

# **Study on Rapid Re-housing Program Models Project Summary Report**

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This document has been prepared for the Calgary Homeless Foundation

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# Executive Summary

Rapid re-housing (RRH) is a Housing First approach that aims to quickly support individuals and families to quickly exit homelessness. Between December, 2019 and March, 2020, the Calgary Homeless Foundation hired a team of consultants to delve into RRH program models in order to understand where they fit within the continuum of housing supports in Calgary and how RRH can meet the needs of Calgary's Homeless Serving System of Care to achieve its goal of 'functional zero'. To accomplish this a literature review and environmental scan were conducted to identify common practices in RRH programs. These were supported by a series of interviews with agencies delivering RRH both locally and in other jurisdictions.

The results of this project noted that most RRH have some common components: housing identification, financial assistance for housing related expenses, and case management. While these are shared across RRH programs, the way they are implemented varies from one program to the next. For example, some RRH programs provide rental subsidies while others require that clients maintain a level of income that will independently support their housing.

The information gathered for this report generally indicates that RRH work best when the needs of client are well defined and fit within the scope of services that a RRH program can provide. These services are typically designed for lower complexity individuals and are intended to be short term. While there was a general lack of consensus about how long supports should be provided to RRH clients, the literature suggests anywhere from 3 to 24 months, with most agencies targeting approximately 9 months.

As with most housing programs, RRH require that the staff who deliver them have the case management skills to support their clients, as well as a foundation of knowledge that can help clients access benefits and navigate various systems. Many RRH programs also either have a designated person responsible for locating housing or they require that program staff have a skillset that allows them to identify housing, build and maintain relationships with landlords, and navigate challenges that may arise as clients become new tenants.

Within a broader homeless serving system of care, RRH is a suitable program that can help a rather defined category of low complexity clients to rapidly exit homelessness, thereby preventing further entrenchment within homelessness and ensuring that more intensive support services are available for those who require them.



## Introduction

Homelessness in Calgary is a complex social issue that requires a variety of dynamic solutions to meet the needs of some of Calgary’s most vulnerable citizens. The Calgary Homeless Foundation (CHF) is a not-for-profit organization that was founded in 1998 to unify these dynamic efforts to end homelessness in Calgary through strategic and focused management of local resources. The CHF serves as the system planner for Calgary’s homeless-servicing system-of-care (HSSC), which includes emergency shelters, rapid re-housing, supportive and permanent supportive housing, rent supports, affordable housing, and additional supportive services. As the system planner, CHF leads and coordinates the efforts of organizations, agencies, and government bodies to boost efficiency and effectiveness on the ground. This means that CHF uses its resources and expertise to ensure that the HSSC provides accessible and appropriate housing supports for people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Rapid re-housing (RRH) is one form of housing solution that is designed to help individuals and families quickly exit homelessness and return to permanent housing. It is offered without preconditions – such as employment, income, absence of a criminal record, or sobriety – and the resources and services provided to clients are tailored to the unique needs of the household. CHF currently supports three programs that follow a RRH

Rapid re-housing is designed to help individuals and families quickly exit homelessness and return to permanent housing.

model, delivered by the Children's Cottage Society; McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Association; and Wood's Homes Calgary.

## Background

Between December 2019 and March 2020, CHF hired a team of consultants to review RRH program models to develop a deeper understanding of how RRH programs operate and how they may further fit within Calgary's HSSC. The purpose of this project was to understand how RRH is used within the continuum of housing options for clients who are experiencing homelessness and what potential exists to further employ RRH approaches within Calgary. With the support of a CHF system planner, the consulting team devised the following guiding questions for this project:

1. Where does this model fit within our current continuum?
2. Does this model meet our needs?
3. If this model were increased, what impacts could this have on our goals of functional zero?



## Methods

To investigate RRH program models a multi-method qualitative approach was taken. First, a review of existing literature on the subject was conducted to understand the history and program structure of RRH. Second, a jurisdictional scan of RRH programs utilized across North America was conducted and interviews with program providers were conducted. Third, a series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with agencies providing RRH programs in Calgary.

### Literature Review

The literature review was conducted to investigate best and promising practices in RRH programs. Literature on specific populations identified as being particularly well-suited to this type of intervention (i.e., families) or presenting with unique needs that RRH could serve (e.g., youth, survivors of intimate partner violence [IPV]) was also reviewed.

The search incorporated multiple databases and multiple search terms and included both grey and peer-reviewed literature. Initial results were subsequently filtered to focus primarily on sources published in the last 10 years (2010 onward), but do not exclude select earlier sources where they were deemed highly relevant. All search results were reviewed by both title and abstract and the search was considered complete when, in each database, two consecutive search result “pages” did not yield new or relevant material. The reference lists of surfaced literature were also reviewed and, in select cases, hand searches were done if a particular reference cited in the literature was believed to be applicable to the topic at hand.

The search terms were based on their relevance to the project and by successive mining of titles and reference lists of early search results. The search terms were developed for use across databases and combined across search strings using the Boolean operator ‘AND’. The search terms used were:

“Rapid re-housing”

“housing intervention” AND homelessness AND assistance

“rapid housing intervention” AND homelessness

“Rapid re-housing” AND youth

The sources for the literature search included the following, which were selected based on their relevance to the subject and history of publishing research in the areas of housing and homelessness: Academic Search Elite, Academic Search Complete, CINHAI with Full Text, Family & Society Studies Worldwide, Family Studies Abstracts, Social Work Abstracts, SocINDEX with Full Text, and Urban Studies Abstracts. The database searches were complemented using Google Scholar, and web searches using Google were utilized to surface any relevant grey literature.

