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Evaluation of the Family Homelessness Systems Initiative: Examining the Effects of Systems Reform on 18-Month Housing Stability and Related Outcomes

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Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Appendices (available in a separate document)

Appendix A. Glossary of Key Terms

Appendix B. Evaluation Methodology for Systems Change, Organizational Case Studies, and Cost Study

Appendix C. Family Impact Study Methodology

Appendix D. Measuring Secular Trends

Appendix E. Families' Characteristics, Experiences, and Outcomes by County

Appendix F. Hierarchical Linear Models Predicting Employment and Housing Stability

Appendix G. Trajectory Analysis

Appendix H. Members of Evaluation Advisory Committee

Executive Summary

The Family Homelessness Systems Initiative, developed by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, provided a decade of funding and support to three counties in the Pacific Northwest, beginning in 2009, to reform their homeless housing and service delivery systems for families. The overall goal of the Initiative was to reduce family homelessness in King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the systems. The key targeted outcomes were reducing the length of time families experience homelessness, improving their housing stability, and decreasing returns to homelessness.

Westat, a national research organization, conducted a rigorous longitudinal outcome evaluation to examine the effects of the systems changes on the experiences and outcomes of families served. This report provides 18-month outcome findings based on an analysis involving a cohort of families served after systems reform compared to a cohort of families served prior to reform.

The evaluation provides strong evidence that system changes had a number of impacts on the families served. Key findings include:

- The Housing First orientation of the reformed systems, reducing the reliance on shelter and transitional housing with a broader array of assistance that prioritizes housing such as diversion and rapid re-housing, led to greater and quicker access to permanent housing and more nights in that housing, despite a tightening housing market.
- Families served after reform were less likely to experience sheltered homelessness in the 18 months following system entry than families served prior to reform, but were more likely to experience unsheltered homelessness, especially while waiting for assistance or if they were unable to access housing.
- After entering housing, however, families served after systems reform returned to homelessness (sheltered and unsheltered) at a rate comparable to families served prior to systems reform.
- Families also experienced greater improvements in employment and income than families prior to reform, even controlling for the fact that they came in with higher employment and income. The same economic conditions that likely made it difficult for families to find housing also likely enabled them to increase their employment and income.
- Parent-child intactness, child absenteeism, and the rate of school transitions during the 18 months following receipt of initial assistance in the system did not appear to be affected by the systems reforms.

Several individual family characteristics, in addition to systems changes, had effects on the outcomes. These include:

- Although families of color, especially Black/African American families, are disproportionately represented among those experiencing homelessness, none of the outcome findings varied significantly between families with African American and White heads of household (HOHs), controlling for other characteristics. Families with HOHs that were multiracial or other races, in fact, had some improved housing outcomes over comparable families with White HOHs. Families with Hispanic HOHs, however, were less likely to access permanent housing and had shorter stays than those with non-Hispanic HOHs.
- Having employment, education, and income all increased the probability of having positive housing, employment, and income outcomes for families before and after reform.
- Within each cohort as well, family size and a recent history of homelessness or less time in one's housing prior to entering the system decreased both the probability of accessing permanent housing and the number of nights in that housing, and increased the number of nights in shelter. Recent evictions likewise decreased the probability of accessing permanent housing and the number of nights in that housing.
- Having a permanent housing subsidy at baseline was also a strong factor in influencing housing access and stability. Families who accessed housing after reform, especially those who accessed it in the first 180 days, were significantly more likely to have a subsidy than families who were unable to access housing during the entire 18-month follow-up.

The study findings have a number of implications for communities nationally. Many of the implications reinforce the work that is underway through Federal and state efforts and funding. The main implications for communities include:

- Prioritize getting families into housing as quickly as possible, as quicker access relates to longer stability;
- Maintain access to shelter separately from coordinated entry to avoid unsheltered homelessness while families wait for other assistance;
- Strengthen ties with employment agencies and work to improve families' human capital given the strong association of human capital to housing outcomes;
- Bridge the homeless service system with the public housing authorities, recognizing the critical role subsidies play for some families in maintaining their own housing;

- Consider providing additional supports to families who enter coordinated entry with larger numbers of children, histories of homelessness, and recent evictions; and
- Reduce any remaining stock of transitional housing and/or consider repurposing it or targeting it to those who might have repeated difficulty accessing housing and return to homelessness.

Follow-on studies can build on the findings from the current study in a variety of ways. For example, as systems have now increasingly implemented dynamic prioritization procedures and are targeting assistance to families with different histories and needs, future studies should examine how the targeting of different types of assistance relates to families' access to and stability in housing. More controlled studies of new system interventions, such as diversion assistance, may also be beneficial in understanding the role each plays in reducing homelessness. Finally, future research should adopt a stronger racial equity lens. Such research should ensure that sufficient numbers of families across racial groups are represented in quantitative studies to conduct a sensitive assessment of families' experiences and outcomes. Additionally, it should ensure that the studies are co-designed with families from the relevant groups to ensure that the studies are sensitive to the biases and inequities they experience.

Section 1. Introduction and Background

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Family Homelessness Systems Initiative, launched in 2009, was a ten-year initiative intended to reform homeless service delivery systems for families in King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties. The Initiative, guided by a Theory of Action based on the best thinking and available research at the time, included five promising strategies for creating comprehensive, coordinated housing and service delivery systems that prioritized access to permanent housing.

Westat, a national research firm, conducted an evaluation of the Initiative, tracking its implementation, assessing how it spurred changes to the homeless service systems and the organizations within them, and measuring the effect of these changes on the families they serve. This report provides findings from the Family Impact Study, integrating analyses of primary and administrative data collected on two cohorts of families, served before and after systems reform. The Family Impact Study recruited each cohort of families upon receipt of homelessness assistance and followed them for 18 months, tracking their experiences and outcomes related to housing access, residential stability, and homelessness, as well as employment, income, parent-child intactness, and children's absenteeism and school transitions. Analyses were aimed at understanding the effect of systems reform on each of these areas of outcome.

Introduction

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Family Homelessness Systems Initiative was a $60 million comprehensive systems change initiative aimed at reducing family homelessness in King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties by improving the coordination, efficiency, and effectiveness of the family homeless housing and service delivery systems. The Initiative was launched in 2009 in response to the persistent number of families experiencing homelessness in the Puget Sound Area and the difficulty families experience in successfully exiting homelessness. The Initiative was also developed in response to the findings from the Foundation's earlier Sound Families Initiative, which found that even with intensive support through transitional housing, only two-thirds of exiting families moved into permanent housing (Northwest Institute for Children and Families, 2008).

The Initiative, guided by a Theory of Action based on the best thinking and available research at the time, weaved together five promising strategies for creating a sustainable systemic response aimed at reducing the length of time families experience

homelessness, decreasing returns to homelessness, and, in turn, fostering more housing stability (see Exhibit 1-1).

Exhibit1I-1. Family Homelessness Systems Initiative Theory of Action
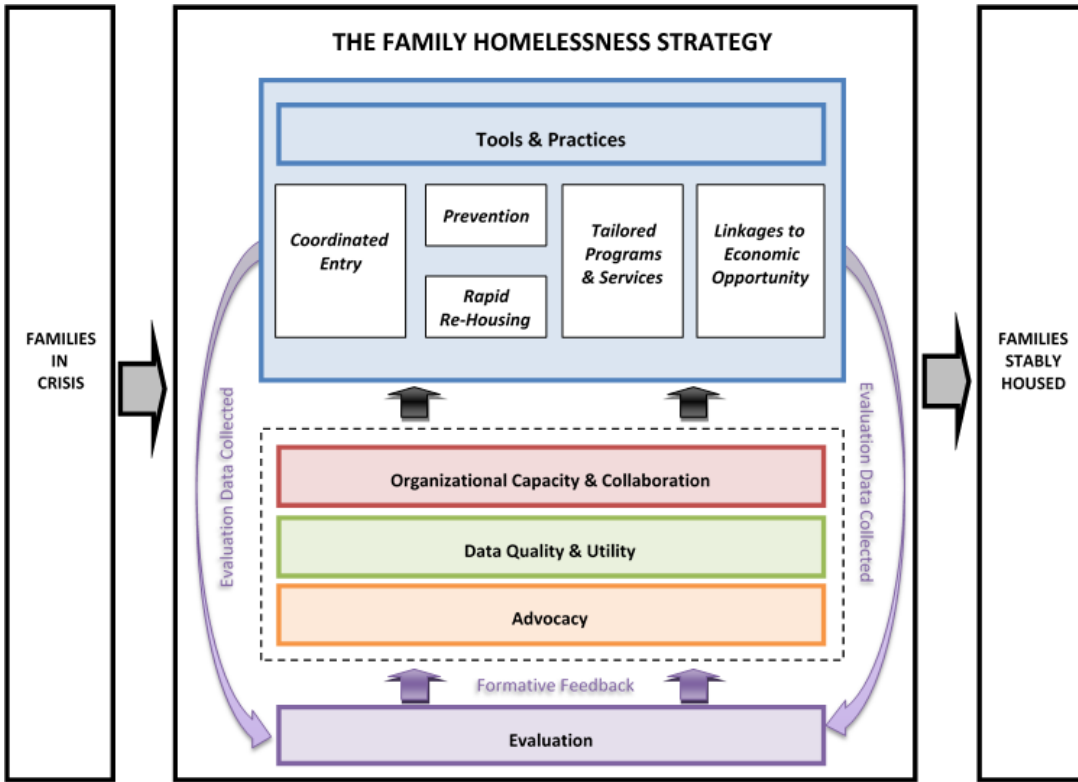
The first strategy included implementing "pillars" of practice, including efforts to: prevent families from entering the homeless system when possible, coordinate housing and services to help those experiencing homelessness access housing assistance and rapidly exit into permanent housing, provide services tailored to families' needs, and offer economic opportunities that support housing access and stability. The four additional strategies in the Theory of Action support systems reform by strengthening organizational capacity and interagency collaboration, improving data quality and use in decision-making, supporting advocacy for funding and policy change, and using evaluation to guide change.

At its inception, the goal of the Initiative was to decrease family homelessness by 50 percent by 2020. Over time, however, it became clear that the implementation of the Theory of Action would not effectively reduce the number of families becoming homeless, understanding that there were broader economic, social, and political factors affecting homelessness outside of homeless service systems. The implementation of the

Theory of Action, however, could affect families' experiences once they became homeless. Thus, the goal of the Initiative was revised to be a 50 percent reduction in the amount of time families experience homelessness and greater housing stability.

Westat, a national research organization, conducted an independent evaluation of the Initiative. Initiated in 2009, the evaluation provides a longitudinal examination of the changes the Initiative helped spur over time in the three homeless service delivery systems that serve families experiencing homelessness, and how these changes, in turn, affected families' experiences and outcomes.

This report presents the findings from the Family Impact Study, a quasi-experimental examination of the effects of the systems changes on families served in the system over an 18-month period. The study compared the experiences and outcomes of families served after the systems have been reformed with those of families served prior to the systems reform. Companion products under development present a descriptive 30-month

Evaluation Questions
• How is the Initiative being implemented?
• How is the Initiative bringing about changes in the systems of housing and service delivery for homeless families and the organizations that serve them?
• What effect are the systems changes having on families' experiences, housing access and duration, family stability, and children's school-related experiences?
• What are the costs of serving a family in a coordinated system (after systems reform) compared to the status quo?

follow-up of a subset of families, a more detailed analysis of the system changes that occurred over the course of the evaluation, a study of select organizations and how they changed in response to the systems changes, and a study of the costs of serving families before and after the system was reformed.

We begin this report with an overview of the evaluation methodology, with particular detail on the Family Impact Study. Section 2 provides background for the family findings with a brief overview of the Initiative's implementation, the reforms to the family homeless housing and service delivery system that occurred, and the context changes that took place over the decade of the study in each of the three counties. Section 3 provides an overview of the characteristics and service needs of the families served. Section 4 summarizes the process of seeking and receiving initial assistance for families and the nature of assistance they received before and after systems reform. Section 5 presents data on the housing and homelessness outcomes achieved by families during the 18-month period following their receipt of initial assistance in the system. Section 6

explores what has been learned through this effort on families' housing and overall stability, including the factors that influence their housing trajectories over time. Section 7 presents data on additional outcomes of employment and income, parent-child intactness, and school age children's absenteeism and school transitions. Section 8 discusses the role of race in family homelessness and how it relates to the outcomes. Section 9, the final section of the report, summarizes the findings, how they can guide governmental and community actions, and the research and evaluation that is needed to build upon and extend these findings.

Family Impact Study

The Family Impact Study was one of five components in the evaluation. Appendix B outlines the four other study components, including a systems study assessing the implementation of the Initiative and changes in the systems, a set of organizational case studies examining the systems' effects on a sample of organizations, a descriptive 30-month follow-up of a subset of the families served after systems reform, and a study of the cost implications of systems change. In this section, we describe the methodology used for the Family Impact Study that is the basis for the 18-month findings.

The Family Impact Study assessed the effects of the systems reforms on the experiences and outcomes of families. The study employed a longitudinal quasi-experimental design in which an "intervention" cohort of families (referred to as Cohort 2) is compared with a "baseline comparison" cohort (referred to as Cohort 1). The study aimed to determine if the changes made to the systems, in turn, affect how families enter the system, how they are treated in the system, the types of housing assistance and other services received, and the relationship of that assistance to their access to and stability in housing and other outcomes.

Description of the Intervention and Comparison Cohorts

Recruitment process: The intervention cohort of families (Cohort 2) was selected after reforms were made to the systems in the three counties. The characteristics, experiences, and outcomes of these families were compared to those of a baseline cohort of families (Cohort 1) served prior to reform. In each county, our goal was to recruit at least 150 families in each county for each cohort. In Pierce and Snohomish Counties, we aimed to recruit as close to a census of families receiving homeless services as possible within the recruitment period needed to achieve the 150 family sample size. In King County, given the vast number of providers, we worked with the county to select the largest providers with shelters and programs across the county with

which we could work to recruit a sample. Families receiving assistance from the system were eligible to be included in the study if (1) they had at least one minor child and/or were pregnant and (2) they were able to complete an interview in English or Spanish. It is important to note that our study is focused only on families who received some type of homelessness assistance in each cohort. We could not track families in Cohort 1 who were turned away because there was not capacity in the shelters, nor could we track families in Cohort 2 who went through coordinated entry in each county but did not receive additional assistance such as a referral for shelter or housing.

Cohort 1 families were recruited from the three demonstration counties between October 2010 and August 2012. Because shelter and transitional housing were the two major homelessness assistance options available for families during this time (with shelter being the primary source of initial assistance), we worked directly with shelter and

> **Initial Assistance**
> The first type of assistance that a family receives from the homeless service system in the demonstration counties. Types of assistance include diversion/navigation, shelter, rapid re-housing, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing.

transitional housing providers in each county to identify and recruit families. Cohort 2 families were recruited between May 2015 and November 2016. As indicated in the Theory of Action (see Exhibit 1-1), following systems reform, the primary point of initial assistance was no longer limited to shelter; therefore, we worked with providers providing one or more of the types of assistance available—including shelter, transitional housing, rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing (or permanent housing with supports), and diversion or navigation services—to identify and recruit Cohort 2 families. Most of the same providers participated in both cohorts, broadening the assistance they provided after systems reform. Specifics on the providers we worked with, how we engaged them in the study, and how they obtained consent to contact forms from families are provided in Appendix C.

In Cohort 2, we opted not to recruit families through coordinated entry due to long waits families were experiencing at the time to be referred to a provider (see Section 4). With an 18-month follow-up, we would have had limited time to observe the effects of the assistance on families' outcomes. In addition, families in Cohort 1 also had wait times for assistance, but were more 'hidden' from the system as they were either on individual provider waitlists or not on a waitlist at all but calling in each day to locate a shelter unit. Therefore, for comparability between the two cohorts, we elected to enroll families in our study once they were accepted by a provider and receiving their initial assistance in addressing the current homelessness episode.

Family Exclusions: As noted, we aimed to recruit as close to a census of families receiving homeless services as possible for each cohort to represent all families receiving assistance through the homeless service delivery systems. However, there were important portions of the population that were not represented due to logistical constraints. For example, specific service providers were not included in the design (i.e., domestic violence providers were not included due to privacy issues; smaller organizations in King County were not included due to study resource constraints); thus, families receiving their initial assistance from these providers were not included in our cohort analysis. In addition, we conducted interviews only in English and Spanish; the resources available for in-person interviews could not accommodate the vast array of other languages spoken. Therefore, families who were not comfortable with speaking in English or Spanish were excluded, such as immigrants and refugees from non-English or Spanish speaking countries. These eligibility constraints thus limit the generalizability of our findings to *all* families experiencing domestic violence (although it is important to note that many families experiencing domestic violence are served by the providers included in the study), as well as to those speaking languages that could not be accommodated.

Even within the providers targeted, there were families who were not included in the study, either due to omission by the providers or for individual family reasons. Although we provided extensive support to providers to refer families to the study, it is possible that some families were missed and not offered the opportunity to participate in the study. In addition, small percentages of families declined to be contacted by the evaluators, while others were contacted but then elected not to participate, and others expressed interest but with whom we were unable to connect for an interview (see Rog et al, 2018). Additional information about sample recruitment is available in Appendix C and the results of an assessment of the two cohort samples representativeness to the populations served during the same timeframes are presented below.

Primary Data Collection

Data were collected from families in each cohort over time through detailed, in-person interviews with the head of household (HOH) in each family, beginning with a baseline interview conducted as close to receipt of initial homelessness assistance as possible, followed by interviews at 6, 12, and 18 months following receipt of the initial assistance. We typically collected data from the family HOH; if there was more than one parent or guardian in the family, we selected the person who was most knowledgeable about all

family members, typically the mother. For simplicity, we refer to all respondents as the families' HOHs.

We collected some basic descriptive information on all family members and more detailed information on one child (referred to as the target child), selected at random from among children between ages 2 and 18 living with the

Exhibit 1-2. Family Impact Study Sample Sizes

	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Total
Baseline sample	467	504	971
6-Month sample *% of baseline*	392 *(84%)*	369 *(73%)*	761 *(78%)*
12-month sample *% of baseline*	389 *(83%)*	365 *(72%)*	754 *(78%)*
18-month sample *% of baseline*	395 *(85%)*	417 *(83%)*	812 *(84%)*
Complete housing data *% of baseline*	391 *(84%)*	408 *(81%)*	799 *(82%)*

respondent at the time of selection. The selection strategy gave preference to a school-aged child if one was present in the household.

Families were provided an incentive for each completed interview. In Cohort 1, families received $20 for the baseline interview and $30 for follow-up interviews. In Cohort 2, families received $30 for the baseline and six-month interview and $50 for subsequent interviews. Sample sizes for each wave of the interview and for those having complete housing data are presented in Exhibit 1-2.

Characteristics of the families in each cohort presented in Section 3 and data on families' experiences entering the system in Section 4 are based on the complete baseline sample, whereas outcome analyses in Sections 5 through 7 are based on the sample with complete housing data (having housing status information for at least 517 of the 545 nights of follow-up data).[1]

Exhibit 1-3 provides a timeline for the data collection for each cohort.[2] The goal was to complete the baseline interview within two months of the family's receipt of the initial assistance and to complete each subsequent interview 6, 12, and 18 months following receipt of initial assistance. For some families who were harder to locate for interviews, these timelines were extended (see more detail in Appendix C).

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[1] We use 517 nights out of 545 as complete housing data because it represents 95% of the total observation period. This approach allows us to retain in the sample families who are missing a limited number of nights, including families who completed their final interview before the 545th day. For ease of communication, we refer to this as an 18-month timeframe.

[2] The timeline for Cohort 2 includes the timing of a 30-month follow-up for a subset of the families.

