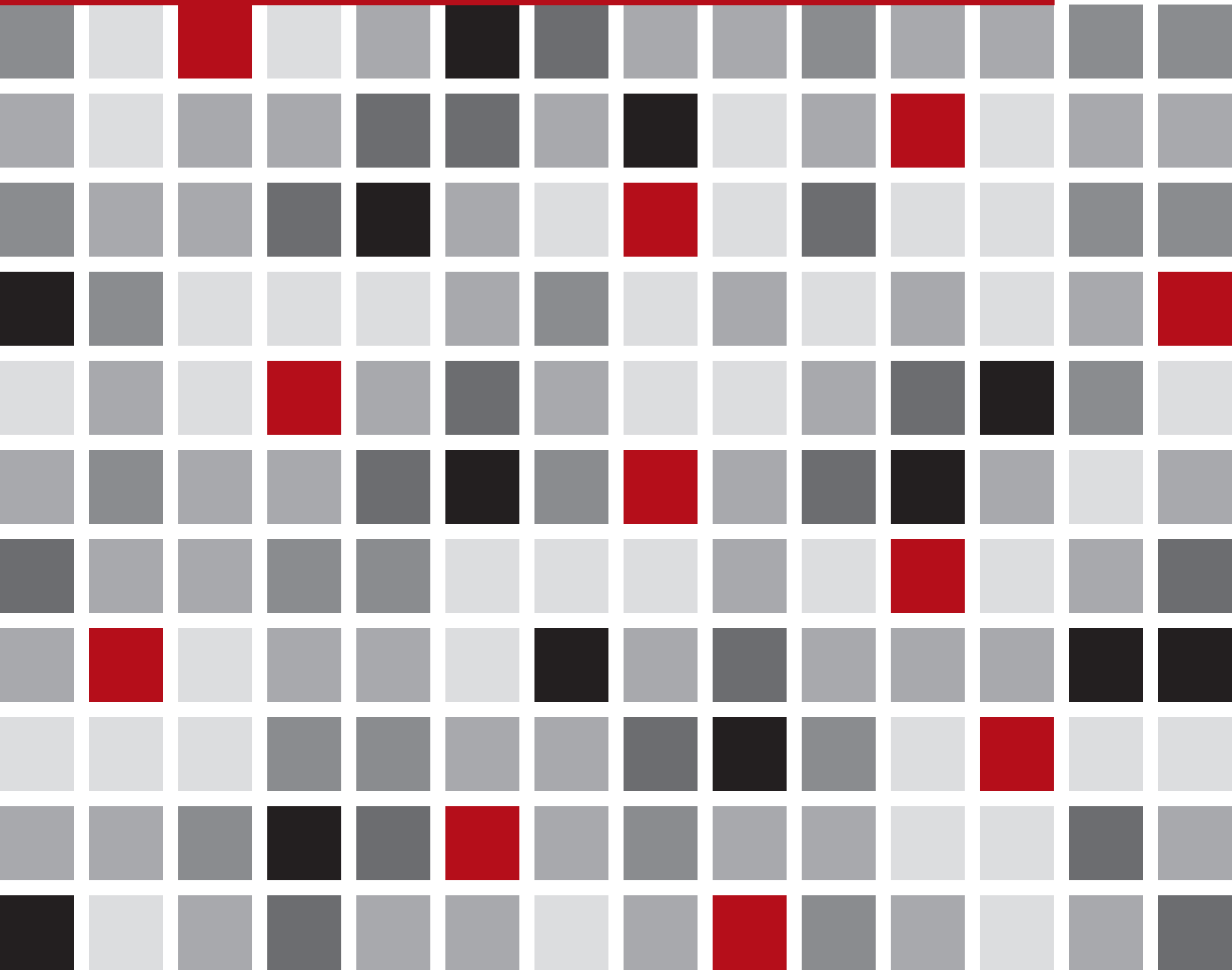


TWO YEARS OF HOMEBASE

Following up with families after the end of HomeBASE Rental Assistance

OCTOBER 2014



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I. SUMMARY

In 2011, Massachusetts responded to the burgeoning population of homeless families in Emergency Assistance shelters and motels, which was putting a huge strain on limited state resources, by establishing the HomeBASE program. The goal of the HomeBASE program was to provide housing-based opportunities as an alternative to emergency shelter and motels by diverting families at the “Front Door” and rapidly re-housing those already in shelters and motels. Two types of assistance were to be used in this effort: Household Assistance and Rental Assistance.

Families rolled off HomeBASE Rental Assistance from July 2013 through June 2014. They were each then given the option to enroll in HomeBASE Household Assistance, up to \$4,000 of funds for a rental stipend or startup costs for a new apartment. If necessary, a participating family could then access Residential Assistance to Families in Transition (RAFT), also up to \$4,000, to sustain their housing for the next year. If these resources were not sufficient for a family to maintain housing, they could apply for shelter.¹

Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership (MBHP) surveyed participants who ended HomeBASE Rental Assistance between September 2013 and November 2013 to determine what would happen to families during the six months after their rental assistance ended. This report is a summary of those findings.

MBHP administers HomeBASE in Boston and 29 surrounding communities.