The search results that were forwarded to full review were subsequently read in their entirety with summary notes prepared for each publication. The questions guiding the project were used to inform data extraction and to theme relevant findings from the developed summaries.

## Jurisdictional Scan

The jurisdictional scan was conducted to inventory existing RRH programs across Canada and the United States. To ensure that programs from comparable jurisdictions to Alberta were reviewed, the scan focused on Canadian municipalities with populations greater than 500,000 persons, and American municipalities with populations greater than 1,000,000. Municipal population counts were based on the 2016 Canadian census (the most recent available) or the United States Census Bureau 2018 census estimates.

The scan was conducted initially by using internet searches to identify RRH programs within the sampled municipalities. This included reviewing the websites of governments and community organizations to locate program information. The initial web searches provided insufficient information as the program information listed on provider websites is often limited. As a result, a secondary approach was taken to contact agencies directly to arrange interviews that could extract more detailed information. A total of 19 agencies were contacted to participate in interviews, first by e-mail and then by phone. This resulted in two agencies agreeing to participate in interviews. The interviews were conducted by phone and each lasted approximately 25 minutes and followed a structured interview guide (see Appendix 1). Field notes were taken during and immediately following the interviews.



## Agency Interviews

Interviews were conducted with agencies delivering RRH programs in Calgary, including: Children's Cottage Society; McMan Youth, Family and Community Services Association, and Wood's Homes Calgary. The purpose was to describe how RRH programs are currently delivered within the HSSC in Calgary. All interviews were conducted in-person by a member of the consulting team with one to three agency representatives. The interview participants were identified by the CHF, who sent an invitation to participate to each of the agencies. The interviews each lasted approximately 60 minutes and followed a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix 2). Field notes were taken during and immediately following the interviews.

## Analytical Approach

The qualitative data for this project included the field notes from the interviews with local and non-local agencies delivering RRH. The data were analyzed using structured content-analysis, which is a research technique for the objective and systematic description of content (Berelson, 1952). All data were organized according to question, and subsequently analyzed to provide a description of the data contents in relation to the respective question(s) (Kathleen & McLellan-Lemal, 2008).

## Limitations

There are several limitations to the collected data worth noting. First, research on RRH is still emerging. While there is some evidence pointing to the effectiveness of the model, the reality is that most of what has been formally published are concentrated around three specific programs: *The Rapid Re-Housing for Homeless Families Demonstration* (RRHD) program; *Supportive Services for Veteran Families* (SSVF) Program, and the *Family Options Study*. All three of these studies are based on American data.

As pointed out in the introduction, CHF supports a limited number of RRH programs and two of these programs have seen very few clients, leaving some ambiguity as to the effectiveness and appropriateness of RRH for these target populations.

Finally, efforts to understand RRH models in other jurisdictions was severely hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic, which accelerated during the last three weeks of the project. Given the need to focus attention on meeting the needs of vulnerable populations during this crisis, it is not surprising that only two of the 19 agencies responded to calls for information.



## Results

RRH has been identified as a critical strategy to meet the goal of ending homelessness for more than a decade (Cunningham, Gillespie, & Anderson, 2015). RRH was a strategy developed by service providers who noticed that a number of homeless families seemed to be ‘stuck’ in shelter while waiting for transitional housing or other types of temporary housing situations because they could not afford permanent, affordable housing (Cunningham & Batko, 2018). RRH programs focused on eliminating the barriers to housing by connecting families and individuals experiencing homelessness to permanent housing through a tailored package of assistance (HUD, n.d.).

RRH emerged in 2009 when the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) launched *the Rapid Re-Housing for Homeless Families Demonstration Project* (RRHD). Target populations for these programs were households that faced barriers to housing but were not likely to need long-term assistance (Cunningham & Batko, 2018). In Canada, RRH has typically targeted households with lower mental health and substance abuse issues (Gaetz, Scott, & Gulliver, 2013). Generally, RRH targets households where the level of support required is much lower and is provided for a shorter period than in other Housing First approaches (Cunningham et al., 2015).

Despite recent expansion, RRH still remains a relatively small component of the solution to addressing homelessness (Cunningham et al., 2015; Cunningham & Batko, 2018). As such, the evidence-base and empirical evidence for RRH is also limited (Brown, Vaclavik, & Watson, 2017; Cunningham & Batko, 2018). To date, much of the support for RRH is drawn primarily from local program evaluation reports that are based on less rigorous research designs (Brown et al., 2017). Whereas higher quality studies

have focused primarily on programs that provide RRH to families and veterans (Cunningham & Batko, 2018). These include:

**Family Options Study:** This is the most recent, and rigorous, evaluation of RRH to date. This study used a randomized control trial to measure the relative impacts and costs of four homelessness interventions. Researchers randomly assigned 2282 homeless families in 12 communities to one of the four interventions (i.e., RRH, project-based transitional housing with intensive supportive services, permanent housing subsidy, and emergency shelter system).