Exhibit 1-3. Data Collection Timeline for Cohorts 1 and 2

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 4

Nov 2010 – Aug 2012

May 2011 – Jan 2013

Dec 2011 – Sep 2013

May 2012 – Mar 2014

Cohort 1 (Baseline Cohort)

May 2015 – Nov 2016

Jan 2016 – Apr 2017

May 2016 – Nov 2017

Dec 2016 – Apr 2018

Jan 2018 - April 2019

Cohort 2 (Intervention Cohort)

WA State DSHS Data Nov 2010 – Dec 2019
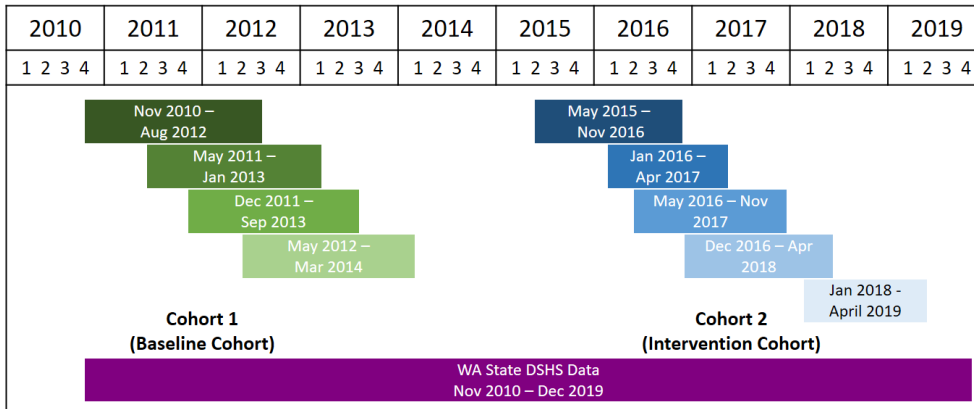
Administrative Data Collection

For families providing their consent in both Cohort 1 and Cohort 2, data were accessed from the Integrated Client Data Base (ICDB) maintained by Washington State's Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) on the HOH and all children in the family. The ICDB is a longitudinal client database that compiles administrative data from over 30 data systems in the state, including DSHS divisions (e.g., Alcohol and Substance Abuse, Children's Administration, Economic Services, Mental Health Services) and other agencies, including the Department of Commerce, the Employment Security Department, the Department of Corrections, and Washington State Housing Agencies. Data were accessed on a range of variables, including demographics, background characteristics, homeless service receipt, and service receipt.

The ICDB data were used to supplement or validate the primary data on key variables, such as employment. In addition, data on families in the two cohorts were compared to data on all families served during the same time periods in the three counties to assess the representativeness of our samples to the full population of families experiencing homelessness served in the systems. The data also provided the ability to look at the inflow of families into the system over the course of the Initiative; these findings are summarized in our systems report (Rog et al., forthcoming in 2021).

The administrative data also afforded the ability to construct two comparison cohorts of families in non-demonstration counties in Washington State. These comparison cohorts allow us to assess the extent to which changes in family characteristics and outcomes occurred over time in other areas that could be due to basic secular trends (e.g., economic upturns and tightening of housing markets), as well as other ongoing initiatives (e.g., Federal and state homeless initiatives and funding).

Analysis of Study Design Integrity, Sample Representativeness, and Secular Trends

Several analyses were conducted prior to conducting outcome analyses to assess the quality of the study design and data.

Analysis of Sample Equivalence: We constructed propensity score weights (Freedman & Berk, 2008) to address any non-equivalence of the cohorts. Propensity score weights, a statistical technique used to control for observed selection biases in non-experimental studies, aim to eliminate or reduce the influence of these differences between the cohorts in family or HOH characteristics on outcomes in order to isolate the role that the systems changes have on families' experiences. The goal of weighting is to achieve balance between the covariates, such that, when applied, there are no longer differences in the distributions of the covariates between the two cohorts. As indicated in Appendix C, there were a number of variables (e.g., age, ethnicity, education, income, homelessness history) that varied significantly between the two cohorts prior to applying the propensity weights. The weights improved the balance for all of the covariates that differed between the two groups. The results of the weighting and the balance are presented in Appendix C.

Attrition Analysis: We performed attrition analysis to determine if there are any significant differences in the characteristics of families in the initial baseline sample of families in each cohort and those who are included in the outcome analyses (84% of Cohort 1; 81% of Cohort 2); that is, whether families who dropped out from the study in each cohort were significantly different from families who stayed in and how these differences may affect outcomes. Families were included in the outcome analysis if they had at least 517 days of housing information (517 days was selected because it constitutes 95% of the full 545 day follow-up). In this analysis, we examined cohort, respondent and family characteristics, service needs, homeless and housing history, and housing barriers at baseline (e.g., mental health, substance abuse, criminal justice involvement). A table comparing the two groups is presented in Appendix C.

Our analysis indicates that the sample of families included in the outcome analyses is representative of the families in the baseline samples for both cohorts. Multivariate logisitic regression predicting drop out revealed the only variable that significantly distinguished the samples was a history of substance abuse; in each cohort, families reporting a history of substance abuse were significantly more likely to drop out of the study than families who did not report having a substance abuse history. No other variables significantly predicted drop-out. As families with substance abuse histories are

likely to have poorer housing outcomes (Shinn et al. 1998), our findings may be over-estimating the extent to which families as a whole maintain their housing. However, because families with substance abuse histories are equally likely to drop out of both cohorts, any cohort differences in outcomes are likely accurate despite this attrition.

Analysis of Sample Representativeness: The ICDB provided us with the ability to compare the two cohorts in the Family Impact Study with the broader populations of families served during each timeframe. We are able to compare characteristics of the families served, the services they receive, and a limited set of outcomes. The analyses thus allowed us to determine not only if the cohorts represent the broader populations served, but also whether their service experiences and outcomes also represent those of the population as a whole.

We compared the sample of families in the each cohort[3] to the complete population of families served in the King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties' homeless service delivery systems during that same period of time, as represented by a receipt of a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) service (e.g. shelter, transitional housing, rapid re-housing, and permanent housing). Tables comparing the two groups are included in Appendix C. One important caveat to this analysis, however, is that the HMIS data included in the ICDB do not include measures of diversion. Families in the cohorts who received diversion are underrepresented in this analysis unless they also received another HMIS service during the cohort timeframes.

Families in both cohorts were similar demographically to other families served during the same time period, with the exception that Cohort 2 families were more likely than the ICDB population to be headed by a female HOH than the population of families served in the systems (92% vs. 85%). Families in both cohort samples also were less likely to have children under 19 than were other families; however, this is likely an artifact of how families were defined for the two samples. The cohort samples include HOHs that were pregnant with no other children in the household; in the ICDB, we were only able to identify families in the ICDB that had children in the household, not those who were pregnant only. This suggests that difference identified between the two

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[3] Families participating in the evaluation were asked to sign a consent to release data from the ICDB on themselves and their children to Westat for the evaluation. Eighty-seven percent of families in Cohort 1 and 82 percent of families in Cohort 2 consented and were identified in the data. Analyses indicate that families who consented were more likely to be White and less likely to be Pacific Islander or other races. They were more likely to have experienced homelessness as a child, less likely to have lived in their own place in the six months before system entry, and more likely to receive Medicaid or inpatient substance abuse treatment.

cohorts of families in the evaluation are not a result of changes in study design over time, but rather reflect actual changes in the population of families served by the homeless service systems over those two time periods.

The two cohort samples also received a slightly different mix of homelessness and housing assistance than the population of families served during each cohort timeframe. Cohort 1 families were more likely to receive emergency shelter in the first six months than other families served at the same time in the three counties. The shelter difference is likely the result of our recruitment strategy to work directly with shelter providers. We did not recruit families entering rapid re-housing because at the time, rapid re-housing was a nascent and time-limited program, being implemented through the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) and was not yet a central component of the service systems. Even among families not in the evaluation, emergency shelter and transitional housing were the primary services received in the first six months. Across both cohorts, families participating in the evaluation were more likely to receive permanent housing, as well as a housing authority subsidy, than families in the broader populations. Families in the evaluation did not differ from families overall in rates of rapid re-housing receipt.

It is difficult for us to determine why the families participating in the evaluation differ from other families served during the same period because the ICDB does not include information about which providers served families. Some possibilities for the differences are that families participating in the evaluation were served by larger providers that were better able to link them to the housing services available, or the HMIS did not fully record all housing services that families received.

The ICDB does not include a measure of where families exit after leaving homeless services. Thus, we were not able to assess differences between the cohort families and all other families on any of the housing outcomes except time spent in shelter and returns to shelter (for the entire population, not just those who entered housing). We were able to examine changes in employment and wages, criminal justice involvement, and Child Protective Services [CPS]-involved family separations.

There were no differences in returns to shelter within 6, 12, or 18 months between families participating in the evaluation and other families in the three counties served at the same time. Additionally, there were no differences in employment, wages, and hours worked at entry or during the 18-month follow-up time, with the exception that Cohort 1 families earned lower wages in the quarter they received initial assistance than

the broader population of families. Families in Cohort 1 were slightly more likely to be convicted of a crime by 18 months following receipt of initial assistance than other families, and families across both cohorts were slightly more likely to have been convicted of a crime by 12 months following receipt of initial assistance than other families. Families across both cohorts were slightly less likely to have an out-of-home placement over time than families in the broader population.

This analysis suggests that families who participated in two cohorts were largely reflective of other families in the system during the same time. Differences identified between the two cohorts, as presented in Section 3, therefore, reflect differences in the populations of families receiving homelessness assistance, rather than differences in study design or recruitment. The one key area of difference is that families in the cohorts were better connected to assistance than families in the broader populations.

Analysis of Secular Trends: We also used the ICDB to determine how the patterns of change in characteristics of the populations served, the types of assistance received, and in the outcomes we can measure for families before and after systems reform in the three demonstration counties compare to patterns of change in six of Washington State's largest counties not participating in the evaluation.

This analysis, presented in Appendix D, reveals some important similarities between the demonstration and non-demonstration counties. First, families in both groups experienced similar demographic changes over time, such that there were increases in the average age of the HOH and the ages of children in the family. Additionally, the population of families in both demonstration and non-demonstration counties experienced increases over time in employment, hourly wages, and average hours worked and decreases in receipt of Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF). These findings suggest that the differences we see over time in the demonstration counties are likely representative of broader secular trends of families experiencing homelessness. Although they could be due to changes in who is being admitted into each system, the strong pattern of findings across the systems despite differences in their structure and operation suggest that the changes are more likely due to population shifts over time.

Second, as expected, over time the non-demonstration counties experienced changes in the array of services provided to families experiencing homelessness, reflecting some of the systems changes the demonstration counties implemented. As described in Section 2, all three counties had a stronger emphasis on transitional housing than all other

counties at the time of Cohort 1 and then de-emphasized transitional housing and replaced it with a Housing First orientation. This is reflected in the significant decreases in the three counties in the percentage of families receiving transitional housing and significant increases in the percentage of families receiving rapid re-housing.

Among the six non-demonstration counties, we identified similar shifts in the decreased use of transitional housing and the increased use of rapid re-housing. These changes across the non-demonstration counties likely reflect a greater federal emphasis on Housing First models over transitional housing and a specific promotion of rapid re-housing within Washington State (Rog et al., 2017). The Initiative itself fostered adoption of rapid re-housing in other non-demonstration counties as early as 2013 through a statewide convening inviting representatives from across the state. In addition, two of the counties included in this analysis (i.e., Spokane and Whatcom Counties) participated in a five-county Department of Commerce-funded rapid re-housing initiative for families receiving TANF, that likely contributed to an increased use of rapid re-housing statewide (Shah et al, 2014).

At both time periods, the three demonstration counties had higher rates of use of permanent housing and receipt of permanent subsidies than other counties. This may be due in part to the Sound Families Initiative, which built partnerships between the local housing authorities and homeless services providers as well as the Moving-to-Work designation of three of the housing authorities in the demonstration counties. Moving-to-Work is a demonstration program for public housing authorities that provides exemptions from many existing public housing and voucher rules and affords flexibility in with how public housing authorities use their Federal funds allowing them the opportunity to implement programs to help residents find employment and become self-sufficient.

Additionally, there were signficant declines in returns to homelessness within 12 months in non-demonstration counties from 14 percent to 9 percent, compared with return rates of 11 percent at both time periods in the demonstration counties. The lower returns could reflect improvements in housing assistance offered or improved economic trends that help people to remain outside of the homeless system.

Taken together, these analyses suggest that:
- The cohort samples were initially non-equivalent, but generally represent the broader population of families served during those timeframes. Propensity-score weighting, however, balanced the non-equivalence of the groups in family

characteristics to control on the role that individual differences have on changes in outcomes in an effort to isolate the effects of systems changes on the outcomes.

- The cohort samples received a greater number of housing services than the broader homeless populations in the three counties, but did not relate to differences in returns to the system or to differences in employment and wages. Data were not available to assess the relationship between receipt of these services and all housing/homelessness outcomes such as access to and stability in housing.
- The three demonstration counties, as described more fully in Section 2, share a pattern of systems changes and housing outcomes that are consistent with expectations. Some of the same types of system changes are reflected in the data in several of the non-demonstration counties, but the pattern of findings is uneven across all six counties.

Analyses of Housing, Homelessness, and Other Outcomes

We conducted a range of descriptive and inferential analyses to examine the effects of systems reform on families' housing and homelessness, including time from formal help seeking to initial assistance, days to entering one's own housing, nights spent in one's own place, returns from housing to homelessness (sheltered and unsheltered), moves, and nights homeless (in shelter and unsheltered). We also conducted more in-depth descriptive analyses to explore the range of housing and homeless settings in which families lived over the 18 months and their housing trajectories after receiving initial assistance. Finally, outcome analyses examined the effects of systems reform on secondary outcomes, including employment, income, parent-child intactness, as well as child chronic absenteeism and school transitions over the 18-month follow-up.

Descriptive analyses included both frequency and bivariate analyses. As described in Exhibit 1-4, inferential analyses, designed to explain differences in outcome variables, included several multivariate analyses, such as ordinary least squares regression, logistic regression, multinomial logistic regression, and survival analysis. Inferential analytic models were estimated, examining the effect of cohort on changes in the outcomes from baseline to 18 months.

Exhibit 1-4. Types of Analyses Performed

Descriptive Analyses	
Frequency distribution	Examines the distribution of a variable for range, measures of central tendency (average, median), outliers, and extent to which there are missing data.
Bivariate analysis	Examines the relationship between two variables, using chi-squares and t-tests to test for significant differences (such as between cohort and number of nights in one's own place).
Inferential Multivariate Analyses	
Ordinary least squares regression	Tests the effect of cohort on differences in continuous or interval measures (such as nights in housing), controlling for the potential influence of other key variables included in the model.
Binary logistic regression	Tests the effect of cohort on differences in dichotomous variables (such as one or more nights homeless), controlling for the potential influence of other key variables included in the model.
Multinomial logistic regression	Tests the effect of cohort on differences in variables with more than two discrete outcomes (such as type of initial assistance received), controlling for the potential influence of other key variables included in the model.
Survival analysis	Tests the effect of cohort on time (such as time to accessing housing). This approach models (1) the probability of moving to permanent housing and (2) how long it takes to move, controlling for the potential influence of other key variables included in the model.
Hierarchical linear modeling	Tests the effect of cohort on the outcome measures, allowing for hierarchical or nested observations. In these models the hierarchical structure is with respect to time, such that time-varying covariates are nested within the covariates that are unchanging over time. This approach allows for an examination of time-varying covariates, such as income or employment, on the dependent variable, controlling for the influence of other key variables included in the model.

All models included a host of family and HOH characteristics to control on individual family differences. When conducting multiple statistical analyses, the probability of observing a false positive (that is, detecting a statistical association between two variables when one does not exist) increases. To ensure that our key findings with respect to cohort differences were not attributable to false positives, we used a false discovery rate, a statistical correction used to set a higher threshold for statistical

significance (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995). Cohort findings remained significant in all cases, and our findings are therefore presented without the application of the false discovery rate so as not to obscure potentially meaningful associations between covariates and key outcomes across models. Regression analyses were used to examine the number of weeks to receive assistance, number of nights in housing following receipt of initial assistance, number of moves, number of nights homeless, and monthly income. Binary logistic regression was used to examine returns to homelessness, any access to one's own housing, employment status, parent-child intactness (i.e., all children living with the family), chronic absenteeism and school stability. Multinomial logistic regression was used to examine factors that related to the type of initial assistance families received in Cohort 2. Survival analysis was used to examine factors that predict time to accessing housing.

Section 2. Understanding the Family Homelessness Systems in a Rapidly Changing Economic Context

At the beginning of the Family Homelessness Initiative, when Cohort 1 families were served, the homeless service systems in all three counties largely operated as uncoordinated continuums of shelter and transitional housing. Providers embraced this model, believing it allowed families an opportunity to become "housing ready" before moving into market rate permanent housing. Limited homelessness prevention services were available, services were not coordinated across homeless providers, and no systematic protocols existed to guide case management and other services. Few connections existed between homeless and mainstream service providers. Accessing employment as well as housing generally were not priorities for providers until a family was ready to exit transitional housing.

The FHI, guided by a Theory of Action, spurred reforms in five pillars of practice, beginning in 2010 in one county but getting more firmly on the ground across the counties in 2012. By 2015/2016, when Cohort 2 families entered the system, each of the counties had implemented reforms that led to increased coordination of homeless services and housing assistance across providers, as well as a greater focus on Housing First through interventions that prioritized quicker access to housing than transitional housing, which emphasized service-rich stays in which families might become more "housing ready." Coordinated entry systems were put into place; diversion assistance was being offered as the first intervention with families system-wide in King and Pierce Counties; rapid re-housing was expanding in use, and transitional housing stock was being reduced or converted; cross-training efforts on services and progressive engagement were underway, and efforts to link employment with housing were being tested.

Since 2015/2016, the counties have continued to refine their coordinated entry systems, with all moving to a process of dynamic prioritization in which the most vulnerable families are prioritized for assistance first (rather than prioritizing families on a first-come first-serve basis). Diversion services have become an integral component of King and Pierce homeless service delivery systems (spreading to systems for adults and youth), and rapid re-housing has become the major housing intervention. Shelter continues to be an important element of the system, especially as the population experiencing homelessness has grown, but transitional housing has

> *been largely realigned to other types of permanent housing or reserved for specific populations.*
>
> *During the same timeframe in which the counties were reforming their systems, especially following 2014, they experienced unprecedented economic change due to growth in Amazon and other industries. All three counties experienced tightening of rental vacancies, decreases in the unemployment rate, and increases in the cost of housing. These changes challenged the reforms they were making, especially efforts to move families with limited resources quickly out of homelessness and into market rate housing.*

The evaluation was designed to track the implementation of the Initiative closely as it unfolded over the decade and to measure changes to the homeless systems that, in turn, were expected to impact the families served. The evaluation also incorporated attention to contextual change and how they affected the implementation of the Initiative and its outcomes, particularly the economic upturns and their effects on both employment and the tightening of the housing market. We are finalizing a separate report on the evolution of the systems reforms in each of the three counties within this changing environment (Rog et al., forthcoming in 2021). In this section, to provide context for the Family Impact Study findings, we provide a summary of the nature of the "systems" prior to reform, the implementation of the Initiative and the changes each county made to the housing and services available to families, and the role of contextual changes in impacting the implementation and effectiveness of these efforts.

The Status of the "Systems" at Baseline

At the beginning of the Initiative, the nature of the homeless service systems was very similar across the three counties. All three counties operated not as systems, but rather as uncoordinated continuums of shelter and transitional housing (see Exhibit 2-1). Families in all three counties predominantly entered services through emergency shelter, with most moving to transitional housing for a typical period of 12 months or more, with the goal of exiting to permanent housing with a long-term subsidy.