KEY FINDINGS

- Of the clients surveyed, 85 percent remained out of shelter six months after their HomeBASE Rental Assistance ended. Almost a quarter obtained permanent, subsidized housing. Sixty percent of clients rented apartments in the private market, most utilizing HomeBASE Household Assistance or RAFT as temporary subsidies.
- Clients living in private-market apartments are generally rent-burdened and in a very precarious position. On average, survey respondents would need to spend 131 percent of their income on rent without HomeBASE Household Assistance or RAFT, and six months after the program ended, only 47 percent of clients agreed with the statement: “My housing situation is stable.”
- Families with disabled members, children under 6 years of age, or immigration issues were more likely to return to shelter than other families. Future efforts to address homelessness need to tackle the issue of whether to target resources to these populations and how to balance the appropriateness of short-term versus longer-term options.²
- For most families, two years was not a sufficient amount of time to raise their income enough to improve their economic self-sufficiency, particularly for a population with limited work skills and education. Time-limited assistance programs need to be based on realistic expectations and include, in addition to housing, support for education, training, job placement, income maximization, and child care.³

II. BACKGROUND AND PROGRAM HISTORY

Since fall 2007, demand for emergency shelter for families, known as Emergency Assistance, has outstripped Massachusetts' shelter capacity. This has forced the state to house families in motels, sometimes far from the support systems in their neighborhoods of origin and with limited access to transportation. In 2009, the state addressed this challenge using federal Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) funds provided as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Although the number of families in motels initially declined, when HPRP funds were depleted the numbers rose again. By July 2011, almost 1,800 families were housed in motels. The state responded with the HomeBASE Rental Assistance program, a short-term income-based rental subsidy program with assistance for up to three years.⁴

The main goals of HomeBASE Rental Assistance were to:

- Provide housing for families as an alternative to shelters or motels and to rapidly re-house those already in the system;
- Use state resources more efficiently by reducing the overall costs of assistance; and
- Provide intensive services to stabilize the lives of families experiencing homelessness, with the expectation that they would be able to handle rental payments on their own at the end of the benefit period.

Initially, the program succeeded in placing families into housing and reducing the number of families in motels—by November 2011, there were just fewer than 1,300 families in motels. But overall demand for the HomeBASE Rental Assistance program was greater than anticipated. As a result, in November 2011, the Massachusetts Legislature tightened the rental assistance eligibility criteria and stopped accepting families who had entered the Emergency Assistance system after October 2011. Then, in 2012, in an attempt to reduce program costs further, participating families were informed that they would receive only up to two years of HomeBASE Rental Assistance instead of up to three years, as they had been promised at enrollment. Despite the significant resources dedicated to the program and to address family homelessness in general, demand for homelessness assistance has not abated. On an average night during January through March 2014, more than 4,400 families were in the Emergency Assistance program statewide, with 2,000 of these families housed in motels.⁵

HomeBASE Rental Assistance program participants included families in motels and shelters, families diverted from shelter (known as “Front Door” clients), and families transitioning off other short-term rental assistance programs, such as HPRP. Across Massachusetts, more than 5,000 families utilized this benefit, with more than 1,400 participants in MBHP's region. HomeBASE provided rental subsidies, case management (known as stabilization), and services aimed at building family self-

In addition to case management stabilization services, HomeBASE originally consisted of two types of financial assistance: Rental Assistance, a short-term income-based housing subsidy, and Household Assistance, flexible funding of up \$4,000 that could be used for various expenses including startup costs, furniture, and utility arrearages. This report focuses on families who received HomeBASE Rental Assistance.

sufficiency. As part of stabilization, each client was matched with a case manager to address barriers to housing stability by furthering education and training, increasing income, and attempting to secure permanent subsidized housing. These goals were intentionally loosely defined so as to be adjusted to fit the needs of individual families.

In July 2013, when rental subsidies began to expire for participating families, there was a substantial gap between rents and the amount most families could afford to pay. During the program, 80 percent of program participants in MBHP's region were living in apartments for which the market rent was greater than their total monthly incomes.⁶

Faced with the prospect of up to 5,000 families ending HomeBASE Rental Assistance statewide and potentially applying to return to shelter, the Commonwealth came up with a multi-pronged strategy, which included significant financial investment, to address this issue:

1. The state allocated 500 Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) vouchers to families rolling off HomeBASE Rental Assistance that had a family member with a disability.⁷
2. The state allowed families to utilize HomeBASE Household Assistance, a flexible benefit of up to \$4,000 that was originally intended to either help families at risk of becoming homeless avoid entering shelter, or assist those who were already homeless move into more stable housing situations. Of the clients receiving stabilization from MBHP, more than 50 percent accessed this benefit, with the majority using it as a rental stipend to stay in place—that is, to remain in the same apartment as when they were receiving HomeBASE Rental Assistance—or as a startup cost for new subsidized or private market apartments. This stipend could all be used quickly or spread over many months (as a “shallow subsidy”).⁸
3. When families exhausted these resources, they were allowed, if necessary, to access a third program called Residential

Assistance to Families in Transition (RAFT), flexible funds of up to \$4,000 aimed to prevent homelessness.

Through the combination of Household Assistance and RAFT, some families received \$8,000 in the year following their exit from HomeBASE Rental Assistance. Due to the flexible nature of these benefits, families were able to structure stipends in whichever way was most beneficial to them. Most families who received the full \$8,000 were able to sustain housing for eight months, though some with greater resources stretched the assistance over a longer time period. However, many families remain rent-burdened, fearful, and at risk of losing their housing and possibly returning to shelter when the assistance ends. Research has shown that participants in previous short-

term housing programs in Massachusetts demonstrated great resourcefulness to maintain their housing with significant financial constraints. However, their housing situations did not feel stable, and they, too, expressed concern about going to shelter when their assistance ended.⁹

...many families remain rent-burdened, fearful, and at risk of losing their housing...

III. FOLLOWING UP WITH GREATER BOSTON HOMEBASE FAMILIES

Short-term rental assistance may be an appropriate policy to address family homelessness: Families have stable housing as they work to improve their economic circumstances while scarce state resources are stretched to assist as many families as possible. Short-term rental subsidies are also a logical extension of the widely influential Housing First model, which addresses housing needs before other barriers to permanent, stable housing.