**Rapid Re-housing for Homeless Families Demonstration Project (RRHD):** An evaluation of 23 sites that implemented RRH in 2009. This evaluation was initiated by the HUD and used homelessness management information system data to track outcomes for 1,459 households along with a participant survey conducted 12 months after program exit.

**Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF):** SSVF is a RRH and homelessness prevention program administered by the US Department of Veterans Affairs and community service providers. The National Center for Homelessness among Veterans monitors the program and there are several research studies evaluating outcomes for SSVF (Brown et al., 2017; Byrne, Treglia, Culhane, Kuhn, & Kane, 2016; Vaclavik, Brown, Adenuga, Scartozzi, & Watson, 2018).

Findings from these various studies will be explored further throughout this report, along with information surfaced about local and non-local RRH programs.

## Program Models

The underlying assumption of RRH programs is that housing affordability is the root cause of homelessness (Rodriguez & Eidelman, 2017). RRH aligns with a Housing First philosophy, meaning that programs focus on eliminating barriers to moving individuals and families quickly into permanent housing without requiring household members to meet behavioural prerequisites like sobriety and treatment adherence (Cunningham et al., 2015; HUD, n.d.). The primary goal of RRH, then, is to support individuals and families to exit homelessness and enter/return to permanent housing within the quickest amount of time possible (Cunningham & Batko, 2018; HUD, n.d.).

Generally, RRH programs prioritize the stabilization of households experiencing housing crises and aim to do so by providing time-limited, but highly flexible forms of assistance

(Byrne et al., 2016). RRH focuses on supporting people with a low-to-moderate level of need who can be best served by providing financial and/or case management assistance, along with help accessing housing (OrgCode, 2014).

### **Core Components**

RRH has many local variations, as it is more of an approach than a specific model (Cunningham et al., 2015). This generally makes replication and scaling more difficult. Several national bodies (e.g., HUD, The National Alliance to End Homelessness, VA, etc.) have suggested there are three core components that every RRH program should contain. They are:

**Housing identification services:** The primary focus of services in RRH is providing help finding permanent housing, as such housing identification services are a crucial component of a RRH program offering (Cunningham et al., 2015; HUD, n.d.). An important part of this work is to recruit landlords willing to provide housing opportunities for individuals and families with histories of homelessness, poor credit, and past evictions, and helping participants with housing location (Cunningham et al., 2015). Assisting with applications and preparation for housing interviews are also an important part of this work.

Interviews conducted with agencies from other jurisdictions noted that this is one of the primary responsibilities for those working in RRH programs. Identifying and recruiting landlords and building their understanding and acceptance of the program's clients is one of the core tasks that service providers engage in. This requires that providers have a degree of competence in building and maintaining relationships as several service providers noted they will often utilize the same landlords for multiple clients because it is easier to house someone with a less-than-perfect housing history with an understanding landlord.

Locally, the approach to identifying housing varied between agencies. McMan, for example, only begins to start locating housing once the youth identifies that they are ready and willing to maintain community-based housing. In this way the program is not only about finding appropriate housing, but also building the youth's independence and ability to maintain that housing. With the family RRH program at The Children's Cottage, the housing identification component is mostly focussed on finding affordable housing for families, typically as a result of experiencing a housing affordability crisis that pushes them towards homelessness, and/or advocating on behalf of the family because of severed relationships with affordable housing providers.

**Financial assistance for housing-related expenses:** The underlying assumption inherent in RRH models is that the primary barrier to permanent housing for many individuals and families experiencing homelessness is their limited finances (HUD, n.d.; Rodriguez & Eidelman, 2017). RRH addresses this barrier by offering time-limited financial assistance to help participants get back on their feet. Move-in costs, deposits, and rental and/or utility assistance are all part of the financial assistance provided. The amount and duration of assistance does vary between communities and between participants, depending on their needs (Cunningham et al., 2015). There is a lack of consensus in the literature about how long financial and case management assistance should last, with some sources suggesting 3-6 (OrgCode, 2014), 6 months or less (HUD, n.d.), 12 months (Rodriquez & Eidelman, 2017), or up to 24 months (Cunningham et al., 2015). The intention is to provide the minimum amount of assistance necessary for households to move out of homelessness and stabilize in permanent housing (City of Seattle, n.d.). Some programs work on a graduated rental assistance calculation, where 100% may be covered in the first month, 70% in the second month, and beyond three months, households may be covering up to %60 of their gross household income towards rent (with the program paying the remainder of rent costs) (Ball Cooper & Vohryzek, 2017; City of Seattle, n.d.).

Interviewed agencies generally agreed that they will support clients for up to 12 months, although they acknowledged that this is never a hard timeline and that some clients may graduate sooner while others may be engaged longer term. One agency in Toronto also noted that once graduated clients can return directly to the agency's caseload within five years (if needed), while after five years clients must re-enter the system's central intake.

In Calgary, the only RRH program that assists clients with financial assistance with housing-related expenses is The Children's Cottage. The other two programs have their own housing units where the clients live while in the RRH program. A good portion of The Children's Cottage budget helps families address financial issues such as rent and/or utility arrears to avoid eviction. This has been a challenge for the agency because the budget for financial assistance is often allocated to a few families with substantial financial hardship at the beginning of the budget year, sometimes leaving very limited resources that can be distributed to others. This has forced program staff to reassess the family's ability to manage their budgets and housing costs at program intake so that they may be better informed about the financial assistance requirements and provide accordingly.