In King and Pierce Counties, families accessed shelter by calling providers directly. Families frequently made many phone calls in order to find an opening. Additionally, each shelter maintained its own eligibility criteria and conducted its own assessment with families to determine whether they met the criteria. Some providers maintained waitlists, but families often had to check in regularly to see if a slot had become

available. Families who were best able to advocate for themselves and get on multiple lists were perceived to be the most likely to receive assistance.

Snohomish County operated Coordinated Case Management (CCM), a centralized waitlist for emergency and transitional housing programs. Families in need of assistance would call a central telephone line, have a brief assessment over the phone, and be placed on a waitlist for assistance. County staff often referred to CCM as the "waitlist to nowhere" as there were few mechanisms to move families off the list. Families also could circumvent the list and call individual providers to try to obtain assistance on their own.

Exhibit 2-1. Status of "Systems" at Baseline (2011): Uncoordinated Continuums

Access to Homelessness Assistance	Access to Homelessness Prevention	Access to Housing	Access to Services	Access to Economic Opportunities
Access to assistance in King and Pierce Counties was through individual providers with no formal coordination mechanisms Snohomish County had a single point of entry but largely functioned as a waitlist	Typically one-time assistance or limited No coordination with homeless services Not geared to families with very precarious housing situations	Families moved through a continuum of shelter to transitional housing and then to housing if available Providers focused on preparing families to be "housing ready"; orientation was not Housing First	Providers generally provided same services to all served Limited connection between homeless and mainstream services	No formal relationships between shelter and education/ employment providers; some employment services provided by shelter/ transitional housing providers

The few homelessness prevention services that were available in all three counties typically offered one-time assistance, were not coordinated with homeless services, and were aimed at families who needed very limited support to be able to maintain their housing rather than families who needed multiple months of assistance. One notable exception was the Landlord Liaison Project in King County, operated by the YWCA, which provided services to reduce barriers to accessing housing, provided funds for eviction prevention, and built relationships with private landlords to encourage renting to families exiting homelessness.

In all three counties, families typically accessed permanent housing after spending up to 90 days in emergency shelter and 12-18 months in transitional housing. Providers embraced this model, believing it allowed families an opportunity to become "housing ready" before moving into market rate housing; that is, they believed families needed the time and supportive services provided by transitional housing to address barriers to housing stability, such as mental health and substance abuse problems prior to moving into permanent housing. As part of the Sound Families Initiative, local housing authorities provided families exiting transitional housing programs with a scattered-site voucher. Access to other affordable housing in the counties was limited.

The counties lacked coordinated systems of services for homeless families. Shelter and housing providers each offered a range of services to the families they served without a common protocol or definition of case management, and training of front-line staff largely occurred within individual organizations. Providers made referrals to mainstream service agencies, but the connections were informal, and resources were provided on a case-by-case basis. Families and providers both also reported difficulty in accessing some key services, such as mental health services.

Various homeless service providers offered employment assistance and/or educational programs, such as assistance with creating a resume and GED classes or English as a Second Language (ESL) classes; however, providers were not systematically connected to mainstream employment and education providers. Additionally, rather than helping families find employment from the time they entered shelter, most providers did not focus on access to employment until a family was ready to exit transitional housing.

Systems Reform in the Three Counties

The FHI Theory of Action posits that a system implementing five pillars of practice, informed by research and the best thinking in the field, can effectively reduce family homelessness, especially if it is bolstered by strong organizations, data-driven decision-making, and advocacy for sufficient funding and support. These five pillars include efforts to:

- prevent families from entering the homeless system when possible;
- coordinate housing and services to help those experiencing homelessness rapidly access housing assistance and exit into permanent housing;
- provide rapid re-housing assistance for those who need it;
- provide services tailored to families' needs; and

- connect families to economic opportunities that support housing access and stability.

Each county began the Initiative at different times and with a different approach to the implementation of the pillars:

- Pierce County launched its centralized intake system, Access Point for Housing (AP4H), for all populations in January 2011. Initially prevention services also were available through AP4H until demand overwhelmed the system, leading the county to discontinue that effort.

- In July 2011, Snohomish County began a two-year "systems" pilot for 75 families, testing all five pillars at the same time before rolling them out county-wide.

- King County implemented coordinated entry for families in 2012, followed by pilot projects for rapid re-housing and diversion, a strategy to use creative problem-solving and limited financial assistance to identify alternatives to families entering shelter or receiving a referral to a housing program.

By 2015/2016, when Cohort 2 families entered the system, each of the counties had implemented reforms that led to coordination of homelessness assistance across providers as well as a Housing First orientation. This orientation de-emphasized the shelter-transitional housing continuum and focused on improving and accelerating families' access to housing through the use of interventions such as diversion and rapid re-housing, as well as a focus on training case managers to work with families to exit shelter as quickly as possible (Rog et al., 2021). In all three counties, the pillars were adapted and refined over time.

Exhibit 2-2 provides an overview of the status of the systems by 2015/2016, the time of recruitment for Cohort 2. The implementation of each pillar is described below.

> **Housing First**
> An approach in which individuals or families move into permanent housing directly from homelessness as quickly as possible rather than spending a period of time in temporary, service-rich interventions, such as transitional housing, before entering housing.

Access to Homelessness Assistance: By 2015/2016 all three counties were implementing or moving to coordinated entry systems that included assessments of families' needs, determination of eligibility, and assignment to different types of assistance. To target the limited resources to the families who needed them most, all three counties aimed to restrict eligibility for housing assistance to families experiencing

literal homelessness. In both King and Pierce Counties, families were to enter through a single provider, receive an assessment, and be placed on a placement roster for assistance. (During our Cohort 2 recruitment period, Pierce County moved from a placement roster to a 90-day priority pool in which the only families who remained in the pool were those the county had the capacity to serve). Snohomish County implemented a "no wrong door" approach in which families were assigned to Housing and Prevention Navigators who worked with them to identify strategies to resolve their homelessness and connected them to needed services and housing.

Exhibit 2-2. Status of Systems Reform, 2015-2016: Coordinating Access to Shelter/Housing

Access to Homelessness Assistance	Access to Homelessness Prevention	Access to Housing	Access to Services	Access to Economic Opportunities
Coordinated entry implemented in all three counties and undergoing refinements to address long waitlist and bottlenecks Movement from broad definition of homelessness to literally homeless	Pierce and King Counties have limited prevention, but focus on diverting families from entering "the system" Snohomish County navigators make links to prevention services, access flexible funds to address issues that may lead to homelessness	Emphasized Housing First through rapid re-housing Transitional housing decreased; some repurposed as permanent supportive housing Shelter still a key element (operating as separate track outside coordinated entry)	Exploring progressive engagement Developing a case management training curriculum Snohomish County building capacity through SIGs	Investing in numerous programs to expand access to employment services, but none yet emerge as systemic Among most promising efforts: -- coupling employment with rapid re-housing -- partnerships with community colleges to train families in specific high need job sectors

Access to Homelessness Prevention: By 2015/2016, prevention efforts had been tested and implemented in Pierce and Snohomish Counties. Prevention services in Pierce County, initially linked to centralized intake, were discontinued when the demand for assistance overwhelmed supply and, by 2015, were replaced with diversion assistance,

which was being pilot tested as a strategy to divert families seeking homelessness assistance from entering the homelessness system (National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), 2011) or to facilitate their exiting shelter quickly. Similarly, beginning in 2013, King County began exploring ways to integrate diversion into the coordinated entry process. The aim was to provide a flexible, tailored, time-limited intervention to families who were not vulnerable enough to receive referrals to the limited housing assistance available but for whom creative problem solving and/or some discrete financial and other resources may help obtain a permanent housing situation either on their own or with other family and friends. By the end of 2016, diversion assistance in both King and Pierce Counties was fully implemented across each county, linked to its coordinated entry systems, and offered to all families requesting assistance before other types of assistance. The key distinction between diversion and prevention is that prevention targets people at risk of homelessness, whereas diversion targets people who are already seeking homelessness assistance (NAEH, 2011). In Snohomish County, families at imminent risk of homelessness were assigned to prevention navigators, who would refer families to prevention services, including dispute resolution and legal services, and help them access flexible funds to address issues that may lead to homelessness. By 2015, this assistance was fully implemented across the county.

> **Diversion**
>
> An approach that seeks to divert families seeking homelessness assistance from entering the homelessness system or to facilitate their exiting shelter quickly. The diversion process begins with a family's first contact with the homeless response system, when a trained staff member initiates an exploratory conversation to brainstorm solutions to quickly resolving homelessness. When needed, diversion may include a combination of limited or one-time financial and/or case management assistance.

Access to Housing: At the time of the Cohort 2 recruitment, all three counties had adopted a Housing First orientation, encouraging their providers to dismantle their continuums (maintaining shelter but limiting transitional housing) and emphasize housing people in market rate housing or other housing in the community as soon as possible. The counties worked to build the capacity of rapid re-housing programs, initially through Initiative resources, and to convert their transitional housing stock to permanent housing (with and without supportive services). Although transitional housing conversion was implemented more quickly in Pierce and Snohomish Counties than King County, all three counties made some progress in decreasing their stock of transitional housing and increasing the availability of permanent housing through both

rapid re-housing assistance and permanent housing (as evidenced in their Housing Inventory Counts, an annual inventory of housing units available) (Rog et al., 2018).

Access to Services: During the period of recruitment for Cohort 2, all three counties were developing and implementing trainings for case managers throughout their systems, and learning circles and work groups to bring staff together across agencies to address how they serve families. However, at this point none of these efforts had approached system-wide implementation. Both King and Pierce Counties were promoting a progressive engagement approach but met with some resistance from providers who wanted to fulfill the anti-poverty mission of their organizations to help families in all aspects of their lives, not just the immediate housing crisis. Snohomish County was expanding access to mental health and other services for families through investments to build the capacity of providers to serve families experiencing homelessness and the other two counties were establishing linkages through Initiative funding with other providers, such as early childhood education programs and health systems.

Access to Economic Opportunities: As with services, all three counties were testing various interventions to improve economic opportunities for families. In particular, all three counties were exploring the use of employment navigation to help families connect to mainstream employment and education agencies and secure jobs and/or additional education. For example, King County was implementing a pilot project to provide employment navigation to families receiving rapid re-housing, Pierce County was using Initiative funding to increase access to employment services for McKinney-Vento-eligible families in high-poverty school districts, and Snohomish County was investing in providing employment services to various groups of families ,including those receiving rapid re-housing, families receiving TANF, and those on waitlists for permanent housing subsidies. However, at the time of the recruitment of the second cohort, none of these efforts were system-wide. Therefore, not all families coming through coordinated entry in Cohort 2 would necessarily have been offered educational and/or employment opportunities in a systematic way.

Systems Reform since 2015/2016

Since 2015/2016, the counties continued to adapt the implementation of the five pillars of practice, with a particular focus on refining their coordinated entry systems. Management of coordinated entry moved from individual providers to the county in all three counties. Both King and Pierce Counties each moved from a system with a single point of entry to one with many front doors. Additionally, all three counties moved to a

process of dynamic prioritization, in which the most vulnerable families are prioritized for assistance first (rather than a first-come first-serve basis). Diversion (or rapid resolution) services have become an integral component of each of the systems to address their limited capacity to provide deeper housing assistance to everyone in need.

As noted, a separate report is under development that will provide an in-depth understanding of the evolution of the systems reforms in each of the three counties (Rog et al., forthcoming in 2021).

Studying the Effects of Systems Change in a Rapidly Changing Economic Context

Because the Family Impact Study includes two cohorts separated by five years, it needs to consider any changes in context between these two time periods that could affect the implementation of the Initiative as well as confound the effects of the systems reform on families.

Between 2009 and 2019, and especially after 2014, the three demonstration counties experienced unprecedented economic change due to growth in Amazon and other industries. Exhibit 2-3 displays graphs of key contextual changes in all three counties, including the tightening of market-rate rental vacancies, the decrease in the unemployment rate, and the increase in fair market rent. These changes likely impacted the stock of affordable housing available, with fewer vacancies available in affordable units; the willingness of landlords to rent to families with subsidies given their greater ability to increase rents; and the increased availability of jobs (although this was seen most for jobs in technology and related industries and was less the case for jobs requiring less education). In addition, it is possible that these context changes affect who becomes homeless, including, for example, the degree to which families with employment and income become homeless, and how long families remain homeless (Maritz & Wagle, 2020).

In fact, during this time of unprecedented economic change, the size of the population of families experiencing homelessness was expanding. As Exhibit 2-4 shows, the number of families requesting homelessness assistance each year more than doubled from 3,150 in 2012 to 7,322 in 2018. The number of families accessing housing also increased during this time period, likely in part due to the reform efforts, but did not keep up with the rate of increase in demand. The increased demand for assistance likely made it more difficult for families to access shelter, as suggested by the increase in unsheltered homelessness described in Section 5.

In sum, the tightening housing market, in particular, likely made it more difficult for families with limited incomes, even those with subsidies, to find and keep housing. The changes, in turn, increased the demand for homeless services, stretching the capacity of the existing shelters. These economic changes, therefore, likely challenged the Initiative's ability to achieve its goals, especially in reducing the time families remained in shelter and experienced homelessness.

Exhibit 2-3. Contextual Factors, 2009-2019, by County

King County

Pierce County

Snohomish County

Rental Vacancy Rate — Unemployment rate — Fair market housing cost (2 bed)

---Indicates baseline data collection period for Cohort 1 and Cohort 2.
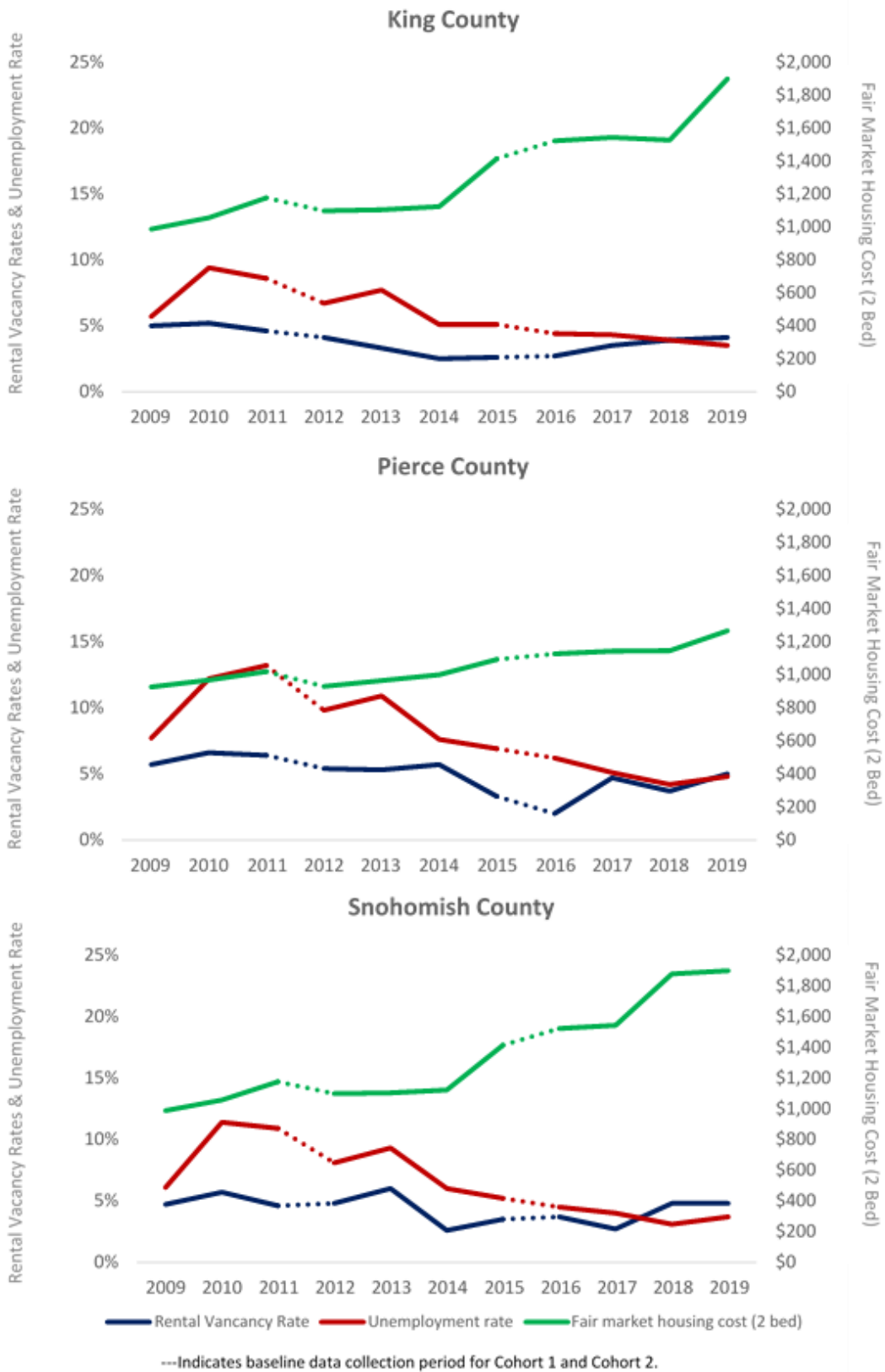
Exhibit 2-4. The Number of Families Experiencing Homelessness in the Initiative Counties, 2012-2018
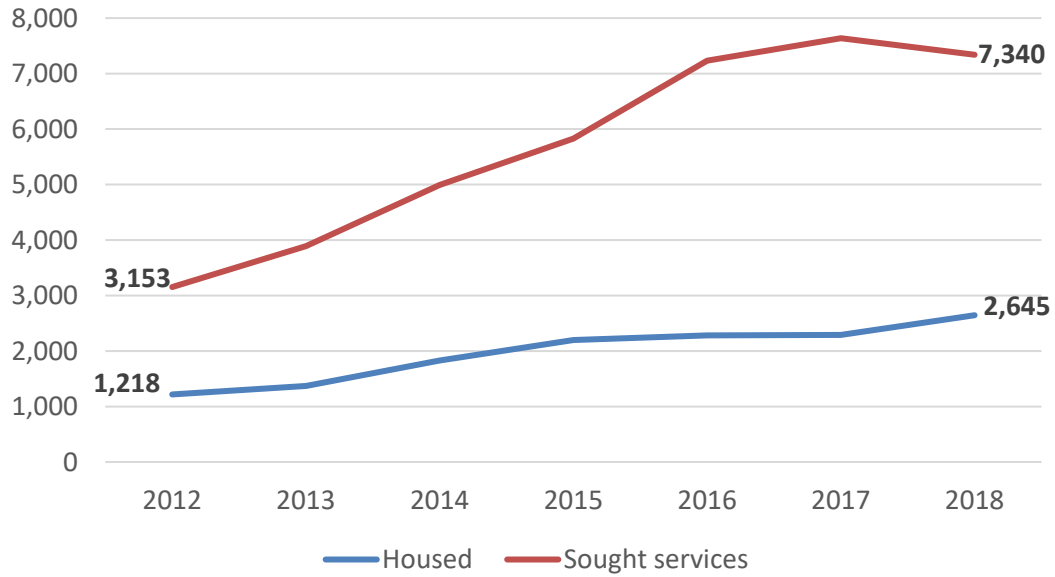
Source: HMIS data from King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties analyzed by Building Changes.

Section 3. The Family Impact Study: Characteristics of Families Served in the Two Cohorts Before and After Systems Reform

Heads of household (HOHs) of families who receive homelessness assistance in Cohort 2 after reform are similar on most demographic and background characteristics to Cohort 1 HOHs of families served prior to systems reform. However, Cohort 2 HOHs are more likely to be older, less likely to be Hispanic, and more likely to have lived in the county for at least five years.

The families in the two cohorts differ most significantly in their recent homeless experiences as well as in their education levels, rates of employment, and amount of monthly income. Cohort 2 HOHs, compared to Cohort 1 HOHs, are more likely to have experienced recent homelessness in the six months prior to receiving homelessness assistance, consistent with a tightening of eligibility for assistance in all three counties to literal homelessness. They are also more likely than Cohort 1 HOHs to have higher levels of education, be employed at entry, and have higher incomes, with significantly more income coming from SSI/SSDI, and to have medical insurance – all changes that are likely affected, in part, by changes in the overall local context and broader secular trends.