In previous reports,¹⁰ however, MBHP has called into question the likelihood of families being able to sustain market rent on their own, given the relatively short time frame of many such programs—two years, in the case of HomeBASE.¹¹ Given the barriers to success experienced by the families participating in the program, including education level and job skills, there was little likelihood that their earning potential would increase sufficiently while participating in HomeBASE to allow them to compete successfully in the private housing market.

In response to the uncertain housing situation faced by most of these families, MBHP set out to survey HomeBASE Rental Assistance participants in Greater Boston, gathering information from families at the time that their HomeBASE funds expired, and then again three months and six months later. The purpose of the survey was to assess the impact of the end of HomeBASE Rental Assistance on the participant families' housing, health, finances, and children's wellbeing. To control for the effects of seasonal variations in Boston's apartment rental market, the survey was offered only to families who ended HomeBASE Rental Assistance in September 2013 through November of 2013. To maximize consistency in services provided, researchers chose to focus on families who received stabilization services from MBHP.

Out of 287 families who were offered the opportunity to participate, 139 participated in the baseline survey and 98 completed all three surveys, with a retention rate greater than 80 percent each round.

WHO ARE THE HOMEBASE FAMILIES?

The families MBHP surveyed, in keeping with program demographics, were overwhelmingly female-headed households of color (see Table 1). Of these, 53 percent had employment income, averaging \$14,376 annually (\$1,198 monthly) compared to the 2014 federal poverty threshold of \$15,730 for a two-person household and \$19,790 for a three-person household.¹² Average income, regardless of employment status, was even lower at \$12,624 (\$1,052 monthly) for survey respondents and \$10,572 (\$881 monthly) for all families.

Of the 98 clients who completed all three surveys, 47 stayed in place, 22 received permanent subsidized housing, nine moved to other, non-subsidized apartments, and five moved in with family and friends (see Table 2). Of the 47 who stayed in place, the large majority (91 percent) used Household Assistance and more than half (53 percent) used RAFT (see Table 3). Meanwhile, those who did not stay in place used HomeBASE Household Assistance and RAFT at much lower rates. For example, of the 22 respondents who obtained permanent subsidized housing, only 41 percent accessed Household Assistance and 9 percent accessed RAFT.

Of the families surveyed, only 15 percent entered shelter within six months of the end of their HomeBASE Rental Assistance. The success of keeping 85 percent of survey clients out of the Emergency Assistance shelter system is primarily due to the intensive case management services provided by MBHP, and the significant financial resources the state allocated to this population. However, despite this achievement, keeping clients out of shelter should not be the sole criterion of success for housing programs, particularly when the long-term housing stability of many of the "successful" families is in question. It is clear from the gap between incomes and contract rents that most of the

families who did not receive a permanent subsidy will not be able to sustain their housing once the assistance runs out. They will most likely be displaced and may be forced to return to shelter or pursue other less preferable housing arrangements.

Once HomeBASE Rental Assistance funds expired, many families stayed in place while others moved to new apartments. On average, families who elected to move and utilize HomeBASE Household Assistance in different apartments had new contract rents that were 7 percent less expensive than their

previous HomeBASE Rental Assistance contract rents. However, these families are now each paying, on average, more than twice as much toward their rent than those who did not move. This is in large part because many families who stayed in place were still receiving extended rental supports, either through HomeBASE Housing Assistance or the RAFT program, while families who moved had to use a large portion of their assistance for start-up costs, which prohibited them from stretching the subsidy over a longer period of time.

TABLE 1: Demographics of HomeBASE families in Greater Boston

| | HomeBASE families* | Families surveyed |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|
| Gender, Head of Household | | |
| Male | 9.6% | 10.2% |
| Female | 90.4% | 89.8% |
| Race/Ethnicity, Head of Household | | |
| White (non-Hispanic) | 21.1% | 16.3% |
| African-American/Black (non-Hispanic) | 42.6% | 32.7% |
| Hispanic/Latino (any race) | 35.3% | 45.9% |
| Other | 0.9% | 5.1% |
| Number of children | | |
| 1 child | 43.0% | 42.9% |
| 2 children | 31.8% | 31.6% |
| 3 or more children | 25.2% | 25.5% |
| Children's ages | | |
| Has a child under 6 | 35.9% | 22.4% |
| Has a child 6–18 | 37.2% | 42.9% |
| Has children both under 6 and 6–18 | 24.7% | 30.6% |
| Has children over 18 | 2.1% | 4.8% |
| Income† | | |
| Average monthly income | \$881 | \$1,052 |
| Portion employed | ‡ | 53.1% |
| Average monthly employment income (for those employed) | ‡ | \$1,198 |
| Educational attainment | | |
| Less than high school | ‡ | 24.5% |
| High school or a GED | ‡ | 33.7% |
| Some college or higher degree | ‡ | 41.8% |

* From MBHP calculation based on internal data on all families receiving HomeBASE Rental Assistance in region.

† Numbers for survey are at baseline.

‡ Indicates data not available.

TABLE 2: Housing outcomes for HomeBASE families surveyed at six months

| | Number of total survey clients |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Stayed in place | 47 |
| Obtained permanent subsidized housing | 22 |
| Entered EA system (shelter/motel) | 15 |
| Moved to another non-subsidized apartment | 9 |
| Moved in with family/friends | 5 |
| TOTAL | 98 |

TABLE 3: Housing resources used by HomeBASE families surveyed at six months

| | Number of total survey clients | Clients who used HomeBASE Household Assistance | Clients who used RAFT |
|---|--------------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Stayed in place | 47 | 91% | 53% |
| Obtained permanent subsidized housing | 22 | 41% | 9% |
| Entered EA system (shelter/motel) | 15 | 7% | 7% |
| Moved to another non-subsidized apartment | 9 | 78% | 11% |
| Moved in with family/friends | 5 | 40% | 0% |

NOTE: Percentages shown in tables on this page may not total 100% due to rounding.