**Case management services:** Case management is in place to help participants address the challenges that may prevent access to housing or present challenges in maintaining housing stability (Cunningham et al., 2015). Case management services should be client-directed, voluntary, and respectful of an individual's right to self-determination (HUD, n.d.). Again, while there is a range of models found in the literature, case management should be in place throughout the duration of financial assistance and may continue up to 60 days after financial assistance ends (City of Seattle, n.d.). A wide range of services were noted through the literature and interviews, including:

- Counseling
- Obtaining benefits, including income supports (federal, provincial, local)
- Providing information and referrals to other community services
- Education, training, and employment assistance
- Legal assistance
- Safety planning and/or risk assessment with victims of intimate partner violence
- Outpatient health services
- Transportation
- Food security
- Settlement services
- Life skills development

Interviews with RRH program providers in other jurisdictions also noted that eviction prevention work is also a core component of their case management workload and this aligns with what is noted in the literature. Case management services may need to monitor participants housing stability after securing housing and during the support period through home visits and communication with landlords and case managers should be available to resolve housing-related crises should they occur (HUD, n.d.).

It is important to distinguish between how case management is provided to youth and to families in Calgary. At McMan, there is an emphasis on life skills development and connecting youth to natural supports. They describe the purpose of the case management approach as “giving these youth a boost during the transition to independence, which other youth may get from their families.” Given there has been only one client in the RRH program at Woods, there is less of an opportunity to define their case management approach.

At the Children's Cottage, case management has emphasized financial and budgeting skill development, supportive counselling for parents, and systems navigation, usually related to benefits and income assistance. The staff also spoke about the relatively



common occurrence of having to connect families and individuals in the family to mental health and/or addictions supports.

While the expectation is that all RRH programs should contain these three components (housing identification, financial, and case management), it is not necessary for programs to offer all three components to every participant (HUD, n.d.). Research on RRH in high-cost rental markets found programs to take highly individualized approaches to setting goals with families, finding housing, and designing service plans (Batko, Gillespie, & Gold, 2019). The common thread within the literature and the interviews is that RRH programs are adaptive and include a suite of supports that are drawn from to meet their individual needs. In this respect, RRH operate best when they have the flexibility needed to be responsive.

### **Staffing and Skillsets**

The literature on RRH does not provide an expansive description of the required staff qualifications for a successful RRH program (Bassuk, Tsertsvadze, DeCandia, & Richard, 2014). The exception to this is in research on high-cost markets (Batko et al., 2019). Research conducted by the Urban Institute found that staff need to be adept at the housing search, and some programs had at least one specialized staff person whose primary responsibility was to recruit and maintain relationships with landlords (Batko et al., 2019).

While the interviewed agencies did not have staff dedicated to housing searches, it was identified as one of the staff's core responsibilities. A few of the interviews note that it is important for staff to have knowledge of the housing market, existing landlords, and agencies that provide housing and housing-related supports. As was mentioned, a substantial portion of RRH is focused on maintaining relationships with landlords and those interviewed stressed that service providers require these "soft skills." One staff person said, "There is a need to deal with landlords ongoing – because landlords get reused so we have to maintain a relationship with those landlords for future clients." There is also a need to educate landlords (particularly private ones) on their responsibilities in a tenant relationship, and to build clients knowledge and skills about how to talk and negotiate with landlords.

The interviewed agencies also shared that it is important for service providers to have an awareness of the landscape of systems and available supports, including how to engage other services (e.g., food banks, settlement services) and access government programs/benefits (i.e., income support). One agency stated that they only house RRH clients in market housing and so it is incumbent on clients to have a source of income to

support themselves; often times this means that case workers will help clients access income from employment, income assistance, or disability supports.

One local agency spoke about the need to have staff who can connect with their clients, empathize with their situation, and have a belief that the client can succeed. Another particularly important skill is the ability to apply the natural supports framework, which is to help youth to identify their natural supports and then to guide them through strengthening the supports and keeping them maintained.

Interviewed agencies also emphasized the need for service providers to be trauma-informed and operate with a harm-reduction lens. This was stressed by all those interviewed, and some further emphasized the importance of understanding these approaches within the context of Indigenous experiences and experiences of intimate partner violence.

A few studies identified a range of staff to client ratios in RRH programming. One study noted a case load of 21-35 families (Batko et al., 2019) and this was what one agency in Toronto reported practicing. Another study similarly reported caseloads of 36 families (Shinn, Brown, & Gubits, 2017). Caseloads reported in the literature for youth were smaller (5-14 youth) but case management services appear to be more intensive, with the National Network for Youth suggesting case management meetings 1 to 2 times per week (2018). This contrast to Resource Assistance for Youth (RaY) in Winnipeg, Manitoba, which practices a caseload of 40 youth to one case manager. Interviewed agencies reported that staff with social work backgrounds are typically sought for RRH work, with varying education levels noted.

### **Key Practice Considerations**

RRH may be more of an approach than a stand-alone model and, as such, practices vary depending on funding, community context, and household need. That said however, HUD (n.d.) has identified several practice considerations for RRH programs:

- Be consistent with a housing first approach of housing without requiring participants to meet behavioural requirements.
- Be accessible to those experiencing homelessness, whether through outreach efforts, emergency shelters, food banks, and other social service programs. Coordinated entry and access systems should move toward integrating RRH screening and triage to identify households in need.
- Use housing assessments and plans, as these tools help assess housing needs and provide a basis for determining initial levels of financial assistance and/or supportive services required.