There are not significant differences between target children in the two cohorts in demographics, schooling, and health.

For each cohort of families, we collected detailed information at baseline on families' heads of households' (HOHs') background and demographic characteristics, strengths and vulnerabilities, and homelessness and housing history and, for many of these characteristics, also collected them at each follow-up interview. Data were also collected on several family-level characteristics (e.g., family composition) and on the characteristics of the target child at baseline and over time. An earlier report (Rog et al., 2018) provided a detailed description of the baseline data on families' background and demographics, strengths and vulnerabilities, and homelessness and housing history. In particular, key differences among the counties and between the two cohorts were noted, informing our understanding of how changes in both eligibility and economic and housing context may have impacted changes in the families.

In this section, we provide a summary of these baseline characteristics, especially those factors that differ between the two cohorts and those factors that emerge in our outcome findings as important predictors of housing and other key changes for families. In addition, where relevant, we provide data on how these findings change or stay constant over the 18-month follow-up period. Appendix E presents information for each county individually.

Demographics and Family Composition

The HOHs in both cohorts were similar on nearly all demographic characteristics (see Exhibit 3-1). The only differences are that Cohort 2 families compared to Cohort 1 families were, on average, significantly older, less likely to be Hispanic, and more likely to have lived in their current county of residence for at least five years. Similar to families in prior studies (e.g., Rog & Buckner, 2007; Gubits et al., 2016), most families in both cohorts were led by single parents who were female, and, on average, in their mid-30s and who identified with a range of racial backgrounds, with a disproportionate representation of Black/African American or other non-White families.[4] The vast majority of families were born in the United States, and over 80 percent of each cohort lived in the state of Washington for five years or more.[5] Seventy percent of those in Cohort 2, in fact, lived in the county they currently resided in for five years or more. A small percentage of the HOHs had served in the Armed Forces.

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[4] Section VIII provides an analysis of the disproportionality of race among poor and homeless populations in the three counties for Cohort 2.

[5] Correction: the six-month report previously reported that those in Cohort 2 were more likely to live in Washington State for the past five years. This was a calculation error. In fact, 81% of those in Cohort 1 and 83% of those in Cohort 2 had lived in Washington State for the past five years, a non-significant difference.

Exhibit 3-1. Demographic Characteristics of the HOHs of Families

	Families served before reform N=467		Families served after reform N=504
Female	89%		92%
Age	31.9 years		34.2 years***
Hispanic	17%		11%*
White	43%		43%
Black/African American	27%		26%
Asian	2%		1%
American Indian	3%		4%
Pacific Islander	3%		3%
Other	6%		4%
Multi-racial	16%		19%
Born in US	87%		91%
Live in WA 5+ years	81%		83%
Live in county 5+ years	56%		70%***
Served in Armed forces	3%		3%
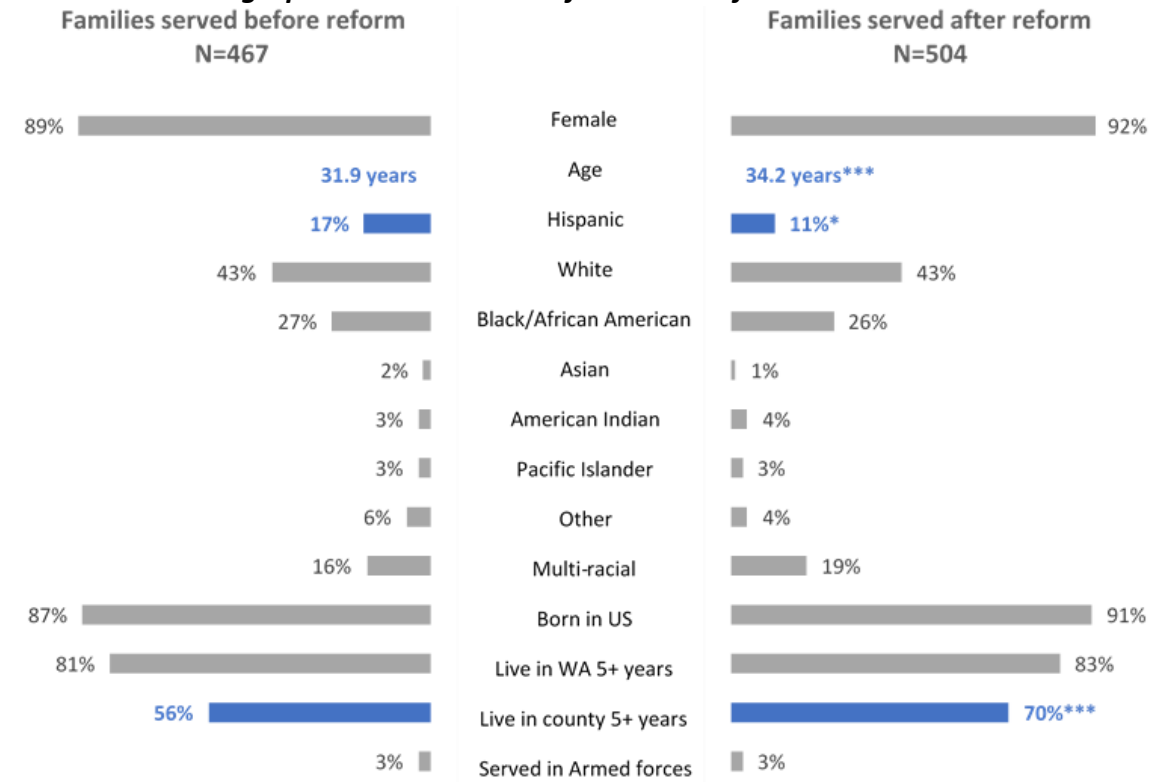
*p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001.* Blue lines indicate significant differences.

The composition of the families also was comparable between the two cohorts (see Exhibit 3-2). Families, on average, had fewer than two children under 19 years of age. At baseline, approximately 40 percent of each cohort had a child under two years of age and 8 to 10 percent were pregnant. Approximately a quarter of the families had a spouse or partner, and a quarter had a child living away from the family, most often voluntarily with another family member or friend. In Section 7, we examine changes in parent-child intactness (either through reunifications or new separations) and if these changes differed between the two cohorts.

Exhibit 3-2. Composition of Families

	Families served before reform N=467		Families served after reform N=504
# children under 19	1.8		1.8
Spouse/partner	25%		27%
Children under 2	43%		37%
Currently pregnant	10%		8%
Child away	23%		25%
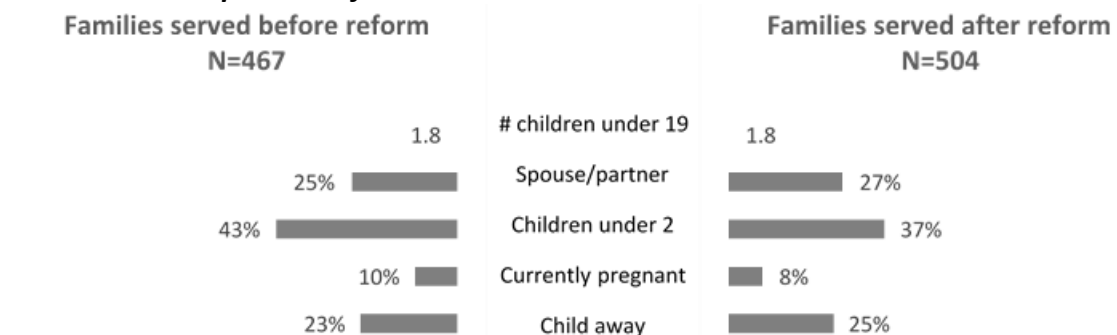
*p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001.* Blue lines indicate significant differences.

Human Capital, Resources, and Debt

Baseline: The two cohorts differed significantly on human capital and resource measures at baseline (see Exhibit 3-3). Cohort 2 families, compared to Cohort 1 families, were significantly more likely to have pursued education beyond the high school degree, whereas Cohort 1 families were more likely to have less than a high school degree. In addition, nearly all HOHs in each cohort had been employed at some point in the past, but a significantly larger percentage of Cohort 2 families than Cohort 1 families were employed at the time they received their initial assistance. In fact, the percentage of Cohort 2 families entering with a job (34%) was nearly double the percentage of Cohort 1 families (19%).

Exhibit 3-3. Strengths and Vulnerabilities of HOHs of Families

Families served before reform N=467		Families served after reform N=504
29%	<HS degree	20% **
33%	HS degree/GED	32%
39%	Some college	49%**
96%	Ever employed	98%
19%	Employed at entry	34% ***
$478	Median monthly income	$817***
10%	Family receives SSI/SSDI	19%***
$3,471	Median total debt	$6,493***
82%	Has medical insurance	96%***
10%	Poor health functioning	11%
47%	Any mental health indicator	55%**
15%	Hospitalized for MH	17%
22%	Substance abuse screen	20%
21%	Hospitalized for SA	19%
9%	Recent DV	8%
60%	History of DV	60%
17%	Convicted of a felony	18%
7%	On probation or parole	5%
9%	Open CPS plan	9%

SA= Substance abuse DV=Domestic violence
* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001. Blue lines indicate significant differences.

A closer look at the nature of the employment, wages, and hours among HOHs employed in both cohorts at the time they began to receive homelessness assistance

indicates that the number of hours and hourly wages were significantly greater for HOHs who worked in Cohort 2 compared to employed HOHs in Cohort 1, contributing to their higher incomes (see Exhibit 3-4).

Exhibit 3-4. Employment Characteristics for HOHs' Jobs at Receipt of Initial Assistance

	Cohort 1 (N=91)	Cohort 2 (N=172)
Hours per week (N=89, 169)	27	32**
Median hourly wage (N=86, 160)	$9.60	$11.30***
Working multiple jobs (N=91, 172)	1%	3%
Job offers benefits (N=90, 168)	14%	43%***
Job type (N=88, 169)		
Permanent	66%	74%
Temporary	26%	17%
Seasonal/Day labor	8%	9%
Job offers opportunity for advancement (N=61, 132)	54%	67%

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001

Additionally, HOHs in Cohort 2 were more likely to work in jobs that offered benefits, most commonly access to health insurance. A larger proportion of families in Cohort 2 were working 30 or more hours per week; however, the difference in hours does not fully explain the increase in access to benefits. Rather, it could be that employers were more likely to offer benefits in 2015/2016 than in 2012 or that some families, especially those with higher levels of education, had slightly better jobs.

With respect to resources at baseline, Cohort 2 families compared to Cohort 1 families had significantly more monthly income,[6] were more likely to receive SSI/SSDI, and were more likely to have medical insurance. This is consistent with national trends for more people to have medical insurance, especially after 2014, following the passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010.

As noted in Section 1, our secular trend analysis found that these changes in employment and wages between the two cohort time periods were evident for the homeless families served in six non-demonstration counties as well as the broader homeless family populations in the three demonstration counties; these shifts, therefore, likely reflect the impact of economic changes on the working status of homeless families. It is also conceivable that some of the differences, such as in

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[6] Descriptive data present actual median income for each cohort. Regression models include inflation adjusted measures.

education, income, and employment are due to more families with resources experiencing housing instability within the tighter housing markets of Cohort 2. Differences in income are also likely due, in part, to slight overall increases in wages and cost of living.

The vast majority of families in both cohorts, however, had debt (86% in Cohort 1 and 88% in Cohort 2) that was, on average, ten times their monthly salary. Cohort 2 families reported more median debt than Cohort 1 families ($6,493 vs. $3,471, respectively). In fact, 23 percent of families in Cohort 2 had $20,000 or more in debt at baseline. The most common sources for both cohorts include debt for cable or telephone, overdue utilities, medical debt, and student loans. The highest median amounts of debt owed, among those with the debt, were for student loans, medical expenses, car loans, and past due child support.

Change over time: Families in both cohorts experienced some improvements in resources over time. Families in both cohorts increased their monthly income from baseline to 18 months, from a median of $478 to $742 in Cohort 1 and from a median of $900 to $1,150 in Cohort 2. (Analyses in Section 4 examine the role of systems reform on this increase, controlling for differences due to individual family characteristics). In addition, in both cohorts, the proportion of families who received SSI/SSDI increased over time, though the increase is statistically significant only in Cohort 1.

The median amount of debt increased over time for families in Cohort 1 (from $3,471 at baseline to $5,500 at 18 months) and decreased somewhat for families in Cohort 2 (from $6,493 at baseline to $5,000 at 18 months), such that the significant difference between the cohorts at baseline is no longer significant at 18 months.

Additionally, receipt of medical insurance decreased over time from 82 percent to 75 percent for Cohort 1 families, while remaining relatively stable for families in Cohort 2 (96% at both baseline and 18 months). Families in Cohort 1 were more likely to receive an additional degree or vocational certificate over the 18-month follow-up period than were families in Cohort 2 (19% vs. 9%), likely due to their lower rates of education at baseline.

Vulnerabilities

Baseline: The two cohorts were comparable on most vulnerability indicators, except mental health and debt (see Exhibit 3-3). Similar to studies in the past (e.g., Rog & Buckner, 2007), the majority (60%) of the families in both cohorts reported a history of

domestic violence and a little less than 10 percent of the families reported recent experiences with violence at baseline.

With respect to mental health, Cohort 2 HOHs compared to Cohort 1 HOHs were more likely to report one or more mental health indicators (55% to 47%), including generalized anxiety disorder, depression, or low mental health functioning. Approximately one-fifth of the HOHs in each cohort screened for substance abuse concerns and a similar percentage reported having a past hospitalization for a substance abuse problem. Approximately 10 percent of each cohort were screened to have poor health functioning at baseline. Fifty percent of HOHs in Cohort 2 reported having a chronic health problem, with common conditions including fibromyalgia; chronic back, neck, shoulder, and knee pain; and arthritis.

A little less than a fifth of the HOHs in each cohort had been convicted of a felony, and less than 10 percent were currently on probation or parole at baseline. Less than 10 percent had an open Child Protective Service (CPS) plan at baseline and approximately three percent of the families in each cohort have a child in foster care.

Change over time:[7] The percentages of families with reports of domestic violence, and families with an open CPS plan did not change significantly over the 18-month period for either cohort, but other areas of vulnerability did change, though in inconsistent ways. Families in each cohort had decreases in their health functioning, but improvements in mental health, substance, abuse, and criminal justice involvement.

By 18 months, more families in both cohorts were considered to have poor health functioning, increasing from 10 percent at baseline to as much as 15 percent for both cohorts.

Over time, significantly fewer families in both cohorts were considered to have mental health or substance abuse concerns. Cohort 1 HOHs reporting one or more mental health indicators decreased from 47 percent at baseline to 36 percent at 18 months; Cohort 2 HOHs showed a similar pattern, decreasing from 55 percent at baseline to 50 percent at 18 months. Substance abuse concerns similarly decreased, from baseline levels of 22 percent for Cohort 1 and 20 percent for Cohort 2 to nine percent in each cohort at 18 months.

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[7] Significance testing for change over time was conducted on those families included in the outcomes analysis (with 517 or more days of housing data)

Finally, fewer HOHs were involved in the criminal justice system over time. The percentage of HOHs on probation or parole in both cohorts decreased significantly from baseline to 12 months (from 5% to 3% in Cohort 2 and 7% to 3% in Cohort 1) and remained low at 18 months (4% in both Cohorts).

Homeless and Housing History

Families in Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 reported similar histories of homelessness. Approximately 45 percent of the HOHs in each cohort reported ever experiencing homelessness prior to the current episode, with 21-25 percent reported experiencing it in the last two years, and less than one-fifth reported first experiencing homelessness as a child (see Exhibit 3-5). Families in Cohort 1 and 2 likewise reported similar histories of eviction and subsidy, with 13-14 percent experiencing eviction from their own housing in the year prior to entry and 18-20 percent reporting a subsidy.[8]

Families in the two cohorts did differ significantly, however, on several measures of their recent housing and homelessness status. More than twice the number of HOHs in Cohort 2 reported experiencing homelessness in the six months prior to receiving their initial assistance than HOHs in Cohort 1 (64% vs. 29%). Similarly, half of Cohort 2 HOHs reported being homeless the night before receiving assistance, over three times the rate reported by Cohort 1 HOHs.

With respect to other housing situations, fewer Cohort 2 HOHs than Cohort 1 HOHs reported being doubled up (61% vs. 74%) and in their own place (41% vs. 49%) during the six-month period prior to receiving homelessness assistance.

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[8] Current receipt of subsidy was first assessed at the 6-month interview wave. For families who did not complete a 6-month interview wave, subsidy was imputed according to the proportion of cases reporting a subsidy in the complete 6-month sample.

Exhibit 3-5. Housing and Homeless History of Families[9]

Families served before reform
N=467

Families served after reform
N=504

	Before reform	After reform
Homeless ever	44%	47%
Homeless as a child	17%	14%
Homeless past 2 years	21%	25%
On lease last 6 months	42%	44%
Homeless last 6 months	29%	64%***
Homeless night before entry	14%	50%***
Doubled up last 6 months	74%	61%***
Own place last 6 months	49%	41%*
Prior eviction	14%	13%
Subsidy	20%	18%
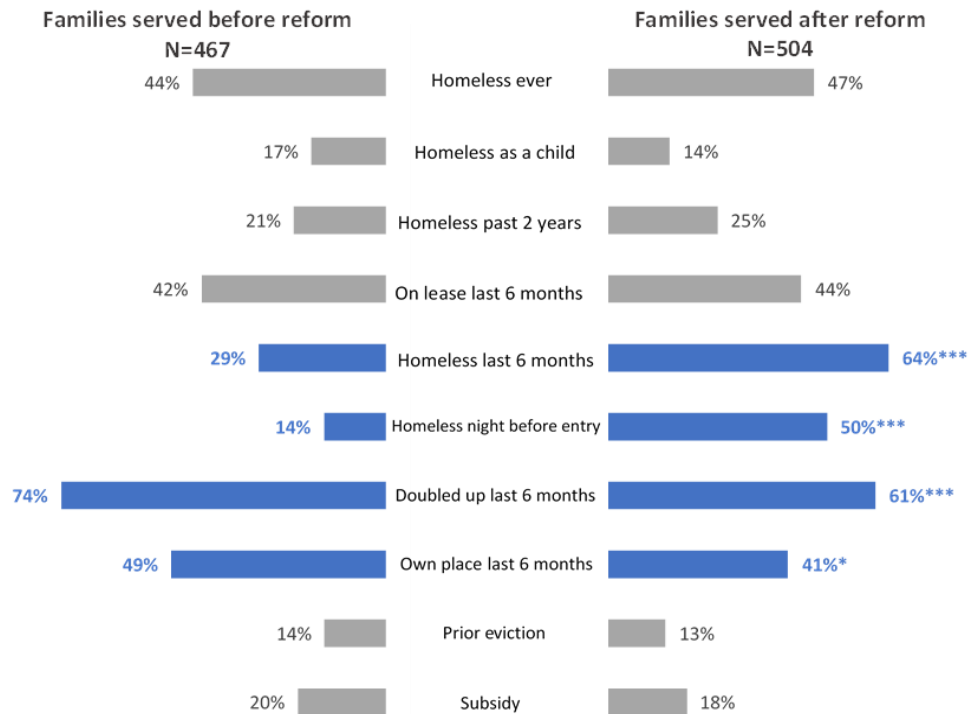
* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001. Blue lines indicate significant differences.