“I’m in a **stable situation right now. I don’t know for **how long**.”**

Some families obtained permanent subsidized housing, which sets a cap on their rent burden and gives them an opportunity for long-term stability. Other families returned to Emergency Assistance shelter. MBHP agrees with the Commonwealth’s position that shelter should not be considered an appropriate permanent response to homelessness.¹³ The survey participants’ experiences further demonstrate that shelter does not foster an environment for families to improve their situations. One client described her time in shelter before she entered the HomeBASE program by saying, “I was in shelter, it was a difficult time, knowing we couldn’t provide a home for our kids. The bus passed every hour so we had to walk a lot. We made a lot of sacrifices.” Still other families moved in with family and friends, which can be tenuous and is often not a permanent solution.¹⁴ As one client in this circumstance said, “I’m in a stable situation right now, I don’t know for how long.”

HOUSING OUTCOMES AND FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES

Even within the study’s short time frame, the data provides some clues as to what factors might impact housing outcomes.

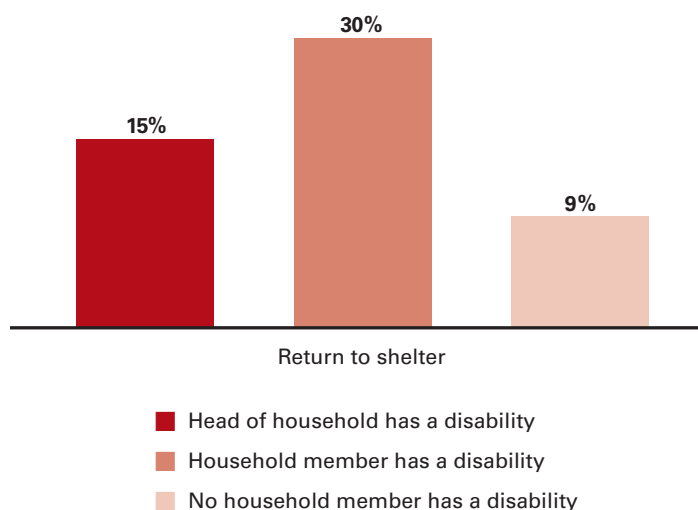
Disability. Families where either the head of household or a member of the household had a disability were more likely to return to shelter—15 percent and 30 percent respectively, compared to 9 percent for those families with no disabled members (see Chart 1). This outcome speaks to the fact that families with disabled members face greater challenges, even when compared to a population that already has many barriers to success, in terms of increasing income and sustaining market rents. Stability was an especially pressing issue for families with disabled children. As one family member said,

My kids are disabled and they had been doing well with their psychiatric care. So having to move them is going to be difficult. I don't want to be in the street. I don't know what to do. I don't know where they're going to send us. I've also been sick. The kids are the ones that suffer the most. It's unbearable.

The state attempted to address this population by allocating MRVP vouchers targeted to families with a disabled household member in the beginning of Fiscal Year 2014; however, this effort was not sufficient to address the amount of HomeBASE households with disabled family members.

“The **kids are the ones that **suffer** the most. It’s **unbearable**.”**

CHART 1: Return to shelter, by disability status



“My son goes to school here... he doesn't want to leave. He says, ‘This is my room, my friends are here.’”

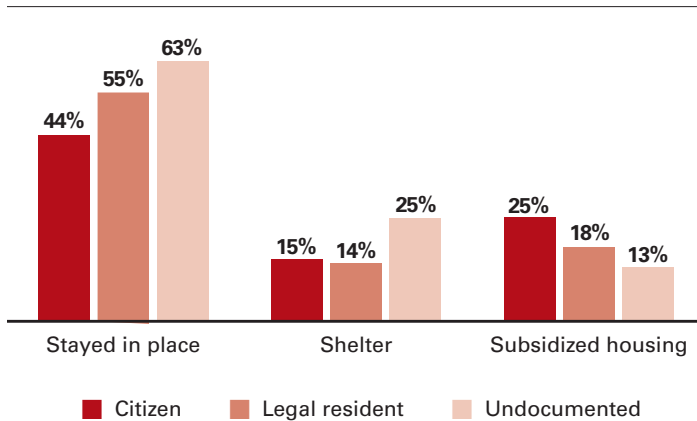
Household composition. Parents with school-aged children appeared to have had greater motivation to stretch their current living situations at least through the end of the school year. For families with only school-age children (6-18 years old), 57 percent continued to stay in place six months after HomeBASE Rental Assistance expired, compared to only 32 percent of families in which all children were under 6 years old. Families with younger children were more likely to re-enter shelter (27 percent compared to 12 percent of those with only older children) and more likely to secure subsidized housing (32 percent, compared to 17 percent). Where families had children that spanned both age ranges, the outcomes were more mixed. Research supports the belief that frequent moves can damage children’s educational progress.¹⁵ One parent with a school-aged child stated, “This place is pretty convenient as far as getting my daughter to school and getting to work, so we want to stay put for now.” Another parent stated,

I want a roof over my head. My son goes to school here...he is having a hard time and acting up, and he doesn't want to leave. He says, ‘This is my room, my friends are here.’ I don't want him to go through having to move around a lot.

A third parent stated, “If it were just me I would be okay. I would even go to shelter. But I can’t do that to my children. They are studying and that’s what they should do.”