- Be flexible, with adaptable assistance critical to support diverse households. Acknowledge that there may be a need to adapt services for changing circumstances within households, too.

### **Populations Served by RRH Programs**

RRH has been promoted as an effective intervention for many different types of households experiencing homelessness, however most of the literature in this area is focused on families and veterans (Byrne et al., 2016; Cunningham et al., 2015; Patterson et al., 2016; Shinn et al., 2017; Vaclavik et al., 2018 ). HUD guidelines suggest that the majority of households experiencing homelessness are good candidates for RRH, with the only exceptions being those experiencing chronic homelessness who require permanent supportive housing, or those households who need a more therapeutic residential environment, such as those recovering from addiction or with mental health needs.

There has been little effort to evaluate whether RRH programs hold promise as effective interventions for improving the residential stability of single adults and youth who experience crisis homelessness (Byrne et al., 2016; National Network for Youth, 2015). There is also an increasing recognition that RRH programs need to be adapted for unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness as the RRH model for this population is more challenging (Clarity Human Services, 2016; National Network for Youth, 2015). The following section provide more detail on the various populations served by RRH.

### **Families Experiencing Homelessness**

Data shows that a substantial proportion of the homeless population is composed of families (Bassuk et al., 2014; Patterson, West, Harrison, & Higginbotham, 2016). Despite this growth, however, there are only a few studies that have explored the effectiveness of housing interventions and housing and service interventions that address family homelessness (Bassuk et al., 2014). There are also scholars who suggest that the difficulties creating stable housing for family units are less understood than those associated with single adults or youth, as family homelessness is inherently more complex (Patterson et al., 2016).

One study found that the prototypical family served by RRH was 37 years old, White, nonveteran female with a disabling condition and a history of domestic violence whose primary reason for homelessness was eviction, unaffordable housing, or substandard

housing (Patterson et al., 2016). This demographic profile is consistent with research from the Family Options Study (Gubits et al., 2015).

Because of the current imbalance between market rents and wages earned by low-wage workers (and income supports received by those unable to work), the rent-debt burden for many families is often severe (Ball Cooper & Vohryzek, 2017). One study in Washington, DC found that RRH programs required households to contribute a minimum of 40% and maximum of 60% of its annual adjusted income toward the monthly rent and that a two-parent family with both adults working full-time at minimum wage would not be able to sustainably rent a two-bedroom apartment in any of the 10 cheapest neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. (Ball Cooper & Vohryzek, 2017). HUD (n.d.) defines sustainable rent as not exceeding 30% of income. These findings suggest that RRH may not be able to place people in *sustainable*, long-term housing because of rent. As such, RRH may be suited for a narrower population than anticipated:

- Families made homeless by a genuinely short-term crisis
- Families that include an adult worker entering the job market for the first time
- Households with adults who have reasons to believe they can see a rapid increase in wages and or hours over the one-year period
- Households with one worker enrolled in a training program that leads to significantly higher income within the next year (Ball Cooper & Vohryzek, 2017)

Suitable families who meet these criteria may not necessarily be those who are utilizing shelters and therefore program recruitment may need to look elsewhere to identify families who are best suited for

Catholic Community Services (CCS) in Seattle, WA provides RRH that quickly connects families and individuals experiencing homelessness to permanent housing through tailored housing stability plans that may include the use of short term financial assistance and targeted supportive services.

CCS has established partnerships with community resources and quickly links clients to those services that enable them to achieve housing stability in the long-term. All services are voluntary and housing stability plans are created in partnership with clients.

The RRH Program does not own or sub-lease units and has no direct access to subsidized or low-income units. Clients are assisted in finding market-rate rental units in the King County region. Clients do not need to have current income to be eligible for the RRH program, but they must work with their case manager to develop a plan for assuming responsibility for their rent.

RRH supports, such as through referrals from income support programs or other agencies dealing with vulnerable families (Ball Cooper & Vohryzek, 2017).

### **Single Adults**

Single adult households comprise the bulk of households experiencing homelessness on a relatively short-term basis (Byrne et al., 2016). While there has been considerable momentum in recent years to expand the availability of flexible housing stabilization services, the bulk of those services have been targeted primarily to family households (Brown et al., 2017; Byrne et al., 2016). There are some scholars who suggest that single adult households, who are sometimes ineligible for assistance, may be best suited to be served by RRH programs (Ball Cooper & Vohryzek, 2017; Byrne et al., 2016). One study concluded that there is encouragement for the potential use of RRH programs among the single homeless adult population, although the study was based on veterans experiencing homelessness who may be characteristically different than their non-veteran counterparts (Byrne et al., 2016).

### **Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence**

The pathways from IPV victimization to housing instability or homelessness can be both direct and indirect (Sullivan, Bomsta, & Hacsckaylo, 2019). Domestic violence is a significant factor in family homelessness, with many surveys identifying domestic violence as an immediate cause of homelessness (Ball Cooper & Vohryzek, 2017). Financial stability can also be compromised through IPV, as perpetrators of violence may ruin victims' credit, harass them at jobs, or prevent them from working or attending school (Sullivan et al., 2019). Some IPV programs offer survivors immediate flexible financial assistance with brief advocacy support to help these families avoid homelessness

The District Alliance for Safe Housing (DASH) is a non-profit organization that works primarily with survivors of gender-based violence based in Washington, D.C.