Target Child Characteristics, Schooling, and Health

As previously indicated, we collected more detailed information about one child in the family (target child), selected at random from among children between 2 and 18 years of age who were living with the respondent at the time of selection, with preference to a school-aged child if one was present in the household. Exhibit 3-6 provides the percentages of families with selected school-aged children and those with selected children under six years of age. Outcome analyses are limited to families who identified a school-aged target children in baseline and follow-up waves; 47 percent of the full sample for the outcome analysis in Cohort 1 and 57 percent of the full sample for the outcomes analysis in Cohort 2. These rates are lower than the rates of HOHs for the two cohorts included in outcome analyses because, for some families, target children identified at baseline aged out by 18 months or moved out of the household, and in some, families erroneously answered questions about a different child.

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[9]In Cohort 2, a larger proportion of families reported ever having been on a lease in the 6 months prior to entry than reported having been in their own housing during this timeframe. This occurred in circumstances where they were in transitional housing (and likely signed a housing agreement), doubled up (when the person they were staying with was on a lease) or in a motel and interpreting the requirement to pay as a lease.

Exhibit 3-6. Percentages of Families with a School-Aged or Younger Target Child[+]

	Baseline		6 months		12 months		18 months	
	C1 N=467	C2 N=504	C1 N=392	C2 N=369	C1 N=389	C2 N=365	C1 N=395	C2 N=417
School-aged target child	49%	55%	53%	62%	54%	64%	56%	67%
Younger target child	25%	22%	26%	25%	29%	24%	31%	24%
No target child	25%	22%	21%	13%	17%	11%	13%	9%

[+]Percentages calculated to reflect presence of a target child eligible for inclusion in outcome analysis.

Baseline*:* Exhibit 3-7 presents information on demographic characteristics, schooling, and health for the school-aged children and the younger children in both cohorts. Among school-aged target children, about half were female, with an average age of just under 11 years. Just over half were in elementary school, with the remaining half in middle school and high school. A quarter to a third of the school-aged children changed schools when their families began receiving homelessness assistance, despite McKinney Vento provisions allowing students to stay in their schools of residence. It is likely that families choose to have their children change schools, particularly if their new location was a distance from their prior residence.

The majority of children were reported by the HOHs to be in very good or excellent health; however, 50 percent reportedly had at least one special need. Special needs included, including either a learning disability; a speech, hearing, or vision concern; a physical illness, disability, or concern; a developmental concern; and/or a mental health condition.

Cohort 2 school-aged children were comparable to Cohort 1 school-aged children on all these measures. High rates of children in both cohorts were reported to be chronically absent (i.e., having missed six or more days of school in the last three months) (30% in Cohort 1 and 22% in Cohort 2) at baseline. These numbers, though high, are surprisingly in line with the percentages of school-aged children chronically absent in the Puget Sound area, which are higher than the national estimate of 13 percent for the 2013-2014 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). During this time period, the percentages of chronic absenteeism for school districts in the three counties range from 16.7 percent (Mukileto School District) to more than 30 percent (Auburn School District) (Jacob & Lovett, 2017; Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2017). Section 7

examines the relationship of systems changes to chronic absenteeism and school stability for school-aged children.

Exhibit 3-7. Characteristics of Target Children

Families Served Before Reform Cohort 1 (N=232)	**Older Children**	Families Served After Reform Cohort 2 (N=279)
51%	Female	48%
10.7 years	Age	10.9 years
57%	Elementary school	65%
24%	Middle school	24%
19%	High school	23%
25%	Changed schools	33%
30%	Chronic absenteeism	22%
74%	Excellent/very good health	76%
50%	Any special need	50%

Families Served Before Reform Cohort 1 (N=125)	**Younger Children**	Families Served After Reform Cohort 2 (N=119)
48%	Female	52%
3.2 years	Age	3.4 years
30%	Preschool/Pre-K	**45%***
28%	Changed schools	25%
21%	Early intervention assessment	**32%***
10%	Early intervention	19%
81%	Excellent/very good health	80%
27%	Any special need	32%

*p<0.05   **p<0.01   ***p<0.001.* Blue lines indicate significant differences.

Among the younger target children, the average age in both cohorts was just over 3 years old, and approximately half were female. Almost half of the children in Cohort 2 (45%) were enrolled in preschool, higher than in Cohort 1 (30%). About a quarter in both cohorts changed schools when their families received their initial assistance. Thirty-two percent of children in Cohort 2 families had received an early intervention assessment, a higher proportion than in Cohort 1 (21%), and 10-19 percent of children in the two cohorts were receiving those services. Most (80-81%) were reportedly in very good or

excellent health, but over a quarter in each cohort (27-32%) reportedly had at least one special need, including either a learning disability; a speech, hearing, or vision concern; a physical illness, disability, or concern; a developmental concern; and/or a mental health condition.

Changes over time: For both school-aged and younger target children, there were not significant changes in their health over the 18-month period for either cohort. For younger children, special needs remained constant over time for both cohorts. However, for older children, special needs remained constant over time in Cohort 1 but decreased from 50 percent at baseline to 41 percent at 18 months in Cohort 2.

Importance of Difference between the Cohort Samples

As noted earlier, the differences in characteristics and recent homeless and housing experiences between the families in the two cohorts are likely due, in part, to the introduction of coordinated entry as well as changes in the overall context. The use of new eligibility criteria and screening processes as part of the coordinated entry in each county was intended to limit assistance to families who were literally homeless upon seeking assistance.[10] Prior to the reform, families received homelessness assistance almost exclusively through shelter and were not systematically screened for literal homelessness (e.g., living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, in transitional housing, or exiting an institution where they temporarily resided). Families in Cohort 1 were predominately living in doubled up situations prior to receiving homelessness assistance, with 60 percent doubled up the night before entry.

It is interesting to note that although a majority of Cohort 2 HOHs experienced homelessness in the six months leading up to assistance, not *all* families reported experiencing homelessness in this timeframe (and thus were not seemingly in line with the eligibility criteria). Some families may have entered the system through "side doors," bypassing coordinated entry; others may have told assessors that they were homeless but were more accurate in detailing their history in our interviews. In addition, some families may have been unsheltered at the time of their coordinated entry assessment but found other housing arrangements between their assessment and receiving assistance.

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[10] All three counties now use vulnerability assessments and prioritization processes to provide homelessness assistance to families, but those processes were not yet in effect in these counties during our recruitment of Cohort 2.

Other differences between the two cohorts may be due to context differences, as well as other factors that are difficult to discern. Differences in employment and income are likely related, at least in part, to changes in the economic climate in all three counties and the state overall. In addition, the enforcement of TANF timelines limiting households to 60 months of lifetime assistance occurred in 2011; thus, this provision was implemented midway through our Cohort 1 recruitment but was fully in enforcement for Cohort 2. It is possible that these changes in TANF policy spurred more HOHs in Cohort 2 to be employed and to work more hours than might have occurred in a different context. Results from the analysis of secular trends confirming a decrease in TANF receipt and increase in employment over time in all counties corroborates this assumption. Analyses in Section 7 examine the relationship between systems reform and changes in employment and income over time.

Section 4. The Family Impact Study: Seeking and Receiving Assistance Before and After Systems Reform

Following the implementation of coordinated entry in each of the three counties, families seeking homelessness assistance after systems reform reportedly experienced many of the same challenges as families seeking assistance before reform. Although there was a decrease in the median number of calls a HOH made to find assistance and in the median number of organizations a family contacted before getting assistance, families waited either the same length of time (Pierce and Snohomish Counties) or a significantly longer period of time (King County) to receive assistance after contacting the homeless system.

The nature of assistance received, however, did change after systems reform. Families who received homelessness assistance in the three counties after systems reform no longer received shelter as a "one size fits all" solution. Families in Cohort 2 received one of several options as their initial assistance, including diversion/navigation, rapid re-housing, shelter, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing.

As discussed in Section 2, before systems reform, families seeking homelessness assistance in King and Pierce Counties had to contact shelters on their own to find an opening. Often, as the data below show, they needed to contact numerous shelters and be on waitlists before a unit was available. In Snohomish County, families requesting assistance were placed on a single county-wide waitlist, from which shelter and transitional housing providers could draw when they had openings. Families could also circumvent the list by calling providers directly.

After systems reform, coordinated entry was implemented, with the initial aim of streamlining the process for families, coordinating openings among providers, and ensuring that the process allowed for greater accessibility to housing and other homeless services for all families. As described in Section 2, coordinated entry underwent several revisions in each county, evolving to have greater focus on prioritization of families with higher needs and vulnerabilities. During the time period of our data collection, however, prioritization and the use of a vulnerability assessment instrument was not yet in place in any of the counties when Cohort 2 families were recruited. At that time, families were assessed and referred to housing and homelessness assistance for which they were eligible, largely based on a first come-first serve basis.

This section summarizes families' experiences in seeking and receiving initial assistance in the three counties before and after systems reform, as well as the nature of the assistance received. A more thorough description of these findings is provided in a report of families' outcomes six months after receiving assistance (Rog et al., 2018).

The Process of Seeking Homelessness Assistance

Formal Help Seeking - Descriptive analysis: Despite having a version of coordinated entry in place in all three counties, families in Cohort 2 continued to experience many of the challenges experienced by families in Cohort 1. They reported making many calls to find a place to stay, participating in many assessments, and going to multiple places seeking assistance. As Exhibit 4-1 indicates, the median number of calls a HOH made to get assistance dropped significantly between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 (from 40 to 30) as did the median number of organizations a HOH contacted while seeking assistance (from 6 to 5). In both cohorts, however, there was a considerable range in families' experiences.

Exhibit 4-1. Formal Help Seeking

	Cohort 1 (N=467)	Cohort 2 (N=504)
% Contacted homeless system first	72%	76%
% Ever on waitlist	62%	75%***
% Ever contacted 211	78%	85%**
# Calls seeking assistance		
Mean	98	73**
Median	40	30**
Range	0-500+	0-500+
# Organizations contacted		
Mean	11	9
Median	6	5***
Range	0-99	0-100
# Different assessments		
Mean	5	5
Median	2	3***
Range	0-99	0-99
Time to entry (weeks) among those who contacted the homeless system	(n=330)	(n=342)
Mean	25	38**
Median	10	14*
Range	0-500+	0-493

*p < 0.05   **p < 0.01   *** p< 0.001*

Cohort 2 HOHs reported completing more assessments than Cohort 1 HOHs (3 vs. 2, respectively). Assessments were defined as a set of questions about housing and services that a family may need. Prior to systems reform, Cohort 1 HOHs typically completed assessments specifically for different individual housing providers and potentially other providers. Following systems reform, Cohort 2 families likely completed an assessment as part of coordinated entry, but they may also have completed some assessments for one or more providers.

Number of Weeks to Receive Assessment - Multivariate Analysis:
Families in Cohort 2 waited longer than families in Cohort 1 between the time they first requested and then received assistance (a median of 14 weeks vs. a median of 10 weeks),[11] but when controlling for HOH demographic and background characteristics, the

> **Ordinary Least Squares Regression**
> Tests the effect of cohort on differences in continuous or interval measures (such as number of weeks to receive assistance), controlling for the potential influence of other key variables included in the model. The regression coefficient indicates the estimated change in the dependent variable for each one-unit change in a covariate, holding all other covariates constant.

difference in the time to entry between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 was no longer significant (Exhibit 4-2).[12] In both cohorts, families with an older HOH waited fewer weeks to receive assistance whereas HOHs with a mental health indicator wait, on average, 11 weeks longer to receive assistance than those without a mental health indicator, assuming all their other characteristics are the same. Additionally, families with more nights homeless in the year prior to entry waited longer to receive assistance than those with fewer nights homeless. Families in King County also had longer wait times than families in Pierce County. King County Cohort 2 families waited a median of 20 weeks to receive assistance, more than double the median of nine weeks of Cohort 1 families. In Pierce and Snohomish Counties, the median wait times stayed relatively stable between Cohorts 1 and 2 (Pierce County was 8 and 9 weeks, respectively and Snohomish County was 15 and 14 weeks, respectively). Other factors—such as race, family size, education, employment status at entry, and income—were not related to the length of time to entry, all else being equal. These findings suggest that county differences, age, the

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[11] Descriptive analysis presents median values because the means are skewed by several very long waits.
[12] These regression findings are somewhat different than those represented in the 6-month report, which states that ever experiencing homelessness prior to the current episode was a significant predictor but mental health indicator was not. Findings likely differ between the two models as this model includes propensity score weights that take into account the full 18-month follow-up period for families and a larger sample size, as well as slightly different covariates for consistency with the other models in this report, whereas, the previous model was limited to families with a 6-month follow-up.

extent of previous homelessness, and mental health background account for the cohort differences in wait times.

Exhibit 4-2. Predicting Number of Weeks to Receive Assistance for Families Contacting the Homeless System (N=650)

Covariates[+]	Coefficient
Cohort 2 (compared to Cohort 1)	2.21
Age	-0.54*
Race (compared to White)	
Black/African American	-3.14
Multiracial or other race	5.96
Hispanic	-9.45
Spouse/partner	-3.36
Number of children under 19 years old (compared to 0 or 1)	
2 or 3 children	-0.42
4+ children	-3.48
Education (compared to HS/GED)	
Less than a HS degree	-4.75
More than a HS degree	0.38
Employed at entry	3.11
Income at baseline	0.73
Ever convicted of a felony	-2.59
History of domestic violence	5.09
Substance abuse screen	2.65
Mental health indicator	11.38**
Number of nights homeless in year before entry	0.14***
Experienced a prior eviction	-3.47

*$p < 0.05$ **$p < 0.01$ ***$p < 0.001$. County is included in the model as a covariate, but results are not presented in the table; findings indicate families in Pierce County have shorter times to entry into the system than families in King County.*

Type of Initial Housing Assistance Received

Type of Initial Assistance - Descriptive Analysis: As expected, prior to systems reform, the overwhelming majority of families (89%) in Cohort 1 received shelter as their initial assistance in the system, with a smaller percentage receiving transitional housing as their initial assistance (Exhibit 4-3).[13]

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[13] One family in Cohort 1 entered directly into permanent housing.

After reform, five different assistance options were available to families in each of the three counties (as shown in Exhibit 4-3). Shelter continued to be the type of initial assistance received by more than a third of the Cohort 2 families, with Snohomish County having the highest percentage (43%) and King County the lowest (27%). Diversion/housing navigation services and rapid re-housing were received by 30 percent and 20 percent of the families as their initial assistance, respectively. Small percentages of Cohort 2 families also received transitional housing (11%) and permanent supportive housing (4%) as their initial assistance. King County served the lowest percentage of families (8%) in transitional housing initially while Pierce and Snohomish Counties each served 13 percent in transitional housing. As reported in the six-month report, multivariate analyses using multinomial logistic regression indicate that individual characteristics do not distinguish between families who received *shelter* versus other types of initial assistance (Rog et al., 2018). Differences between families who received *diversion* versus other types of assistance are discussed below.

Exhibit 4-3. Type of Initial Assistance Received
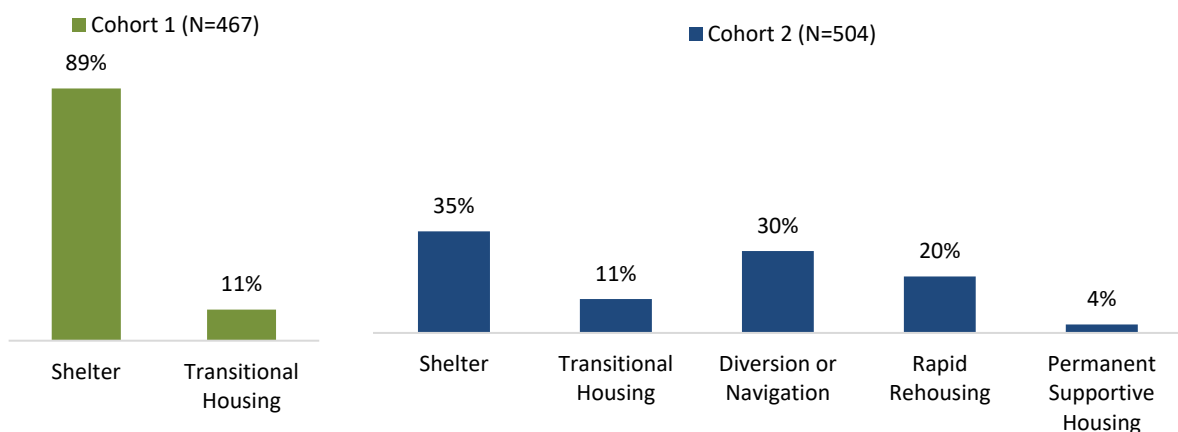
* *There is a statistically significant difference between cohorts in the distribution of types of initial homelessness assistance.*

As with families in Cohort 1, families in Cohort 2 may have received additional types of assistance following the initial assistance. For example, families who first received diversion could have subsequently received shelter or rapid re-housing if the diversion assistance was not ultimately successful. Also, particularly in Pierce and Snohomish Counties, rapid re-housing assistance was often provided to families who first entered shelter. In fact, within 18 months of entry, almost half of the Cohort 2 families who received shelter first (43%) indicated that they were subsequently offered rapid re-housing assistance.

As discussed in Section 2, in all three counties, the receipt of the initial assistance we describe pre-dates the inclusion of vulnerability prioritization tools in the coordinated entry systems[14] and the elimination of specific provider selection criteria. Instead, the type of assistance received was likely determined based on a combination of factors, including assessment results, specific provider criteria and denials, and family refusals and selection. At the time Cohort 2 families were recruited, families in all three counties had the option to refuse at least one recommended placement without losing their place on the list if they did not feel it would be a good fit for their needs. Similarly, providers also could deny families based on their own criteria, although there was a movement in the counties to reduce or eliminate those criteria.

Understanding Diversion and Rapid Re-housing

This evaluation provided a unique opportunity to collect additional data on the two options most aligned with the Housing First orientation, diversion and rapid re-housing.

Diversion: By 2016, all families entering coordinated entry in both King and Pierce Counties were offered diversion[15] before other types of assistance. Providers described the service as engaging families in diversion conversations, using problem-solving to identify alternatives to families entering shelter or receiving a referral to a housing program. Flexible funds and other resources were available if needed to help eliminate a family's housing crisis. Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses on family follow-up interviews noted that families most typically received funding for move-in costs, security deposits, rental application fees, or previous housing debts. Some unique solutions also were reported, such as funds to pay for a HOH's electrician work license to help regain employment and be able to pay rent, conflict mediation with a family to restore a shared housing arrangement, funds for a U-Haul to be able to move out of state, funds to pay for propane gas to help offset the burden of staying with family, and funds for car repair to help a family continue employment with more reliable transportation. A minority of families did not receive any financial or material assistance; in several of

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[14] Vulnerability prioritization tools are tools, such as the VI-SPDAT, designed to ensure people with the greatest needs receive priority for housing and homelessness assistance rather than allocating assistance based on a first come first served basis. As of 2019, all three counties were using vulnerability prioritization in their coordinated entry systems; however, those were not in place by 2015/2016 when Cohort 2 was recruited.

[15] We elected to exclude navigation services in Snohomish County from this analysis of diversion because at the time of data collection, navigation operated differently than diversion in King and Pierce Counties. Navigators worked with families while they waited for housing assistance, providing them with resources and referrals to help resolve their housing crisis or address other service needs. The goal, however, was not to divert families from receiving other assistance from the system, but rather to provide them with assistance that they needed at that moment.

these instances, they needed the funds but could not find an apartment to rent or another place to live to use the funds. Qualitative data suggest that some of the difficulties in getting and/or keeping housing may relate to past felonies and evictions, and domestic violence.

Although there are similarities and differences in the approaches used in the two counties, a key distinction is that diversion assistance in Pierce County is provided once per family, whereas in King County, if the first diversion assistance is not successful, a provider may try alternate approaches. As Exhibit 4-4 shows, when compared to families entering the system in King and Pierce Counties, as a whole, a higher percentage of families who received diversion had a HOH who was male, identified as Black/African American, and had one or more indicators of mental health need. Diversion families also were less likely than other families to have an open CPS plan and were less likely to have reported recent homelessness, more likely to be employed at the baseline interview, and had higher incomes, on average, than families receiving other types of assistance. These last three factors likely played a role in whether case managers and families themselves believed diversion could be an effective solution for their housing crisis.

