding for "bridge child care" to provide immediate child care services while working to obtain long-term child care vouchers and/or income-eligible slots.

Finally, a recent innovation includes the development of an early education career track for job seekers. Working with child care agencies, Secure Jobs is sponsoring two courses and internships that will qualify an individual for child care teacher certification. While building career ladders, the region is increasing its capacity to serve the children of future job seekers.

## **FUNDING FOR INITIATIVE/PROJECTS**

**What funding streams are being accessed to support this approach? How are funding streams (government and private) being combined or leveraged? Specifically, how are WIA funds being accessed? What are the amounts of each funding type?**

Public, private and foundation funding as well as extensive leverages combine to fund Secure Jobs: HAPHousing (MADHCD) \$212,000; Fireman Foundation \$523,000; MA DHCD \$250,000; CommCorp through EOLWD \$207,000; Partner agency leverages \$475,000

When permissible, Career Center partners make every attempt to co-enroll clients in various programs to leverage available dollars. Workforce Investment Act funds and services are accessed when clients are eligible for and enrolled in WIA, and funds are available for approved training and educational programs.

## **CONNECTION TO EMPLOYERS**

**How are employers being engaged? What role do they play in the initiative beyond providing employment? Please identify what types of employers, including whether they are private, public, or nonprofit sector employers.**

The Secure Jobs design includes incentives for businesses to hire, which have proven effective in helping employers to "take the risk" to hire clients that may not have the skills, education or work history they typically seek. Additionally, businesses engaged in our program frequently exceed the strict role of providing employment to include a more expansive approach with assistance such as: gift cards for successful completion of job training or readiness programs; provision of interview or job clothing; the establishment of a car ownership program.

# PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

A summit on integrating employment and housing strategies to prevent and end homelessness

## Community Profile

Secure Jobs also engages employers through recognition. At a “first year” program celebration event in February, 2014, the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness, with support from all the program partners, hosted a large public event to honor 13 businesses that participated in the Secure Jobs program. The event included approximately 20 state legislators, mayors and state officials who attended to applaud the business participants and success of the program’s clients. Businesses also received positive media coverage from every major media outlet in the region. Businesses were eager to continue and to do more in support of this project as a result of this event (which also was key in fueling political support for the public funding that was allocated by the state legislature in June later that year).

Secure Jobs clients have secured employment in private, public and nonprofit sectors. Industry sectors where employment has been secured include Healthcare, Childcare, Hotel and Food Service, Construction and Manufacturing, Retail and Wholesale, Transportation and Administration.

## COMMUNITY CONTEXT –

Community Population	Hampden #467,319; Hampshire #159,596; Franklin #71,221; Berkshire #129,585
2014 PIT (overall homeless)	Hampden County #2655; Three County CoC #753; Combined #3408
2013 CoC award	Hampden County \$2,109,95; Three County CoC \$1,599,964; Combined \$3,709,916
2013 WIA formula grant allocation*	Hampden \$3,512,146; Franklin/Hampshire \$1,518,105; Berkshire \$926,042
Current unemployment rate**	Hampden 8.1%; Hampshire 5.7%; Franklin 5.8%; Berkshire 5.8%

\*This includes Title 1 Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth WIA Formula Grant Allocations by county

\*\*Most recent month; not seasonally adjusted.

## DATA AND RESULTS

**What data are you collecting? What outcomes are being measured relative to employment, housing, other? How does data integrate or supplement HMIS or other national data systems? What are the results in terms of people served, initial employment, retained employment at 6 months and 1 year? Have there been any evaluations? Please attach or provide links to program reports and evaluations.**

Data protocols for Fireman Foundation and DHCD funded grants are extensive and tracked by Brandeis University which is collecting and analyzing all data for program evaluation. We follow the same protocols for all three programs.

Data is collected via a customized CPM Access database. Extensive demographic and programmatic data is gathered including changes in employment, housing and child care situations.

Overall the collaborations have employed over 200 clients between February 2013 and August 2014. Of the 23 clients that entered employment prior to August 2013 (able to achieve 1 year job retention) 17 remain employed for a 74% one year job retention rate. Of the 47 clients that entered employment prior to February 2014 (able to achieve 6 month job retention) 41 remain employed for an 88% -six month job retention.

# PARTNERSHIPS FOR OPENING DOORS

A summit on integrating employment and housing strategies to prevent and end homelessness

## Community Profile

For more information on the *Secure Jobs Fund & Vocational Training* initiative go to <http://www.ppffound.org/pdfs/SecureJobsReport.pdf>

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REPLICATION

### What lessons have you learned that would be helpful to other communities that might want to replicate your approach?

We continue to learn lessons on a daily basis. Our advice at this point would include: allow for flexible dollars in order to allocate funds precisely towards each client's needs, including fees, certifications, drivers license, purchase of ID's, child care costs, transportation expenses; design a program where each client works toward their individual goal vs. a design of one training program that must fit all; work with career ladders, homeless clients need immediate income and, while working, opportunities to earn advanced credentials increasing their income and housing stability; allow flexibility in program attendance to accommodate the reality of the complex and often unanticipated challenges homeless clients face; establishing child care prior to employment to increase the success of transitions for both parent and child.

### Optional

### Do you have any success stories that you could share? If yes, please attach or provide links.

Stephanie is a 24 year old single parent of a toddler. She has been in shelter since late in her pregnancy; her child has lived in shelter all her life. Stephanie had strong case management from the Center for Human Development shelter staff. During her time in shelter she completed a medical assistant training program; however she was unable to secure employment and was referred to Secure Jobs Connect. Once in the program, we established child care for her daughter and paid for Stephanie to receive her Phlebotomy and Blood Borne Pathogens Certifications. CareerPoint staff worked with Stephanie on job search, and she was offered a full time position in a medical office. Stephanie's job required her to work from 8 am to 5 pm Monday through Friday and offered a sustainable wage and full benefits package.

Unfortunately, the child's daycare was unable to provide coverage for the appropriate times. Reaching out to partner agency, Square One, we were able to secure a daycare slot that would fit. However, the shelter was located outside of their transportation area and public transportation schedules did not allow for Stephanie to take a bus from the shelter to the daycare and arrive at work for 8am. Reaching out to housing partners, we located a shelter vacancy at the New England Farm Workers' Council shelter. This unit was in the transportation service area and less than 1 mile from Stephanie's job. Within 4 days of accepting the position Stephanie was moved from one shelter provider to another, and her child was moved to the new daycare. Stephanie has now been employed since September 2013, and has received a pay increase to \$13.79 per hour. She has maintained perfect attendance. In February 2013, she and her child left shelter and moved into their first apartment. In October 2014 Stephanie is being honored by Square One for her dedication and commitment to her child. She is planning on starting college courses in January 2015 to work toward her LPN Certification, paid for by her employer.

Thankfully, Stephanie's story isn't unique. This type of coordinated effort is happening daily in our region, but it doesn't happen on its own. It requires the support of many individuals and agencies, as well as someone to coordinate the many pieces needed for each client's success, a Navigator, who can affect system change.

### Do you have anything else that should be shared about your project?

*Thank you. Please submit by **August 27, 2014** to: [barbara@poppeassociates.com](mailto:barbara@poppeassociates.com).*

*If you have any questions, please contact Barbara Poppe at e-mail above*