While those in immediate danger or needing more intensive support can access their residential or transitional housing programs, the organization also offers flexible funding to those who risk losing their current homes (but wish to remain), or those who have identified new housing that they could obtain and sustain with some brief assistance.

The key feature of this program is assessing whether a survivor is likely to sustain their housing if DASH were to step in with one-time financial assistance and brief housing advocacy. Qualitative research on this model has shown that 94% of individuals (47/50) were housed 6 months after receiving the flexible funding (Sullivan et al., 2019).

(Mbilinyi, 2015). Targeting survivors of IPV who are experiencing what may amount to a short-term crisis could help a substantial number of people avoid shelter stays and secure permanent housing (Ball Cooper & Vohryzek, 2017).

### **Youth Experiencing Homelessness**

RRH has been used for youth experiencing homelessness, although the literature is clear that youth RRH programs need to be youth-appropriate and provide more in order to ensure that youth can achieve long-term outcomes related to housing (Hsu, Rice, Wilson, Semborski, Vayanos, & Morton, 2019; National Network for Youth, 2018). RRH programs for youth need to work from a positive youth development and trauma-informed approach. Time in program is generally longer than other populations, with the average length of stay in program while receiving rental assistance being 9-12 months with a range from as little as 3 months (for low acuity) to 24 months (for medium acuity) (Hsu et al., 2019; National Network For Youth, 2018). Many youths can do well in scattered site, but others do better when they have peers close by (National Network for Youth, 2018).

RRH programs for youth also require several specific case management supports and services. Programs for youth/young families can include incentives such as cash bonuses for goal completion, or rewards for getting good grades, maintaining their job, or earning a high school diploma or equivalent (National Network for Youth, 2018). Providing vocational training, education and employment services also helps youth to achieve sustainable self-sufficiency and maintain housing for the long term.

Effective landlord management has been identified as a critical component to a successful RRH program for youth (Cohen, McSwiggen, Johnson, Cali,

The Northwest Youth Services has been working with youth in Bellingham, WA since 1976. Their RRH program, called Permanent Housing, has been operating for the past 8 years, supported by a variety of public and private funders. The agency offers a range of vocational services, which are also available to RRH youth.

Their RRH services include housing identification, along with coaching on how to mediate landlord/roommate relationships and manage housing-related expenses. They also provide financial assistance, giving youth rent subsidies, and case management that blends positive youth development, harm reduction, and housing practices. Caseloads are generally 1:14.

The program typically supports youth for an average of 9 months up to a maximum of 24 months.

K., & Montelongo, 2017). This may include being prepared to repair or clean apartments to maintain positive relationships with landlords. RRH programs should budget for upkeep and repairs to housing units for at least the first 12-24 months of residency (National Network for Youth, 2018).

## Program Outcomes

Empirical evidence of long-term housing outcomes in prevention and re-housing programs is limited, however most studies of RRH suggest that most families and veterans do not become homeless again, although many struggle with ongoing housing affordability (Bassuk et al., 2014; Cunningham & Batko, 2018). Studies of RRH have generally looked at several key outcomes, such as housing stability, family preservation, adult wellbeing, child wellbeing, and self-sufficiency (Cunningham & Batko, 2018; Gubits et al., 2016). Interviewed agencies also indicated that they measure housing loss, ability to obtain and maintain income (and what type of income), and life skills development. Studies on RRH have shown the following:

**Time to housing:** Since the fundamental goal of RRH is to reduce the amount of time a person spends homeless, assessing time to housing is an important metric. There is mixed evidence of RRH reducing the time spent in shelter. The Family Options study showed no evidence that RRH reduced stays in shelter or places not meant for human habitation at either 20 months after random assignment or 37 months after random assignment (Gubits et al., 2016). Other research found that couples without children and two-parent families were stably housed faster than single-mother headed households (Patterson et al., 2016).

**Housing stability:** Evidence suggests that RRH has some effectiveness at achieving housing stability. 70% of participants in three studies successfully accessed permanent housing by program exit (Cunningham & Batko, 2018). The Family Options study showed that RRH programming increased the proportion of families living in their own place with a lease for the first several months after program initiation (Gubits et al., 2016).

**Adult and child wellbeing outcomes:** Only the Family Options study included measures of adult and child wellbeing. The findings showed no significant differences between RRH and usual care (i.e., staying in shelter) on any of the adult or child-wellbeing outcomes (Gubits et al., 2016; Shinn et al., 2017). Slight increases to food security and family income were found at the 20-month follow-up but neither of those effects were present at 37 month follow-up (Gubits et al., 2016). Another study found



that the proportion of families earning income did increase somewhat, moving from 34 to 38% at program exit, with a further increase 12 months after program exit (45%) (Cunningham & Batko, 2018).

**Re-entry to homeless service system:** Several studies have examined the likelihood of re-entering the homeless service system after participation in RRH programming. 12.8% of the RRH participants in the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) re-entered homeless services (Brown et al., 2017). Another study found a significantly higher proportion of RRH families in the HPRP study re-entered homelessness compared to participants in the homelessness prevention program (Vaclavik et al., 2018).