Immigration status. Families where the head of household was undocumented were much more likely to either stay in place or return to shelter and were less likely to access subsidized housing than citizens or legal residents (see Chart 2). These families have fewer options both in terms of housing (federal housing subsidies cannot be used for the undocumented, but state programs, including Emergency Assistance, do not have such restrictions) and income generation, creating additional uncertainty and forcing these families to choose between staying in place or returning to shelter. Even though many families in this population were able to stay in place for six months, due to limited income and lack of opportunity it will be very difficult for most to continue this through the entire year. One undocumented parent stated, “Now it’s difficult, I’m worried. The program is over. I’m up in the air. I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

CHART 2: Select housing outcomes, by immigration status



Program origin. MBHP’s researchers found that the pathways through which families accessed HomeBASE Rental Assistance were closely tied to their financial and housing outcomes. Three different entry points were available to families:

1. “Front Door” clients, or families who were eligible for Emergency Assistance but were given HomeBASE Rental Assistance as an alternative to being placed in shelters or motels (diversion).
2. Those already housed in the Emergency Assistance shelter and motel system.
3. Those who had already received some form of rental assistance, either through prior state Flex Funds, or federal HPRP funds.

TABLE 4: Employment and income by HomeBASE origin

| Origin | Number of Families | Number working | % working | Avg monthly income |
|---------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------|--------------------|
| Front Door | 47 | 23 | 49% | \$975.74 |
| Motel/shelter | 30 | 12 | 40% | \$1,021.66 |
| Flex/HPRP | 21 | 15 | 71% | \$1,387.86 |

This group had at an earlier point been a part of the shelter/motel system.

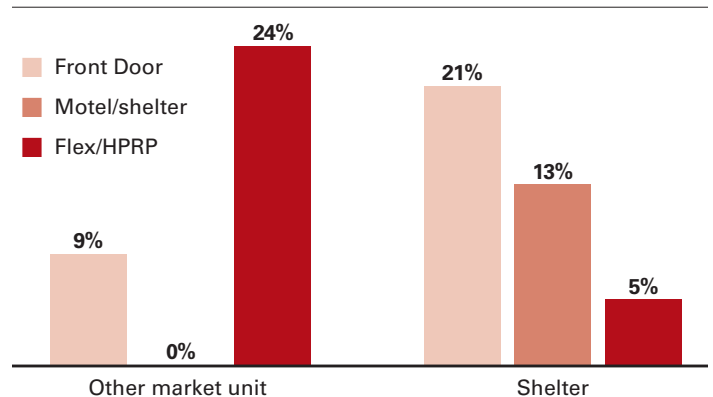
There were two housing outcomes where there was a marked difference between these different program origins.

First, those who had participated in the Flex Funds programs or HPRP were much more likely to have relocated to other private market apartments (24 percent compared to none of those from the shelter/motel system, and 9 percent from the “Front Door,” see Chart 3), possibly because of their higher incomes (see Table 4).

Second, families who had entered through the “Front Door” were the most likely to go to shelter (21 percent compared to 13 percent of families coming from shelter or motel and 5 percent of families who had been on Flex Funds or HPRP). This could be attributed to the fact that transitioning from one program to another (HomeBASE Rental Assistance to Household Assistance) created stress and uncertainty—something that families who had participated in previous short-term programs were already familiar with and more likely to take on. Another possibility is that, unlike “Front Door” clients, families that had been previously placed in motels and shelters may have been less willing to be placed there again. One parent who had been in a previous program stated this clearly, saying, “I do not want to go back to shelter—and you can put that in capital letters—or to be relocated with my kids. I’m hardworking and taking care of my kids, trying to get better and pay more.”

Families also had very different incomes and work situations when compared across their origins. Families who had been participants in previous rental assistance programs, such as Flex Funds or HPRP, had average incomes that were much greater than those

CHART 3: Select housing outcomes, by program origin



of other origins. Additionally, many more of these families were working. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that families who had participated in previous programs had been afforded more time in stable housing than families who had been homeless more recently. This extra time could have contributed to their ability to increase their incomes. The greater average income of the families who were on the Flex Funds programs and HPRP may explain their greater chance of affording market rate units and lower rates of entering shelter. If future housing programs are designed to be of longer duration, with essential services such as education and training, job placement, and child care provided from the beginning, this will increase the chances that families will end the program in a position to support themselves and pay their rent without a subsidy.

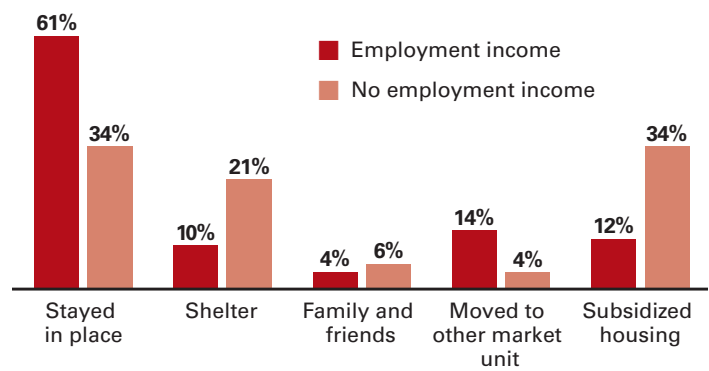
Work and income. On average, those who moved to another apartment had the highest monthly incomes (\$1,527 at six months). Those who moved in with family or friends or went to shelter had the lowest incomes (\$595 and \$559, respectively). Employment also appeared to play a role. Those without employment income were much more likely to return to shelter (21 percent, as compared to 10 percent of those with employment income) but were also more likely to secure subsidized housing (34 percent, as compared to 12 percent for those with employment income, see Chart 4). Those who were working were likely better able to afford their rents as long as they were receiving HomeBASE Household Assistance. It is also possible that families with working household members were reluctant to return to shelter because of the fear of being placed far from their home and losing their employment.

“I don't want to go through this every six months. I'd rather at least go to shelter.”