> Both King and Pierce Counties implemented diversion as a central resource for families, providing flexible funds for families to quickly resolve their housing crises. In Snohomish County, housing navigation services were provided and included flexible funds and limited case management to help connect families to needed services while waiting for other housing assistance to become available.

Families receiving diversion also were more likely than other families to have been doubled up (40% vs. 29%) and less likely to be in shelter (6% vs. 25%) the night before receiving assistance. Diversion assistance may have been viewed as much more appropriate for these families who may have other resources while they look for housing.

The majority of families (74%) who received diversion as their initial assistance in Pierce and King Counties moved into their own housing during the 18-month follow-up, with 78 percent of those moving in doing so within the first six months and all (100%) moving in within the first 12 months. On average, it took 105 days for these families to move into housing. During the time families were looking for housing, they could be living in a variety of circumstances, including in shelter, couch-surfing, or unsheltered situations.

Exhibit 4-4. Comparison of Families Receiving Diversion to Families Receiving Other Types of Assistance in King and Pierce Counties

Characteristic	Diversion (N=98)	Other Assistance (N=241)
Age (mean)	35.3	33.4
Female	85% *	92%
Race		
White	22% *	36%
Black/African American	60% **	43%
Multiracial/other race	19%	21%
Hispanic	11%	12%
Spouse/partner	26%	27%
Number of kids (mean)	1.9	1.9
Family intact at baseline	79%	81%
Open CPS plan	1% *	7%
Education		
Less than HS degree	14%	19%
HS degree	29%	33%
More than HS degree	57%	48%
Employed at entry	51% **	32%
Income at entry (median)	$1,100 *	$799
Debt at entry (median)	$7,500	$5,139
Ever convicted of a felony	20%	16%
Substance abuse screen	19%	15%
Mental health indicator	63% *	50%
Homeless in 6 months before entry	56% *	68%
Own lease in 6 months before entry	46%	43%
Own place night before entry	9%	6%
Doubled up night before entry	40%*	29%
Shelter night before entry	6%***	25%
Unsheltered night before entry	34%	30%
Transitional housing night before entry	0%	3%
Other housing night before entry	10%	7%

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001

Rapid re-housing: Rapid re-housing increased in all three counties as an intervention to help families re-enter the housing market. During Cohort 2, 24 percent of King County families, 27 percent of Pierce County families, and 10 percent of Snohomish County families received rapid re-housing as their initial assistance. Unlike diversion, families assigned to rapid re-housing did not differ on any measured characteristics from all other families, except that, on average, families in rapid re-housing trended towards

higher median monthly incomes ($1,000 vs. $800, p = 0.13) and had higher median debt ($8,000 vs. $5,800, p = 0.04) than all other families in each cohort.

Through rapid re-housing, families typically received some type of financial assistance, most commonly multiple months of rental assistance, help with move-in costs and security deposits, and often additional financial help to pay utility deposits, past debt, and application fees. At times, families also reported receiving help with moving

> Rapid re-housing offers a family case management support to find market rate housing in the community and financial assistance for a time-limited period once housing is located.

expenses, vouchers for motels while waiting for housing, and transportation assistance to look for housing. Finally, families reported receiving other forms of nonfinancial assistance, such as assistance working with landlords, checking credit reports, and connecting to employment services.

The majority of families (85%) who received rapid re-housing as their initial assistance moved into their own housing during the 18-month follow-up, with 90 percent of those moving in doing so within the first six months and nearly all (99%) moving in within the first 12 months. On average, it took 73 days for these families to move into housing. During the time families were looking for housing, they could be living in a variety of circumstances.

Exhibit 4-5 provides examples of families' homeless situation and experiences accessing assistance in both cohorts.

Exhibit 4-5. Examples of Families' Experiences

Cohort 1
Ellen was a 31-year-old woman with two children living in with her grandmother in King County. When her housing difficulties began, she was unemployed and had over $15,000 in debt for back rent and student loans. Her grandmother asked her to move out because there was not enough space. She called 211 and obtained a list of phone numbers for shelters. She contacted 15 different places, making 20 phone calls, and was put on a waitlist for shelter. It took about two months for her to receive a place in shelter.
Matthew was a 32-year-old father of two children in Pierce County, who was separated from his wife and living with his parents. He was unemployed, with a high school degree, $4,000 in debt and a monthly income of $478 through TANF. His housing difficulties began when his parents decided to move to another county to be closer to work, and he was unable to afford to live on his own with his daughters. After contacting two locations and making four calls, he moved into a shelter approximately four weeks after he began looking for assistance through the homeless service system.

Jenna was a single, 38-year-old woman with three children living in Snohomish County with her youngest child's father. Her housing difficulties began because he was using drugs and stopped paying the rent and she wanted to be in a safer location. At the time, she was unemployed, with less than a high school education, over $6,000 in debt, and a monthly income of $1,485 through TANF and child support. She reported a history of mental health and substance use concerns, as well as a history of domestic violence. She contacted 211 and obtained a list of shelters, a motel voucher, and food and diapers. She contacted 6 places and made 10 phone calls before accessing shelter.

Cohort 2

Sharon was a 36-year-old woman with 2 children in King County. She was unemployed, with a GED, a monthly income of $500 through TANF, and over $30,000 in debt, mostly for student loans and legal fees related to a recent car accident. She reported a history of domestic violence, substance use concerns, and an open CPS plan. Prior to reaching out for assistance, her family was moving among a variety of doubled up housing situations with family and friends. She reportedly made 30 calls, contacting three different places, including shelters and Family Housing Connection (coordinated entry in King County), after which she moved into shelter and was referred to a rapid re-housing provider. The provider gave her a list of addresses to assist with her housing search. It took her about one month to find an apartment. She received rental assistance for seven months.

Kelsey was a 34-year-old woman with one child in Pierce County. She first realized she was having housing issues when the apartment she was living in was sold and the new owner stopped making repairs and didn't address a mold issue. She contacted the health department who referred her to Access Point for Housing (centralized intake in Pierce County). At the time, she had over $10,000 in debt (from student loans and medical debt) and part-time employment as an administrative assistant earning $1,100 per month. She reported a past felony conviction but no other housing barriers. She received assistance through diversion, including help with the first month's rent and a security deposit. It took her approximately two months to find a new apartment.

Francesca was a 29-year-old mother of three children in Snohomish County. She was living with friends after having been evicted from her own apartment. When she experienced a felony conviction, she was asked to leave. At the time, she had over $6,000 in debt (from cable/phone, back utilities, medical debt, fines, and loans from friends and family), was unemployed at entry with less than a high school diploma and with a monthly income of approximately $500 in child support payments. She called 211 and various providers, reportedly making about 50 calls. She moved into shelter and was placed on a waiting list for housing assistance.

Section 5. The Family Impact Study: Effects of Systems Reform on Families' Housing and Homelessness Outcomes

The main housing goals of the Family Homelessness Systems Initiative, through reforming the homeless service delivery systems, were to reduce the time families experience homelessness, increase their access to stable housing, and decrease their returns to homelessness. The findings from our analyses comparing families served before and after reform indicate that the Housing First focus of the systems changes helped more families access housing and helped them access it more quickly, leading to longer stays in housing than families served prior to reform, and no greater vulnerability to leaving housing and becoming homeless. However, although families reduced their reliance on shelter, a greater number experienced unsheltered homelessness, especially while waiting to access housing.

For both cohorts, families' human capital (e.g., education, employment, income), as well as having subsidies, helped families access housing and/or spend more nights in that housing while family size, a recent history of homelessness, and recent evictions served as barriers for families, suggesting that systems should continue to focus resources to increase families' access to economic opportunities and assist with housing barriers.

Overview

The main goals of the Family Homelessness Systems Initiative were to reduce the time families experience homelessness, increase their access to stable housing, and decrease their returns to homelessness. Our earlier analyses (Rog et al, 2018) indicate that in the six months after receiving their initial assistance, families served after systems reform (Cohort 2), compared to families served prior to reform (Cohort 1), were significantly more likely to:

- be in their own housing;
- access that housing faster;
- spend more time in that housing; and
- spend less total time homeless (including both in shelter and unsheltered settings), despite having spent more time unsheltered before receiving assistance.

This section provides findings from analyses examining families' housing and homelessness for an 18-month period following initial assistance. With a longer

timeframe, the analyses not only provide an understanding of the extent to which the six-month findings are sustained, but also sufficient time to examine returns to homelessness that families may experience following entry into housing.

The findings are presented for three sets of outcomes:
- those related to housing access;
- those related to residential stability; and
- those related to homelessness.

For each set of outcomes, we begin with a summary of what was learned, followed by descriptive data on each outcome, examining raw differences between the two cohorts. Examining descriptive differences between the groups provides an understanding of the magnitude of the outcome differences between the two cohorts, but it does not allow us to draw definitive conclusions as to whether the differences are due to the systems changes that occurred or to other factors. Because the study was not a randomized study, families differed between the two cohorts in ways that could potentially affect their housing outcomes. Therefore, as described in Section 1, to provide a more robust test of the systems reform's effects on the outcomes, a multivariate analysis of each outcome variable was conducted, employing two statistical techniques to isolate the effects of the reform: propensity score weighting to balance the differences between the two cohorts and the inclusion of covariates in the analysis to provide additional control on individual differences as well as offer explanation. Various multivariate analyses (i.e., ordinary least squares regression, logistic regression, survival analysis) were employed, depending on the measurement of the outcome variable. Descriptions of these analyses are offered in Section 1 but also are provided when used below for the convenience of the reader. Statistically significant associations are denoted in tables with asterisks (i.e., ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$). The absence of an indicator indicates there is not a statistically significant relationship between the variables. Because the small sample sizes within each county limit power to detect effects, where county-level findings are presented, we present marginally significant trends in addition to the standard levels of significance.

Access to One's Own Housing

Overall finding: Systems changes led to more families accessing their own housing after receiving initial assistance and accessing it more quickly.

Access to One's Own Housing - Descriptive Analysis: Cohort 2 families, having a range of initial assistance options that included direct access to housing (e.g. diversion, rapid

re-housing), were more likely to move into their own housing in the 18-month follow-up period and at a faster rate than families in Cohort 1.[16] As Exhibit 5-1 shows, over three-fourths of Cohort 2 families (75%) entered housing within 18 months after entry compared to 46 percent of Cohort 1 families. Over a third of the Cohort 2 families (39%) entered housing within three months of receiving assistance, and by six months, 57 percent of Cohort 2 families entered housing. Among Cohort 1 families, however, only 15 percent entered by three months, increasing to 28 percent by the six-month mark.

Exhibit 5-1. Time to First Enter One's Own Housing
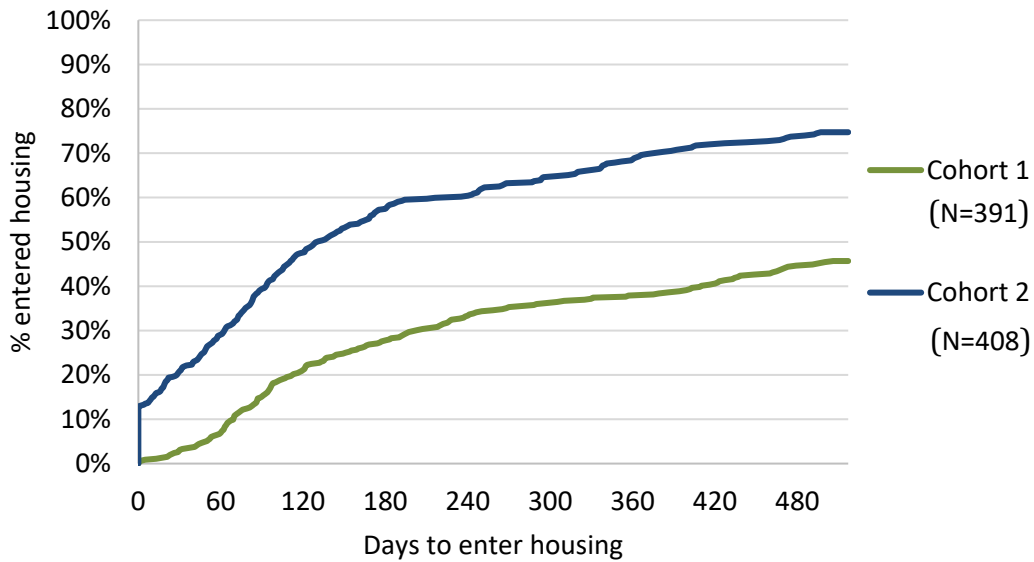
On average, Cohort 2 families entered their own housing within four months after receiving their initial assistance (mean = 121 days), more than two months quicker than Cohort 1 families (mean = 183 days). As Exhibit 5-2 displays, all three counties showed the same pattern of findings: more Cohort 2 families than Cohort 1 families entered their own housing in the 18 months following receipt of initial assistance, and they entered at a quicker rate.[17] The difference in time to housing was greatest in King County, with Cohort 2 families entering housing nearly three months quicker than Cohort 1 families. Snohomish County had the biggest increase in the percentage of families entering housing from Cohort 1 to Cohort 2 (24% vs. 77%), in part because so

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[16] After entering housing, not all families stayed in housing continuously for the full follow-up period. Additional analyses in this section and Section 5 examine housing stability.

[17] In Snohomish County, families in Cohort 2 accessed housing faster than families in Cohort 1, but this finding was marginally significant, likely due to the small sample size, resulting in limited power to detect differences (31 families in Cohort 1 in Snohomish County accessed housing). Likewise, in King County, families accessed housing at greater rates in Cohort 2 than in Cohort 1, but the finding was marginally significant.

many Cohort 1 families continued to be in transitional housing during the complete 18-month follow-up period (as described in Section 4).

Exhibit 5-2. Percentage of Families Entering Own Housing and Average Number of Days to Entering

	Cohort 1 (N=391)		Cohort 2 (N=408)	
	% with 1+ nights in own housing	Average days to housing[+]	% with 1+ nights in own housing	Average days to housing[+]
Tri-County	46%	183	75%***	121 ***
King County	58%	206	68%[†]	122 ***
Pierce County	56%	156	83%***	103 **
Snohomish County	24%	188	77%***	137 [†]

[†]*p < 0.10 * p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001.* [+] *Among those who entered*

Access to One's Own Housing - Multivariate Analysis: We conducted a survival analysis to test whether families in Cohort 2 accessed their own housing faster than families in Cohort 1 when individual family characteristics are considered. Survival analysis is a statistical technique for modeling how long it takes for an event of interest to occur (Singer & Willett, 2003), such as time to accessing one's own housing after receipt of initial assistance.

The findings (presented in Exhibit 5-3) corroborate the descriptive analysis and indicate that systems changes led to quicker access to housing for more

> **Survival Analysis**
> Tests the effect of cohort on time. This approach models (1) the probability of moving to one's own housing and (2) how long it takes to move, controlling for the potential influence of other key variables included in the model. The hazard ratio indicates the likelihood that an event will occur for one group over another at a given point in time, controlling for other factors in the model. A hazard ratio of one indicates there is no difference between the groups. A hazard ratio less than one indicates there is a lower likelihood of the event occurring in one group over another; a hazard ratio greater than one indicates there is a greater likelihood of the event occurring in one group over another.

families, controlling on individual family differences. Cohort 2 families were significantly more likely than families in Cohort 1 to be in their housing at any point in the 18 months following receipt of initial assistance. Within each cohort, families significantly more likely to be in housing included those with HOHs who were multiracial (as opposed to White), had a spouse or partner, had more than a high school degree (compared to a high school degree), had higher incomes, were employed at entry, had more nights in

own housing in the year prior to entry, or had a housing subsidy. Families less likely to enter housing had a HOH with a history of eviction, four or more children, or were Hispanic.

Exhibit 5-3. Predicting the Probability of Entering One's Own Housing in the 18 Months Following Receipt of Initial Assistance (N = 930)

Covariate[+]	Hazard Ratio
Cohort 2 (compared to Cohort 1)	2.30***
Age	1.01
Race (compared to White)	
Black/African American	1.06
Multiracial/other race	1.20*
Hispanic	0.64***
Spouse/partner	1.17*
Number of kids (compared to 0 or 1)	
2-3	0.89
4+	0.72**
Education	
Less than HS	0.95
More than HS	1.38***
Employed at entry	1.17*
Income at entry	1.10***
Ever convicted of a felony	1.06
History of domestic violence	0.90
Substance abuse screen	1.13
Mental health indicator	1.10
Number of nights in own place in year before entry	1.001***
Experienced a prior eviction	0.67***
Has a subsidy[18]	1.66***

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001. ⁺County is included in the model as a covariate but results are not presented in the table; findings indicate that families in Pierce County are more likely to be their own place and families in Snohomish County are less likely to be in their own place than families in King County.

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[18] Current receipt of subsidy was first assessed at the 6-month interview wave. For families who did not complete a 6-month interview wave, subsidy was imputed according to the proportion of cases reporting a subsidy in the complete 6-month sample. This approach permitted retention of the complete 18-month sample in all models.

Residential Stability

Overall findings: We examined residential stability in three ways: the time spent in one's own housing over the 18-month period, returns to homelessness (among those who enter their own housing), and overall number of moves (in and outside of one's own housing). The findings indicate that systems reform led to more families spending more nights in their own housing, but no significant differences in either returns to homelessness once in housing or overall moves in different residential settings across the 18-month period.

Time in One's Own Housing - Descriptive Analysis: Families served after reform, compared to families served prior to reform, spent more nights on average in their own housing (Exhibit 5-4) during the 18-month follow-up period. This difference was consistent across the three counties, although the magnitude of the difference varied across county, with the largest percentage increase in Snohomish County (71 nights vs. 260 nights). As one would expect, the quicker families access housing, the more nights they spend on average in housing during the 18-month follow-up period.

Exhibit 5-4. Average Number of Nights in One's Own Housing in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance[+]

	Cohort 1 (N=391)	Cohort 2 (N=408)
Tri-County	138	266**
King County	168	243**
Pierce County	176	300***
Snohomish County	71	260***

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001. [+]Average is calculated for the full cohort of families with 18 months of follow-up data.

As Exhibit 5-5 shows, for each six-month time period, the percentage of families who spent one or more nights in their own place is significantly greater in Cohort 2 than in Cohort 1. Additionally, in each six-month time period, the average number of nights families spent in their own place is significantly higher for Cohort 2 families than Cohort 1 families (due in part to the greater number of families spending time in their own place in Cohort 2). This pattern is consistent across the three counties (see Appendix E).

Exhibit 5-5. Nights in One's Own Housing in Each 6-month Period[+]

	Cohort 1 (N=391)		Cohort 2 (N=408)	
	% with 1+ nights in own place	# of nights in own place	% with 1+ nights in own place	# of nights in own place
Days 0-180	28%	25	58%***	67***
Days 180-365	37%	57	67%***	107***
Days 365-517	42%	55	69%***	92***

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001. [+]Average is calculated for the full cohort of families with 18 months of follow-up data.

Time in One's Own Housing - Multivariate Analysis: We conducted two sets of multivariate analyses, including ordinary least squares regression and hierarchical linear modeling. The findings from the regression analysis examining nights in one's own housing during the 18-month period following initial assistance indicate that overall systems reform led to greater housing stability for families (Exhibit 5-6). Families in Cohort 2 spent, on average, 115 more days in their own housing after receipt of initial assistance than comparable families in Cohort 1. Within each cohort, families spent more nights housed if they had a subsidy, more nights in their own housing in the year prior, higher incomes, more than a high school degree (compared to a high school degree) and were multiracial (as opposed to White). They spent fewer nights housed if they had an eviction from their own place during the 12 months prior to the baseline interview, were Hispanic, or had four or more children.