Though the research shows that families and veterans return to shelter at low rates, several studies point to the fact that families do not achieve long-term housing stability. The “rapidness” of RRH may also be questionable, as the Family Options study showed that 59% of families assigned to RRH spent an average of 2 months in shelter after being assigned to RRH (Gubits et al., 2015), which exceeds the guidelines set by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. The National Alliance to End Homelessness (2009), however, suggests that there is no universal timeframe when considering how “rapid” RRH is, rather household characteristics and rental markets determine how expedient the re-housing process might be.

## Costs

Interviewed agencies noted that the major expenses for RRH programs are staff, start-up housing costs (e.g., damage deposit, down payment on utilities), and incidental expenses (e.g., transit tickets, food, administrative expenses related to applications or obtaining identification); however, because the cost of housing is covered by clients the majority of the expenses (and particularly ongoing expenses) are the client’s own responsibility. Research indicates that RRH is less expensive than emergency shelter or transitional housing, although there is not a ton of data on the cost of the program (Cunningham et al., 2015). In the SSVF study, the average per-household cost was \$2,480. In the HPRP program, households that received RRH support averaged \$6000 over twelve months (Taylor, 2014). Data from the Family Options study showed the average monthly cost of RRH (which includes financial assistance, staffing, and overhead) was \$880 a month, significantly lower than the \$2706 for transitional housing, or \$4819 for emergency shelter (Gubits et al., 2016). In each of the three comparisons done in the Family Option study, RRH families had the lowest average cost. When the study took into account all services used by families across the length of the study,

families assigned to RRH had slightly lower total costs than families assigned to emergency shelter (Cunningham et al., 2015; Gubits et al., 2016). Total program cost for RRH over the course of the study was \$38,441, whereas emergency shelter was \$42,167. Essentially, RRH resulted in the same outcomes as emergency shelter, but at a lower cost (Cunningham et al., 2015). Applied to a broader context, however, this difference could result in substantial savings to the system.

## The Calgary Context

### Children’s Cottage

<b>Goal</b>	Provide targeted, time-limited financial assistance and supportive services to help families quickly exit out of shelter and obtain and retain housing.
<b>Program focus (non-housing)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broker community resources</li> <li>• Strengthen social networks</li> <li>• Enhance family strengths and self-sufficiency</li> <li>• Address risk factors for housing instability</li> <li>• Identify budget realities and shortfalls</li> <li>• Advocate for subsidized housing and other resources</li> <li>• Identify and support access to benefits</li> <li>• Parenting support</li> </ul>
<b>Target</b>	40 families per year.
<b>Eligibility</b>	Minor-to-moderate complexity families who are episodically or transitionally homeless, or at risk of homelessness.
<b>Timeline</b>	Targets 6 to 9 months.
<b>Staffing</b>	Case manager (1:20 client ratio) and housing locator
<b>Goals/Metrics</b>	None described
<b>Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 50 program exits (program completion rate = 70%) including 45 exits to subsidized or unsubsidized housing</li> <li>• Average days to move-in: 50</li> <li>• Average months in program: 7 (range 2-14 months)</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment Tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NSQ</li> <li>• Family Star</li> <li>• GAIN (Global Assessment of Individual Needs) assessment</li> <li>• ACE survey</li> </ul>



**McMan Youth, Family, and Community Services**

<b>Goal</b>	Graduate youth out of RRH within a short period of time to avoid becoming dependent on case management
<b>Program focus (non-housing)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance employment/education</li> <li>• Mental health and addictions support</li> <li>• Improve cultural, community and natural supports</li> <li>• Life skills development</li> </ul>
<b>Target</b>	3 youth
<b>Eligibility</b>	Minor complexity youth who are transitionally homeless. The program has a minimum income requirement, life skills requirement, and expectation that clients have previously addressed challenges related to mental health or addictions that have contributed to homelessness
<b>Timeline</b>	Targets 6 to 8 months. If by month four it has been identified that youth have complex needs, they are transferred back to CAA to access more supportive housing programs
<b>Staffing</b>	Case manager (3:1 ratio) and live-in support worker
<b>Goals/Metrics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 80% of youth engage in meaningful activities 3-4 times/wk. at 3 months</li> <li>• 80% of youth maintain connection with supports at 6 months after discharge</li> <li>• 80% of youth exit to a positive destination</li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 program exits (program completion rate = 100%) including 3 to subsidized rental, 1 to housing with long-term supports, and 1 to family home</li> <li>• Average days to move-in: 110</li> <li>• Average months in program: 9 (range 5-12 months)</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment Tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NSQ</li> <li>• Youth Complexity Scale</li> </ul>