CHANGES IN FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES DURING THE SIX-MONTH PERIOD

Though some individuals did see improvements in their circumstances, in many areas the overall picture remained largely the same: Although 20 percent obtained jobs during the period, another 21 percent lost their jobs. While 35 percent of the study participants had an increase in income, 41 percent saw a decline. Research has shown that this level of income volatility, which is more pronounced in low-income populations, makes it difficult for families to maintain stable housing and procure other essentials such as food and transportation.¹⁶ Given both the short study period and the difficulty of gathering data on these issues, little change was detected in terms of food security, health,

CHART 4: Housing status, by employment status



NOTE: Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

“I can't imagine starting something without knowing what my situation is going to be.”

substance abuse, debt, and educational attainment. However, over a longer period of time, and if these families' housing situations continue to be difficult and uncertain, we would expect to see decreases in these measures of well-being.

There was one marked change over the six-month period: families' assessment of their own housing stability. The first survey was completed as families exited the HomeBASE Rental Assistance program and started to receive another round of assistance, such as HomeBASE Household Assistance. At that time, 92 percent stated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “My housing situation now is stable.” Six months after the end of Rental Assistance, only 47 percent agreed with the statement (see Chart 5). Even though many families were able to maintain housing for the full six months because of additional state resources, the large increase in the level of uncertainty shows that families do not feel confident about their futures, and do not think this is a viable long-term solution.

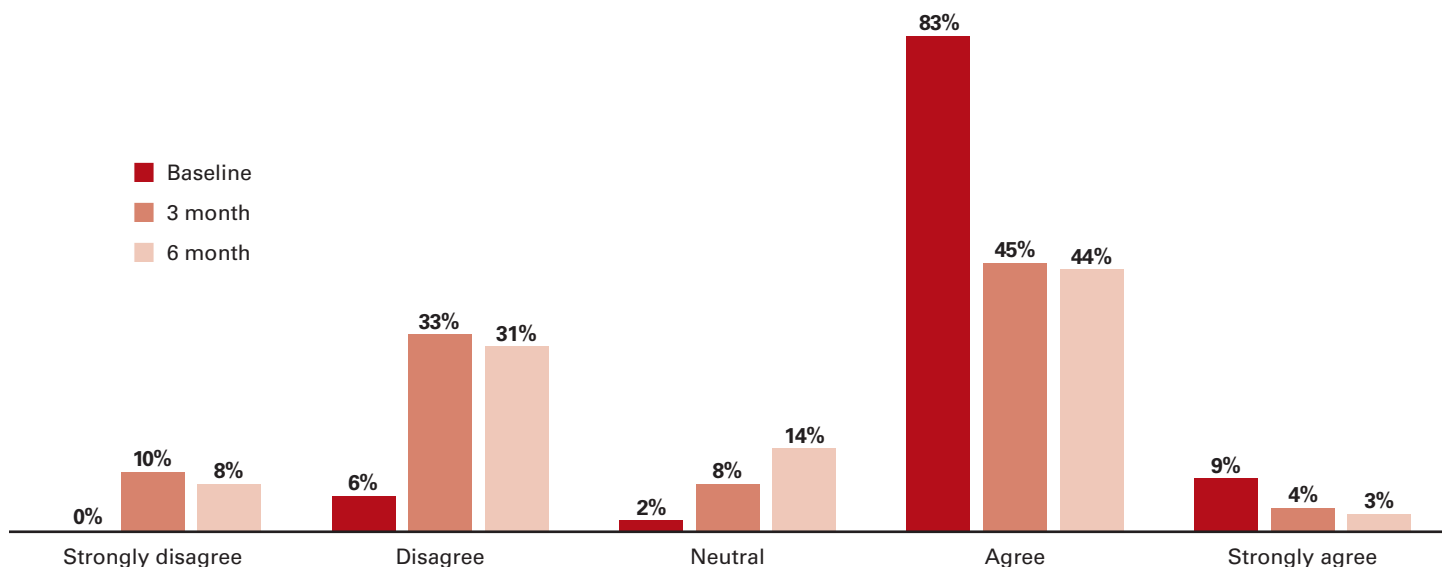
One participant stated, “They told me I could apply for an extension of six more months and I'm talking to my worker about that. But I don't want to go through this every six months. I'd rather at least go to shelter.”

This feeling is corroborated by the large gap between market rents and what families can afford to pay, demonstrating that most families are not in sustainable situations.¹⁷ Lack of confidence in housing stability might cause family members to be less likely to pursue employment or educational opportunities or take other steps toward increasing their self-sufficiency, because these efforts may have to be abandoned if they are forced to move in the near future. As one participant put it,

It was very stressful when [HomeBASE Rental Assistance] was coming to an end. A lot of the stress I have is because I want stability. A lot of what I can do now is because I have assistance. So I can't imagine starting something without knowing what my situation is going to be. I just want to go to school but I don't know if I can do that without knowing what's going to happen. It's just trying to find a balance.

Research also demonstrates that inadequate housing and housing instability frequently damage residents' sense of self-esteem and empowerment.¹⁸ Families are therefore less likely to make successful efforts to improve their education or job prospects while their housing is uncertain.