> **Ordinary Least Squares Regression**
> Examines the influence of cohort on differences in continuous or interval measures, such as the number of nights in one's own housing, controlling for the potential influence of other key variables included in the model. The coefficient indicates the change in the dependent variable that results from a one-unit change in the covariate. For example, controlling on all other variables, families in Cohort 2 spent 115 more nights in their own housing than families in Cohort 1.

Exhibit 5-6. Predicting Nights in One's Own Housing in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance (N = 762)

Covariate[+]	Coefficient
Cohort 2 (compared to Cohort 1)	115.20***
Age	1.37
Race (compared to White)	
Black/African American	2.46
Multiracial/other race	40.16*
Hispanic	-49.44*
Spouse/partner	23.24
Number of kids (compared to 0 or 1)	
2-3	4.24
4+	-52.02*
Education	
Less than HS	-11.34
More than HS	45.19**
Employed at entry	20.42
Income at entry	11.91***
Ever convicted of a felony	14.69
History of domestic violence	-10.37
Substance abuse screen	0.58
Mental health indicator	-0.18
Number of nights in own place in year before entry	0.11*
Experienced a prior eviction	-54.00**
Has a subsidy	96.93***

*$p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$ *** $p<0.001$.* [+]County is included in the model as a covariate but results are not presented in the table; findings indicate that families in Pierce County had more nights in their own place than families in King County over the 18-month follow-up.

A second model using hierarchical linear modeling was performed to determine if other factors that change over time in the 18-month period also have an effect on housing tenure. In particular, we examined whether variations in the length of time families spent in their own housing over time were associated with other variables that also changed over time, such as employment and experience with domestic violence. As shown in Appendix F, these models indicate that, within each cohort, increases in employment over time predict greater increases in time in one's own place ($p < 0.01$).

> **Hierarchical Linear Modeling**
> Tests the effect of cohort on the outcome measures, allowing for a hierarchical structure in the observations. In these particular models the hierarchical structure is with respect to time, and the time-varying covariates are nested within the covariates that are unchanging over time. This approach allows for an examination of time-varying covariates, such as income or employment, on the dependent variable, controlling for the influence of other key variables included in the model.

Additionally, experiencing probation or parole over time is associated with fewer nights in one's own place ($p < 0.001$). Changes in income over time or exposure to domestic violence were not related to time spent in housing.

Returns to Homelessness among Those Who Enter Their Own Housing - Descriptive Analysis: We examined the rate of returns to homelessness only for families who entered housing within six months of receiving their initial assistance in order to have at least a 12-month period of observation for returns. Families in the two cohorts did not differ significantly in rates of returns to homelessness within 12 months of entering housing (see Exhibit 5-7). Among those with at least 12 months of observation, nine percent of those in Cohort 1 and 11 percent of those in Cohort 2 returned to homelessness within 12 months.[19] A higher percentage of Cohort 2 families than those in Cohort 1 (5% vs. 2%) returned first to an unsheltered location within 12 months of entering housing, but this difference was not statistically significant. Families in both cohorts returned by seven months, on average, though the range was up to 11-12 months.

Exhibit 5-7. Returns to Homelessness within 12 Months among those Entering Own Housing[+]

	Cohort 1 (N = 99)	Cohort 2 (N = 221)
% Returned to Homelessness		
Overall	9%	11%
Sheltered	7%	6%
Unsheltered	2%	5%
Days to Return		
Mean	216	220
Median	217	237
Range	101-332	39-362

[+]Among those with at least 365 days following entry into housing.

Returns to Homelessness among Those Who Enter Their Own Housing -Multivariate Analysis: Multivariate analysis, using logistic regression, indicates that cohort was not a significant predictor of the probability of returning to homelessness within 12 months for families who entered housing (see Exhibit 5-8). Families more likely to return to homelessness after entering their own housing were more likely to have a HOH with a mental health indicator. Families were less likely to return to homelessness if they had a

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[19] Among those with at least 180 days of housing data (N = 276 in C2 and 147 in C1), four percent of families in each cohort returned to homelessness within six months.

HOH who was older, had more than a high school education, was employed at entry, or had a subsidy.

Exhibit 5-8. Predicting Probability of Returning to Homelessness in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance[+] (N=317)

Covariate[++]	Odds Ratio
Cohort 2 (compared to Cohort 1)	0.83
Age	0.96**
Race (compared to White)	
Black/African American	0.90
Multiracial/other race	0.69
Hispanic	0.83
Spouse/partner	1.07
Number of kids (compared to 0 or 2)	
2-3	0.99
4+	0.66
Education	
Less than HS	0.58
More than HS	0.48**
Employed at entry	0.47**
Income at entry	1.07
Ever convicted of a felony	0.89
History of domestic violence	0.98
Substance abuse screen	0.83
Mental health indicator	3.19***
Number of nights homeless in year before entry	1.00
Experienced a prior eviction	1.03
Has a subsidy	0.49**

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001. [+]Among families who entered their own housing by 180 days and had at least 12 months of follow-up. [++]County is included in the model as a covariate but results are not presented in the table; there are no significant differences across the counties.

Number of Moves - Descriptive Analysis: One measure of residential stability is the extent to which families moved after they received their initial assistance across all homeless and housed settings. We examined median as well as mean moves due to the skewness in the distributions of the measure. Mean and median number of moves were comparable across the two cohorts (see Exhibit 5-9). This finding was consistent across counties, with the exception of Snohomish County, where there were slightly more mean moves in Cohort 2 than in Cohort 1 (medians did not differ) (see Appendix E).

Exhibit 5-9. Number of Moves in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance
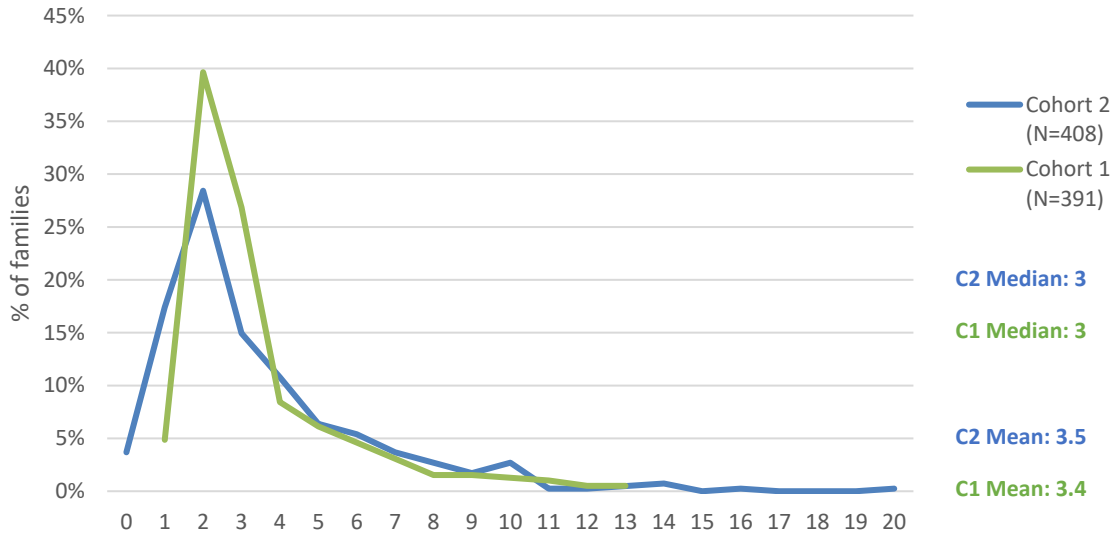
Exhibit 5-10. Predicting Number of Moves in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance (N=762)

Covariate[+]	Coefficient
Cohort 2 (compared to Cohort 1)	-0.05
Age	-0.02*
Race (compared to White)	
Black/African American	0.22
Multiracial/other race	-0.56*
Hispanic	0.30
Spouse/partner	0.13
Number of kids (compared to 0-1)	
2-3	0.15
4+	0.09
Education	
Less than HS	-0.09
More than HS	-0.03
Employed at entry	-0.38
Income at entry	0.02
Ever convicted of a felony	0.40
History of domestic violence	0.29
Substance abuse screen	0.57*
Mental health indicator	0.75***
Number of nights homeless in year before entry	0.00
Experienced a prior eviction	0.95***
Has a subsidy	-0.78***

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001. +County is included in the model as a covariate but results are not presented in the table; there are no significant differences across the counties.

Number of Moves - Multivariate Analysis: Multivariate analysis using ordinary least squares regression similarly indicates that there are not significant differences between cohorts in families' number of moves in the 18 months following receipt of initial assistance. As Exhibit 5-10 shows, families with HOHs with a mental health indicator, a history of eviction, and a positive substance abuse screen experienced more moves in both cohorts, whereas families with a subsidy, and those with an older and multiracial HOH experienced fewer moves.

Homelessness

Overall findings: We examined the extent to which families experienced homelessness during the 18-month following receipt of initial assistance, including, but not limited to, families who experienced homelessness after spending time in their own housing. Homelessness includes any time spent in shelter and in unsheltered arrangements. Findings indicate that the two cohorts do not differ significantly in the extent to which homelessness was experienced, but the nature of homelessness differs. Nearly all families in Cohort 1 and over half of the families in Cohort 2 spent at least one night in shelter, but a third of Cohort 2 families and only five percent of Cohort 1 families spent at least one night in an unsheltered setting, such as staying in one's car, in a tent, or an abandoned building. The number of nights in sheltered and unsheltered settings follow a similar pattern, Cohort 1 families spend significantly more nights in shelter than Cohort 2 families, but significantly fewer nights in unsheltered situations.

Homelessness - Descriptive Analysis: We examined the extent to which families experienced sheltered and unsheltered homelessness at any time after receiving initial assistance, not just after entering housing (Exhibit 5-11). Not surprisingly, because shelter was the dominant type of initial assistance provided to families before systems reform and only one of several options after systems reform, the percentage of families with one or more nights in shelter decreased significantly across all three counties after systems reform. Unsheltered homelessness had the opposite pattern, however. All three counties showed an increase in the percentage of families with at least one night unsheltered, with the greatest increase occurring in Snohomish County (5% vs. 37%) and the smallest in Pierce County (8% vs. 26%).

Exhibit 5-11. Percentage of Families Who Experienced Sheltered and Unsheltered Homelessness in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance

	% with 1+ nights sheltered homelessness		% with 1+ nights unsheltered homelessness	
	Cohort 1 (N=391)	Cohort 2 (N=408)	Cohort 1 (N=391)	Cohort 2 (N=408)
Tri-County	90%	55% ***	5%	34% ***
King County	99%	54% ***	3%	37% ***
Pierce County	95%	50% ***	8%	26% ***
Snohomish County	76%	61% **	5%	37% ***

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001

Similarly, as Exhibit 5-12 shows, Cohort 2 families spent fewer nights in shelter than Cohort 1 families across all three counties, with significant differences in Pierce (102 vs. 44 nights) and King Counties (106 vs. 59 nights), and a smaller, non-significant decline in Snohomish County (100 vs. 85 nights). Yet, Cohort 2 families had more nights unsheltered than Cohort 1 families across all three counties, with the smallest increase in Pierce (an increase of 9 nights) and comparable increases (of 47 nights) in King and Snohomish Counties.

Exhibit 5-12. Average Number of Nights Homeless over 18 Months following Initial Assistance[+]

	Avg. nights sheltered homelessness		Avg. nights unsheltered homelessness	
	Cohort 1 (N=391)	Cohort 2 (N=408)	Cohort 1 (N=391)	Cohort 2 (N=408)
Tri-County	103	63 ***	3	39 ***
King County	106	59 ***	1	48 ***
Pierce County	102	44 ***	6	15 *
Snohomish County	100	85	2	49 ***

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001. [+]Average is calculated for the full cohort of families with 18 months of follow-up data.

Homelessness - Multivariate Analysis: Results of an ordinary least squares regression (Exhibit 5-13) predicting the number of nights spent in shelter after receipt of initial assistance confirm the descriptive findings. Cohort 2 families spent significantly fewer nights in shelter following receipt of initial assistance than families in Cohort 1. Within each cohort, families who spent more nights in shelter over the course of the 18 months after receiving initial assistance had spent more nights homeless prior to receiving the

initial assistance, had lower incomes at baseline, 2-3 children in the household (rather than 0-1), and a HOH with a positive substance abuse screen.[20]

Exhibit 5-13. Predicting Number of Nights in Shelter in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance (N=762)

Covariate[+]	Coefficient
Cohort 2 (compared to Cohort 1)	-51.67***
Age	0.52
Race (compared to White)	
Black/African American	-0.45
Multiracial/other race	-1.41
Hispanic	5.98
Spouse/partner	8.81
Number of kids (compared to 0 or 1)	
2-3	15.50*
4+	24.67
Education	
Less than HS	5.86
More than HS	-8.28
Employed at entry	-5.95
Income at entry	-6.67***
Ever convicted of a felony	8.88
History of domestic violence	-2.91
Substance abuse screen	17.68*
Mental health indicator	6.98
Number of nights homeless in year before entry	0.17***
Experienced a prior eviction	14.65
Has a subsidy	9.10

*$p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$ *** $p<0.001$. [+]County is included in the model as a covariate but results are not presented in the table; there are no significant differences across the counties.

A different pattern of findings is noted for unsheltered homelessness, however (Exhibit 5-14). As the descriptive data suggest, families in Cohort 2 spent significantly more time in unsheltered homelessness than Cohort 1 families. Multivariate analysis, using ordinary least squares regression, indicates that families who experienced more nights in unsheltered homelessness were those with a HOH with a history of felony conviction,

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[20] We also ran logistic regression analyses predicting likelihood of at least one night in shelter in the 18 months following initial assistance. Findings are consistent with the findings for the linear regression predicting number of nights in in shelter.

a positive mental health screen, a history of eviction, and more nights homeless prior to receiving their initial assistance.[21]

Exhibit 5-14. Predicting Number of Nights Unsheltered in the 18 Months following Receipt of Initial Assistance (N=762)

Covariate[+]	Coefficient
Cohort 2 (compared to Cohort 1)	27.51***
Age	0.11
Race (compared to White)	
Black/African American	-6.80
Multiracial/other race	-6.25
Hispanic	8.29
Spouse/partner	5.71
Number of kids (compared to 0 or 1)	
2-3	-0.24
4+	7.76
Education	
Less than HS	-8.31
More than HS	-4.57
Employed at entry	-0.97
Income at entry	1.70
Ever convicted of a felony	23.26***
History of domestic violence	-1.16
Substance abuse screen	-5.94
Mental health indicator	11.90**
Number of nights homeless in year before entry	0.06*
Experienced a prior eviction	13.40*
Has a subsidy	-7.51

*$p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$ *** $p<0.001$. +County is included in the model as a covariate but results are not presented in the table; Families in Pierce County spent less time unsheltered than those in King County.

Examining Patterns of Factors Related to Housing Outcomes

Exhibit 5-15 provides a summary of the findings across all housing and homeless outcomes. Green cells indicate improved outcomes and red cells indicate worse outcomes. The pattern of findings offers some important insights into the factors that foster access to and stability in housing. The patterns are noted here and their implications are discussed in Section 9.

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[21] We also ran logistic regression analyses predicting likelihood of at least one night unsheltered in the 18 months following initial assistance. Findings are consistent with the findings for the linear regression predicting number of nights in unsheltered situations.

Exhibit 5-15. Summary of Trends across Housing and Homelessness Outcomes*

	Prob of/ Time to Accessing Housing	# Nights in Housing	Returns to Homeless-ness	# Nights Sheltered	# Nights Unshel-tered	# Moves
Cohort 2 (after systems reform)	🟩	🟩		🟩	🟥	
Older HOHs			🟩			🟩
Multiracial	🟩	🟩				🟩
Hispanic	🟥	🟥				
Spouse/partner at baseline	🟩					
More children	🟥	🟥		🟥		
Higher education at baseline	🟩	🟩	🟩			
Employed at baseline	🟩		🟩			
Higher income at baseline	🟩	🟩		🟩		
Prior felony conviction					🟥	
Substance abuse screen at baseline				🟥		🟥
MH indicator at baseline			🟥		🟥	🟥
More nights in own place in prior year	🟩	🟩				
More nights homeless in prior year				🟥	🟥	
Prior eviction	🟥	🟥			🟥	🟥
Subsidy at 6 months	🟩	🟩	🟩			🟩

*Green cells indicate improved outcomes and red cells indicate worse outcomes.

Overall, systems reform (represented as Cohort 2 in the table and findings) resulted in increased access to housing, longer stays in housing, and fewer nights in shelter, but it also contributed to more nights unsheltered. No impact was discernable for returns to homelessness or the number of moves families experienced. In the final chapter, we offer some considerations for other communities to consider in replicating these positive findings, while attending to how to diminish the occurrence of the more negative outcome of unsheltered homelessness.

Other individual factors suggest that the resources and characteristics families have also played a role in achieving housing outcomes.

- Having a subsidy affects many outcomes and appears to act as a buffer, significantly increasing the probability of getting and keeping housing and reducing the probability of returning to homelessness and moving. This outcome mirrors much of what is known in the literature about the role of subsidies in improving housing stability (e.g., Rog & Buckner, 2007; Gubits et al., 2016).

- Other variables that foster more positive outcomes relate to a families' human capital. Having more education, being employed at baseline, and having higher incomes at baseline each relate to multiple positive housing outcomes, including greater and quicker access to housing, more nights in housing, fewer returns to homelessness, and fewer nights in shelter.

- Having prior evictions emerges as a significant risk factor for multiple housing and homeless outcomes, including significantly reducing the probability of accessing housing and the time to accessing it (thus reducing lengths of stay), and increasing the number of nights unsheltered and number of moves. As discussed in the summary in Section 9, understanding the role that evictions play in making it difficult for families to obtain their housing can inform interventions that case managers and housing programs may play in mediating with landlords and working with agencies providing subsidies and other housing assistance.

- The HOH's race and ethnicity show a mixed pattern of outcomes. Whereas being Black/African American did not figure in as a significant factor related to any of the outcomes, being multiracial (compared to being White) is related to improved access to housing, more nights housed, and fewer moves. Being Hispanic, however, is associated with lower probability of accessing housing and fewer nights in one's own housing.

- Family composition also affects outcomes. Although having a partner or spouse may increase a family's chances of accessing housing, having multiple children makes access harder and longer, resulting in shorter lengths of stay in one's housing over the course of the 18-month follow-up period and longer stays in shelter. These findings also are consistent with what we have seen in other studies (e.g., Rog et al., 2017).

- Personal vulnerabilities (mental health conditions, substance abuse concerns, and past felonies) relate to one or more poorer stability outcomes for families, including more returns to homelessness from housing, more moves, and more nights in sheltered or unsheltered settings. Implications of these findings for case managers in helping families access the needed supports while in housing are discussed in Section 9.

- Finally, and importantly, housing and homelessness history has a significant effect on housing and homelessness outcomes. Having spent more nights housed prior to receiving their initial assistance relates to improved housing access and increased time in housing. Similarly, having spent more nights homeless prior to receiving initial assistance relates to more nights sheltered and unsheltered following assistance. These data reinforce the importance of the focus on helping families avoid homelessness and obtaining housing as quickly as possible to turn around unstable trajectories.

Section 6. The Family Impact Study: Understanding Families' Housing and Homelessness Trajectories and the Factors That Influence Them

As shown in Section 5, systems reform improved families' ability to exit homelessness quickly and stay in housing. At every six-month timeframe in the 18-month follow-up period, more families in Cohort 2 compared to those in Cohort 1 were living in their own housing, and they spent more nights in their own housing. Yet there is considerable variability among families in these outcomes. Despite the improvements that Cohort 2 families as a whole experienced, a quarter of the families were not successful in obtaining their own housing at any time during the 18-month follow-up period. Few individual and background characteristics differentiated families who were able to access housing from those that were not. Rather, the type of assistance received and permanent housing subsidies were among the strongest predictors of housing access. Families who never accessed housing were more likely to receive transitional housing or diversion as their initial type of assistance and significantly less likely to receive rapid re-housing. They were also less likely to have a subsidy. They were less likely to receive help finding housing early after receipt of initial assistance but did have increased help over the follow-up period. At 18 months, families who never accessed housing were primarily living in doubled up situations, transitional housing, and homeless situations. These families expressed more negative assessments of the fit of the housing for their families.