**Wood's Homes**

<b>Goal</b>	Provide supports and assistance with learning the necessary skills to successfully live independently
<b>Program focus (non-housing)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broker community connections</li> <li>• Employment readiness and securing employment</li> <li>• Basic living skills</li> <li>• Financial literacy</li> <li>• Mental health and addictions support</li> <li>• Community referrals</li> <li>• Family engagement</li> </ul>
<b>Target</b>	2 youth
<b>Eligibility</b>	Minor complexity youth who are transitionally homeless.
<b>Timeline</b>	Targets 6 to 9 months.
<b>Staffing</b>	Youth counselor (8:1 ratio) with access to an employment counselor and mental health clinician
<b>Goals/Metrics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 80% of youth have obtained employment, vocational training, further education, or certification in employable skills</li> <li>• 80% of youth report increased knowledge and connection to community resources</li> <li>• 80% of youth transition to safe, stable placement with a support plan</li> <li>• 80% of youth identify and connect with two natural supports</li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes</b>	No outcomes reported (no youth have finished the program at time of writing)
<b>Assessment Tools</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NSQ</li> <li>• Youth Acuity Scale</li> <li>• Resiliency Canada</li> <li>• Distress Scales</li> </ul>

### **Contributing to Impact**

From the interviews with Calgary agencies it is clear that RRH has been implemented in a variety of ways, targeting different population groups. When this is considered with the relatively low number of program participants across all three programs it is difficult to decipher what the key contributors to program impacts are. However, some ideas raised during the interviews include:

- Focusing on natural supports to help support youth independence
- Taking a youth-driven approach to goal setting
- Targeting families/individuals who can find financial stability, either through employment or income assistance, and who maximize their benefits potential (particularly important for families). Along with this, engaging service providers in a conversation about how they would define 'readiness' and 'willingness' of clients to determine best fit for RRH.

Agencies emphasized that impact within RRH programs is highly dependent on ensuring appropriate client fit. There was some concern that existing assessment mechanisms (i.e., the NSQ) do not provide a sufficient assessment of client suitability for RRH. For families, the NSQ may provide a "myth of low acuity" that does not consider the complex needs of other members within a family, as well as the family's dynamics. This corresponds to what some scholars suggest, specifically that RRH can be helpful to some households, just a narrower population than who the program is typically targeted towards (Ball Cooper & Vohryzek, 2017). According to agencies, the information exchanged at the Coordinated Access and Assessment placement committees also may not prove sufficient for establishing whether a client is appropriate for RRH.



## Conclusion

Based on all the reviewed information it is evident that RRH programs can be effective provided they are appropriately targeted. The RRH model excels when it can accurately assess the capacity and needs of individuals and place them in appropriate housing. The interviews and literature provided several accounts where clients' needs and the RRH program were misaligned, often because of clients with greater complexity being placed into a RRH program that is not equipped to address those needs. Common criteria for defining client fit that were observed across programs include: the ability to have independent income, either through adequate sustainable income supports or employment; the ability to live in and maintain housing; and the ability to manage finances, especially establishing and staying within a monthly budget. It is evident that within the Calgary context the assessments used to place clients into RRH programs may not be properly attuned to ensure that clients' needs can be adequately met, particularly for those clients – including families – whose needs may be less easily apparent.

## Recommendations

RRH has the potential of fulfilling a niche need within Calgary's HSSC by providing those individuals and families who only require limited term supports with the assistance they need to be stably housed. RRH fits within the HSSC by ensuring that those lower-acuity individuals are filtered out of the system sooner, thereby preventing them from becoming entrenched in homelessness and/or developing more complex needs related to precarious housing that will, in turn, require more intensive supports. This may have the effect of freeing up capacity within those more intensive supportive services and contribute to the goal of achieving 'Functional Zero'. To ensure that RRH is effectively implemented in Calgary the following recommendations should be considered.

1. Create and define a baseline RRH program model to provide clarity around how the program can be implemented and what it is intended to achieve. Ensure that the model provides sufficient flexibility to allow program providers the ability to be responsive to the needs of their clients.
2. Work with stakeholders engaged in RRH to collectively establish the criteria that defines what clients are an appropriate fit for the program(s). This includes considering the extent to which the existing NSQ/TAY-VI assessments are appropriately attuned to identify clients who are candidates for RRH, and/or determining what sub-sections of information gathered by these assessments is most applicable for indicating a client's fit for RRH.
3. Develop an RRH Model Guideline to share with potential program providers. This document would include the HMIS and Data Collection Requirements needed to monitor if RRH is contributing to achieving 'Functional Zero'.
4. Explore the potential for RRH with other shelter systems (i.e., intimate partner violence) and how expansion of RRH into these systems could contribute to the goal of achieving Functional Zero.
5. Expand outreach efforts beyond shelters to recruit candidates who may be an appropriate fit for RRH. This may include working with income support providers, such as Alberta Works, to target candidates who are facing short-term financial crises.
6. Utilize the forthcoming results produced by CHF's ongoing *Diversion Services Pilot Evaluation* to map how RRH and diversion programs can complement each other, including how the programs are co-defined, and the extent to which the parameters, approaches, and performance indicators for each program can be harmonized.

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# Appendix 1 – Jurisdictional Scan Interviews

1. Can you tell me about your rapid rehousing program?
2. What is the goal of the program?
3. Who does the program target? (families, youth, adults – men/women, persons fleeing violence)
4. What staffing is required?
5. What skills do staff need to be able to offer this program?
6. Do you use any key performance indicators to measure outcomes?
7. Cost
9. Do have any other comments?

## Appendix 2 – Local Agency Interviews

1. How long has the agency been providing RRH?
2. What is the background/genesis?
3. Who is it intending to serve?
4. What is the program model?
5. What is the job scope for the staff?
6. Do you feel RRH is working? Why or why not?
7. What is the potential for RRH in the HSSC?