CHART 5: Agreement with the phrase "My housing situation right now is stable," by survey period

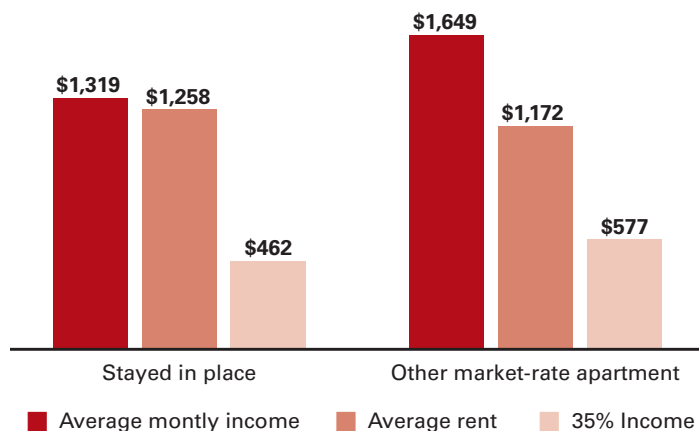


IV. CONCLUSION: FAMILIES CONTINUE TO FACE BARRIERS TO STABILITY

Incomes are insufficient to support market rents. As MBHP has previously suggested, families who are eligible for Emergency Assistance have insufficient incomes to afford market-rate rents without subsidies, and, like most people, income levels do not usually change significantly over the short term. Indeed, even six months after the expiration of HomeBASE Rental Assistance, tenants could not afford their apartments. On average, tenants who stayed in place could only afford \$462 monthly for rent, based on a rent burden of 35 percent,¹⁹ \$857 less than the average monthly rent. While those who moved to other units did so with higher incomes, they could still only afford \$577 or \$595 less than their full average rent (see Chart 6).

Recognizing this shortfall, the Commonwealth and The Paul and Phyllis Fireman Foundation initiated the Secure Jobs program for the HomeBASE population during Fiscal Year 2013. Secure Jobs works with clients to provide intensive job training, job placement,

CHART 6: Income, rent, affordability for select housing outcomes



“I'm thinking about what is coming after, and I'm worried.”

continuing employment support, and child care assistance, when possible. The program is available in select communities across the state. In the Boston area, Secure Jobs is a partnership between MBHP and Jewish Vocational Service. In addition to the private support, this program has been expanded and funded through the state budget in Fiscal Year 2015 and will include access to state housing resources for some participants.

Not all families are in the same circumstances; programs should be designed with this in mind. Although short-term rental assistance may work for some families, other families require different options if they are to remain in or obtain stable housing, including long-term rental assistance. From this study and previous research by MBHP, there are certain situations that can help service providers determine who is more likely to succeed with short- versus long-term assistance (see Table 5). Future efforts to address homelessness need to tackle the issue of whether to target resources to these populations and how to balance the appropriateness of short-term versus longer-term options. Additionally, time-limited state assistance programs need to receive predictable and consistent funding, be based on realistic expectations, and include, in addition to housing, support for education, training, job placement, income maximization, and child care.

Despite the range of programs targeted at families who are homeless, the short-term nature of the programs does not provide sufficient support to stabilize most families.

A number of the families surveyed expressed their thankfulness for the existence of HomeBASE Rental Assistance as well as the additional rental supports that were provided during and after HomeBASE. However, some of these same families also expressed difficulties in making and keeping to long-term plans that would increase their economic self-sufficiency. Instability was a source of stress for many families, undermining the goals of the program:

They gave me ten months [with Household Assistance]. So I am very nervous about this and stressed and I can't concentrate well. It's been good to be in my home, to be able to go out and work and come home to my place. I can't complain about that. It's just the stress about thinking about what's going to happen afterwards.

I can say it's okay because the assistance helps me have a home for my kids. RAFT has helped with that. But I'm thinking about what is coming after, and I'm worried.

Property owners are wary of short-term programs. In addition to the direct effect on families, case managers report that it is difficult to recruit property owners to participate in short-term assistance programs such as HomeBASE. Property owners fear that they will not receive rent payments through the HomeBASE

TABLE 5: Assistance strategy, by family circumstances

| Circumstance | Short-term assistance | Long-term assistance |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Family has employment income | X | |
| Gap between income and market rent is small | X | |
| Household member has a disability | | X |
| Household contains child under 6 | | X |
| Low level of educational attainment | | X |

Household Assistance or RAFT programs, either from the tenant or the funding agency, for the entire lease term, and that they will be forced to pursue costly and time-consuming evictions. One large property management company that manages affordable housing properties was generally positively inclined toward subsidized housing programs but was negatively impacted by the end of HomeBASE Rental Assistance, saying, “It ruined me now because some people can’t pay their rent so I have no choice but to evict them.” The same property manager expressed willingness to deal with the increased paperwork of transitioning families to HomeBASE Household Assistance and RAFT, but had problems with the temporary nature of the programs. “I have a resident right now who owes \$3,000 and is going to eviction [even] after they got the \$4,000 [Household Assistance funding]. The biggest issue is that it is not sustainable for the long term.” These negative experiences may damage the many positive relationships MBHP has built with property owners over the years, and may even make landlords less likely to rent to any tenants with a subsidy in the future.

“If I lose my job today, I would be homeless again.”

Current resources of affordable housing and other services are not sufficient. Housing advocates continually call for more affordable housing resources, but one of the HomeBASE participants made the point clearly, saying,

If I lose my job today, I would be homeless again. If you're a single mom or single dad you could just go back into the cycle again. So it's a good program, the temporary program, but in the long run maybe not.

They really need to increase subsidized housing so people don't have to go into shelter in the first place.

Parents who want to work sometimes cannot due to being unable to afford child care, and there are often long waiting lists for state-subsidized child care vouchers. One participant said, “My son has to spend all his time with me. He’s almost three and he’s not in day care. I can’t work or study. I’m trying, but there’s nothing more I can do.”

SURVEY NOTES

HomeBASE Rental Assistance participants who received stabilization through MBHP and lost their assistance from September through November of 2013 were given the opportunity to participate in the survey process. Participation was voluntary; therefore, a random sample was not possible. Demographic data reveals that survey participants were similar to the population of HomeBASE families in terms of household composition. It is likely that the clients who chose to begin the survey and continue for six months were highly motivated compared to the HomeBASE population in general. Based on the difficulties that survey respondents faced in affording market rents, it is reasonable to conclude that the HomeBASE population as a whole likely encountered even greater obstacles.

NOTES

1. The state provided former HomeBASE Rental Assistance families with a universal waiver which allowed them to access Emergency Assistance shelter without waiting for eviction, apply through their HomeBASE case manager without going to the local Transitional Assistance Office, and access EA for up to 12 months for the end of their Rental Assistance benefit, as long as they met the eligibility requirements, were facing homelessness, and were in good standing with the HomeBASE program (DHCD Housing Stabilization Notice 2013-02).
2. There is no generally accepted definition of short-term rental assistance in relevant research. For the purpose of this paper, short-term rental assistance refers to subsidies of less than five years.
3. Of the families who were surveyed, 21 percent were enrolled in other short term housing programs with income based subsidies, such as Flex Funds or the federally funded Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program, prior to HomeBASE Rental Assistance. When rental assistance ended, these families had higher incomes than those who received only HomeBASE Rental Assistance, which suggests that families were able to increase their incomes when given more time in stable housing. For more on this, see Pages 6–7.
4. Eligibility for HomeBASE Rental Assistance was later shortened to two years (Section 2 of Chapter 139 of the Acts of 2012, item 7004-0108).
5. Commonwealth of Massachusetts. (2014). *Emergency Assistance Program (EA) Fiscal Year 2014 Third Quarterly Report*. Page 6. Accessed August 11, 2014 at <http://www.mass.gov/hed/docs/dhcd/hs/ea/fy14q3eareport.pdf>.
6. From MBHP calculations based on program recertification at the beginning of year two of Rental Assistance.
7. The state has directed substantial resources toward permanent housing vouchers for the homeless population: 500 MRVP vouchers to families in Emergency Assistance shelters and hotels in Fiscal Year 2013, 500 MRVP vouchers to families who had been in Emergency Assistance shelters for the longest amount of time in Fiscal Year 2014, and 500 MRVP vouchers for families rolling of HomeBASE Rental Assistance with a disabled family member in Fiscal Year 2014.
8. In this instance, a shallow subsidy is a stipend that lowers the client's rent below market level, though the rent remains above the portion the client would be required to pay with a permanent housing voucher (usually between 30 percent and 40 percent of gross monthly income).
9. Meschede, Tatjana, Sara Chaganti and Alexis Mann. (2012). *Rapid Re-Housing and Short-Term Rental Vouchers for Homeless Families: Summary Report of a Pilot*. The Heller School Institute on Assets & Social Policy. Accessed September 10, 2014 at <http://iasp.brandeis.edu/pdfs/2012/Rapid%20Re-Housing%20and%20Short-Term%20Rental.pdf>.
10. Davis, Tim. (2010). *Rapid Re-Housing of Motel-Sheltered Families: MBHP's Preliminary Assessment*. Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership. Accessed July 10, 2014 at <http://www.mbhp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/HPRP-Report-2010.pdf>, and Davis, Tim and Terry Lane Saunders. (2012). *Rapid Re-Housing of Families Experiencing Homelessness in Massachusetts: Maintaining Housing Stability*. Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership. Accessed August 11, 2014 at <http://www.mbhp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/HPRP-Report-2012.pdf>.
11. More than 40 percent of HomeBASE Rental Assistance recipients in the MBHP region received prior assistance from the Flex Funds programs or HPRP. With the combination of the programs, these families received more than two years of a rental subsidy.
12. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Federal Poverty Guidelines. Accessed August 11, 2014 at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/14poverty.cfm>.
13. Testimony of Undersecretary Aaron Gornstein Before the Joint Committee on Housing, December 18, 2013. Accessed August 27, 2014 at <http://www.mass.gov/hed/economic/cohed/dhcd/12182013gornsteintestimony.pdf>.
14. Many of our survey participants bounced around between staying with different friends and family members before they were asked to leave and then entered the HomeBASE program.
15. See Cohen, Rebecca and Keith Wardrip. (2011). *Should I Stay or Should I Go? Exploring the Effects of Housing Instability and Mobility on Children*. Center for Housing Policy. Accessed August 22, 2014 at <http://www.nhc.org/media/files/HsgInstabilityandMobility.pdf>.
16. Klawitter, Marieka and Colin Morgan-Cross. (2012). *Income Volatility and Low-Income Households*. Evans School of Public Affairs, University of Washington. Accessed August 17, 2014 at <http://evans.uw.edu/sites/default/files/public/Income%20Volatility%209.21.12.pdf>.
17. For more on this, see “Incomes are insufficient to support market rents” on Pages 8–9.
18. See Mueller, Elizabeth and J. Rosie Tighe. “Making the Case for Affordable Housing: Connecting Housing with Health and Education Outcomes.” *Journal of Planning Literature* 2007 21: 371, pp. 371-385, doi: 10.1177/0885412207299653. Also Bratt, Rachel. “Housing and Family Well-being.” *Housing Studies* 2002 17:1, 13-26, doi: 10.1080/02673030120105857.
19. Tenants with permanent housing subsidies (such as MRVP or Section 8) generally pay between 30 percent and 40 percent of monthly income toward rent; HomeBASE Rental Assistance participants paid 35 percent.

METROPOLITAN BOSTON HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

MBHP is the state's largest regional provider of rental housing voucher assistance, serving 8,800 tenant households and working with 4,300 property owners. MBHP serves individuals and families who are homeless, elderly, disabled, and/or of low and moderate incomes in Boston and surrounding communities.

MBHP's mission is to ensure that the region's low- and moderate-income individuals and families have choice and mobility in finding and retaining decent affordable housing; all MBHP programs and initiatives are designed to encourage housing stability, increase economic self-sufficiency, and enhance the quality of the lives of those it serves. To achieve its mission and to promote efficient service delivery, MBHP works collaboratively with a broad array of service providers and neighborhood-based organizations.

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