The evaluation has provided strong evidence that families provided assistance after systems reform in the three Puget Sound counties were more likely to access their own housing and access it more quickly, leading to longer stays in housing. After reform, families also experienced greater improvements in employment and income than families prior to reform, even controlling on the fact that they came in with higher employment and income. The considerable economic changes between the timing of the two cohorts were undoubtedly affecting the housing, employment, and income outcomes, albeit in different ways. The same economic conditions that were likely making it difficult for families to find housing and may have even depressed the number of families likely to be housed were also likely making it easier for families to find employment and have some boost in income (Martiz & Wagle, 2020). Our secular trend analysis suggests this is likely the case, with similar changes in employment and income between the homeless populations in six non-demonstration counties.

Despite the progress in the three demonstration counties in infusing a Housing First orientation in the homeless families service system and moving people out of homelessness more quickly into their own housing, there were families who continued to struggle in obtaining housing after systems reform. Cohort 2 families experienced less homelessness overall than Cohort 1 families, but did experience more time unsheltered than Cohort 1 families.

Although these findings support the conclusion that systems reform improved families' ability as a whole to exit homelessness quicker and maintain greater stability in housing, they also reveal considerable variability among families in their living situations after receiving initial assistance, whether they accessed housing, the time it took to access housing, and the amount of time they were able to stay housed. As documented in this section, a quarter of the families in Cohort 2, in fact, were not successful in obtaining their own housing in the 18-month follow-up period.

In this section, we maximize the data we collected on families' housing over the course of 18 months by examining the different types of housing and homeless settings in which families lived and the variability among families in whether and how they accessed housing to offer some insights into the type of support that families might need to achieve greater housing stability. We begin by describing the different locations in which families from each cohort lived during the 18-month follow-up, the amount of time they spent in each setting, and where they were living at the end of the follow-up period. We then focus on understanding the different paths to housing that families took before and after systems reform. We examine in more depth the different trajectories families took in their own housing after systems reform, and, among families in Cohort 2, the individual and system factors that differentiate these pathways. Finally, for Cohort 2 families in these different pathways, we share their perspectives on the challenges they faced accessing housing and their recommendations for change.

What are the Range of Places Families Lived Before and After Systems Reform?

Exhibit 6-1 below presents the array of settings in which families in the two cohorts lived during the 18-month follow-up. The cohorts differ significantly with respect to the percentage of families staying at least one night in each setting. Overall, a larger percentage of Cohort 2 families compared to Cohort 1 families spent time in their own home, but also a larger percentage spent time doubled up, unsheltered, and in other settings, such as motels. Larger percentages of Cohort 1 families spent at least one night in transitional housing and shelter. Appendix E presents the county percentages,

showing similar differences between the cohorts for each county, though with differences in magnitude among the counties. Snohomish County, for example, shows the largest cross-cohort differences in the percentage of families who lived in their own housing and in transitional housing, in large part because, in Cohort 1, a small percentage of families were in their own housing and a large percentage were in transitional housing.

Exhibit 6-1. Percent of Families with One or More Nights in Each Location in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance

	Cohort 1 (N=391)	Cohort 2 (N=408)
Own place	46%	75%***
Doubled up	29%	49%***
Homeless, in shelter	90%	55%***
Homeless, unsheltered	5%	34%***
Transitional housing	61%	15%***
Other locations (e.g., motels, hospitals, jail)	12%	28%***

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001

We also examined the time spent in each of the locations, finding similar patterns of difference (see Exhibit 6-2) between the two cohorts. Families served after reform, compared to families served prior to reform, spent more nights, on average, in their own place, fewer nights in shelter, and fewer nights in transitional housing. They also spent more nights, however, in doubled-up situations and more nights unsheltered than families served prior to reform. These differences were consistent across the three counties (see Appendix E), although, again, the magnitude of the differences varied across county. In Snohomish County, consistent with the differences noted previously, families in Cohort 2 spent nearly four times the number of nights in their own place than families in Cohort 1 (261 nights vs. 71 nights) and seven times fewer nights in transitional housing (307 nights vs. 22 nights).
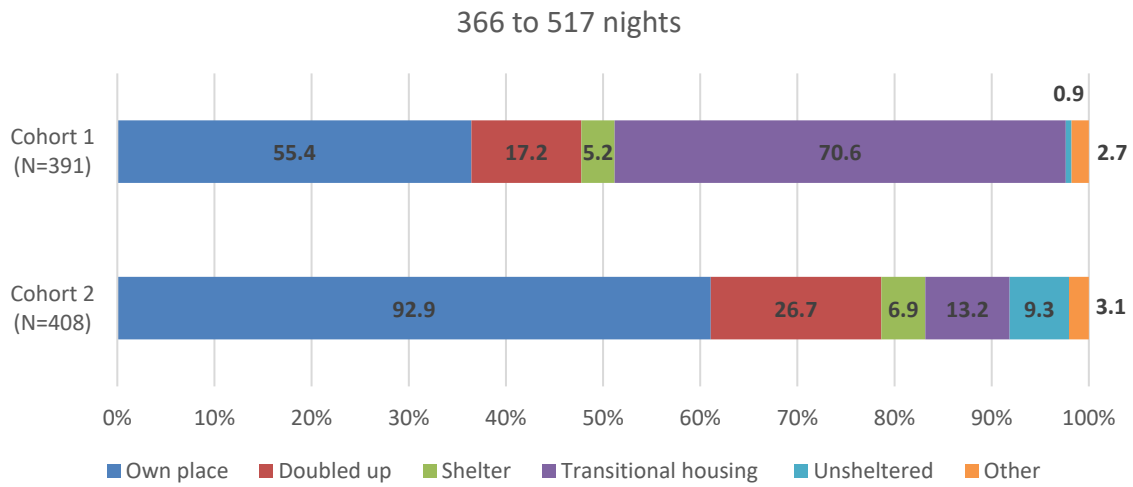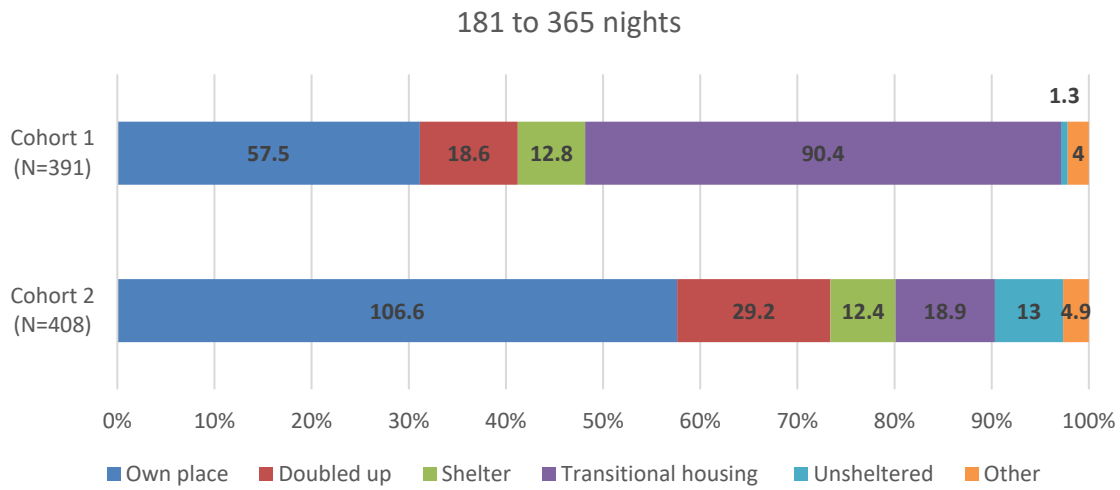
Exhibit 6-2. Average Number of Nights in Each Location in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance [+]

	Cohort 1 (N=391)	Cohort 2 (N=408)
Own place	138	266***
Doubled up	48	85***
Homeless, in shelter	103	63***
Homeless, unsheltered	3	39***
Transitional housing	215	49***
Other locations (e.g., motels, hospitals, jail)	9	14

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001. [+]Average is calculated for the full cohort of families with 18 months of follow-up data.

Exhibit 6-3 presents data on the number of nights families in each cohort spent in each location within each six month increment in the 18-month follow-up. Both cohorts show an increase in the number of nights families spent in their own housing over the three time periods, but, in each timeframe, the number of nights was significantly higher for families in Cohort 2 than Cohort 1. Families in Cohort 2 spent a greater number of nights in each time period in doubled-up situations compared to Cohort 1 families (26-29 nights in Cohort 2 vs. 12-19 nights in Cohort 1). In contrast, in each 6-month increment, families in Cohort 1 spent between three and five times as many nights in transitional housing as Cohort 2 families. Cohort differences in the amount of time spent in shelter and other residential situations (e.g., motels, institutions) were evident only in the first 180 nights, with families in Cohort 1 spending almost twice as many nights in shelter as families in Cohort 2 and less time than Cohort 2 in other situations.

Exhibit 6-3. Length of Stay by Location Type in 6 Month Increments

0 to 180 nights

Cohort	Own place	Doubled up	Shelter	Transitional housing	Unsheltered	Other
Cohort 1 (N=391)	25	12.6	84.8	54.4		0.8 / 1.9
Cohort 2 (N=408)	66.5	29	44.2	17.3	16.5	6.5

Legend: ■ Own place ■ Doubled up ■ Shelter ■ Transitional housing ■ Unsheltered ■ Other

181 to 365 nights

Cohort	Own place	Doubled up	Shelter	Transitional housing	Unsheltered	Other
Cohort 1 (N=391)	57.5	18.6	12.8	90.4		1.3 / 4
Cohort 2 (N=408)	106.6	29.2	12.4	18.9	13	4.9

Legend: ■ Own place ■ Doubled up ■ Shelter ■ Transitional housing ■ Unsheltered ■ Other

366 to 517 nights

Cohort	Own place	Doubled up	Shelter	Transitional housing	Unsheltered	Other
Cohort 1 (N=391)	55.4	17.2	5.2	70.6		0.9 / 2.7
Cohort 2 (N=408)	92.9	26.7	6.9	13.2	9.3	3.1

Legend: ■ Own place ■ Doubled up ■ Shelter ■ Transitional housing ■ Unsheltered ■ Other

Finally, we examined the range of settings in which families in the two cohorts were living at the end of the 18-month follow-up. As Exhibit 6-4 illustrates, 18 months after receipt of initial assistance, the majority of families in Cohort 2 were living in their own housing, whereas the majority of families in Cohort 1 were split between transitional housing and their own home. More families in Cohort 2 compared to Cohort 1 also were living doubled up with family or friends. Comparable small percentages of the cohorts were in shelter and other locations.

Exhibit 6-4. Where Families Were Living 18 Months Following Initial Assistance

	Cohort 1 (N=391)	Cohort 2 (N=408)
Own housing	39%	62% ***
Doubled up	10%	18% **
Shelter	3%	4%
Transitional housing	45%	8% ***
Unsheltered homeless	<1%	6% ***
Other (e.g., motels, institutions)	2%	3%

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001

To understand the extent to which families in their own housing were subsidized at 18 months, we examined families' rates of receipt of assistance (permanent housing subsidies or rapid re-housing assistance) using data from DSHS's ICDB. As shown in Exhibit 6-5, families living in their own place in both cohorts showed comparable rates of assistance receipt, with the majority of families not receiving any form of assistance.

Exhibit 6-5. Receipt of Assistance in Own Place 18 Months Following Initial Assistance[+]

	Cohort 1 (N=127)	Cohort 2 (N=208)
In own place without assistance	61%	60%
In own place with assistance	39%	40%

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001. [+]Sample is limited to those with ICDB data who were in their own place 18 months after initial assistance; this is 82% of the families in Cohort 1 and 83% of the families in Cohort 2 who were living in their own place at 18 months.

What Were Families' Individual Trajectories of Housing?

Individual trajectories of accessing and staying in housing provide additional insight into the relative success that families had in achieving housing stability in both cohorts. Exhibit 6-6 displays five trajectories. The first two trajectories consist of families who

were able to get into and remain in their own housing through the remainder of the 18-month period. Trajectory 1 families entered housing within 180 days of receiving initial assistance and remained in their own housing. Trajectory 2 families entered housing after the first 180 days (typically within 12 months) and stayed throughout the remainder of the 18-month period. Trajectory 3 families also can be considered relatively successful in that they entered housing, typically in the first 180 days, had an interruption in housing, but then reentered and were living in their own housing at the end of the 18-month period. Taken together, these three trajectories account for 61 percent of the families in Cohort 2 and 39 percent of the families in Cohort 1.

Families in the fourth and fifth trajectories were not successful in achieving housing stability within the 18 month period. Trajectory 4 families, 14 percent of Cohort 2 and six percent of Cohort 1, entered housing during the 18-month period (typically within the first six months), but left it and were living in other places at the end of the 18-month period. Trajectory 5 families did not access their own housing at all during the follow-up period. In Cohort 1, families predominately were still in transitional housing by the end of the 18-month period, whereas the families in Cohort 2 were in doubled up situations, and to a lesser extent, in transitional housing and homeless situations.

Exhibit 6-6. Trajectories in One's Own Housing
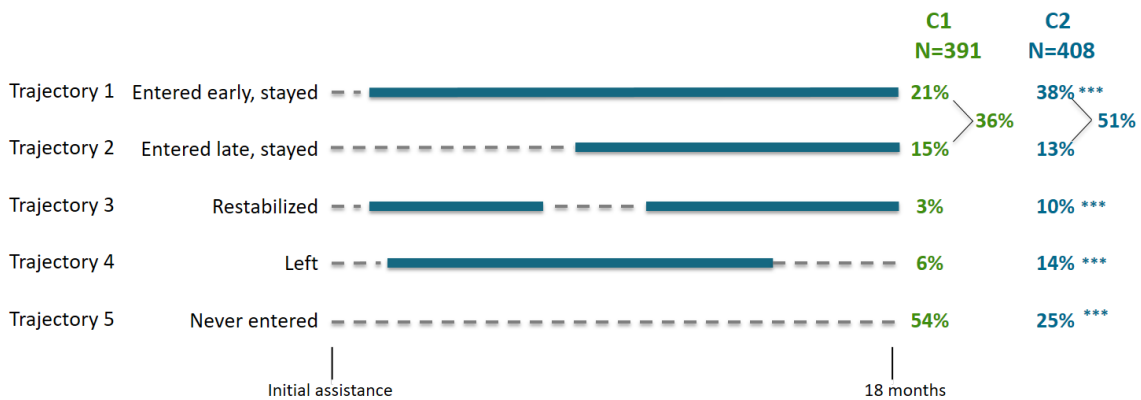
Among Cohort 2 Families, What Individual and Assistance Characteristics Distinguish Families Who Accessed Housing from Those Who Do Not?

Accessing Housing - Descriptive Analysis: We examined differences among the five trajectory groups on a range of HOH and family demographic and background characteristics, human capital, resources, vulnerabilities, and initial assistance received. We also examined differences between the families who did not access housing during the follow-up period (Trajectory 5) with all other trajectory groups that had accessed

housing at least once in the 18 month timeframe. Those patterns that are clearest are the same as those that distinguish Trajectory 5 from all others; therefore, we present those findings here. Complete tables are available in Appendix G.

Compared to all other groups, families in Trajectory 5, who never accessed housing, were significantly more likely to be Hispanic (10% vs 19%), significantly less likely to have attended college (38% vs. 53%), had significantly less median debt at baseline ($4,500 vs. $7,200), and had significantly lower median incomes at baseline ($638 vs. $1,000) than families who accessed housing at some point in the 18-month follow-up. They were less likely to have been homeless as a child (8% vs. 17%) and less likely to have spent time in their own housing in the year prior to entry (42% vs. 58%). No significant differences emerged between the trajectories on other demographic, history, vulnerability, or resource factors.

With respect to initial housing assistance, families in Trajectory 5 were twice as likely to receive transitional housing (19% vs. 8%), and less likely to receive rapid re-housing (13% vs. 24%) (see Exhibit 6-7). Particularly noteworthy is the fact that at each follow-up timeframe, families in Trajectory 5 who never accessed housing were significantly less likely to have a subsidy for permanent housing (such as a Section 8 voucher) than families in other trajectories. In fact, families who accessed housing in the four other trajectory groups were three to four times more likely to have had a subsidy at each of the timeframes and 2.5 times more likely to have had a subsidy at all during the follow-up period than families in Trajectory 5 that never accessed housing in the 18 month period.

Exhibit 6-7. Type of Assistance Received, by Trajectory

	Trajectories 1-4 Accessed Housing (N=308)	Trajectory 5 Never Accessed Housing (N=100)
Initial Assistance		
Shelter	33%	31%
Diversion	30%	36%
Transitional housing	8%	19% **
Rapid Re-housing	24%	13% *
Permanent Supportive Housing	5%	1%
Subsidy Over Time		
Subsidy at 6m	22%	7% **
Subsidy at 12m	23%	6% ***
Subsidy at 18m	26%	7% ***
Ever received a subsidy 6-18m	35%	14%***

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001

Accessing Housing - Multivariate Analysis: Exhibit 6-8 presents the results of a multivariate logistic regression, examining the relative contribution of the individual, county, and assistance factors in predicting whether a family in Cohort 2 was able to access housing during the 18-month follow-up period. Families who did not access housing were less likely to receive rapid re-housing than both diversion and transitional housing, and also were less likely to have a subsidy.

Exhibit 6-8. Predicting Accessing Housing in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance in Cohort 2 (N=393)

Covariate[++]	Odds Ratio
Type of initial assistance (compared to rapid re-housing)	
Diversion/Navigation	0.31*
Shelter	0.54
Transitional housing	0.19**
Permanent supportive housing	2.84
Age	0.98
Race (compared to White)	
Black/African American	2.03*
Multiracial/other	1.56
Hispanic	0.64
Spouse/partner	1.10
Number of kids (compared to 0 or 1)	
2-3	0.55
4+	0.62
Education	
Less than HS	0.79
More than HS	1.65
Employed at entry	0.94
Income at entry	1.20**
Ever convicted of a felony	1.18
History of domestic violence	0.97
Substance abuse screen	1.11
Mental health indicator	0.91
Number of nights in own place in year before entry	1.003*
Experienced a prior eviction	0.51
Has a subsidy	2.69*

*$p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$ *** $p<0.001$.* [+] County is included in the model as a covariate but results are not presented in the table; families in Pierce and Snohomish Counties were more likely to get into their own housing than families in King County.

Additionally, the findings indicate that there were differences among the counties, with fewer families in King County accessing housing than in Pierce and Snohomish Counties. Few individual factors were associated with housing access. Those who were White

(compared to Black/African American), had less income and had less time in their own housing prior to receiving their initial assistance were less likely to access housing.

These findings suggest that differences in housing access may be due less to differences among families and more due to the types of housing assistance and resources received.

Living Situation and Families' Assessment of their Situation

By definition, Trajectory groups 1 through 3 were living in their own housing 18 months after receipt of initial assistance. As Exhibit 6-9 shows, at 18 months, families in Trajectory 5 (who never entered housing) were primarily living in doubled up situations, transitional housing, and homeless situations. The housing situations of families of those who dropped out of housing (Trajectory 4) were similar in some respects to those who never accessed housing, but with higher rates of homelessness and lower rates of transitional housing; 46 percent were doubled up, 5 percent in transitional housing, 11 percent in shelter, 26 percent were unsheltered, and 12 percent were in other housing.

Exhibit 6-9. Where Families Who Never Accessed Housing Were Living 18 Months Following Initial Assistance
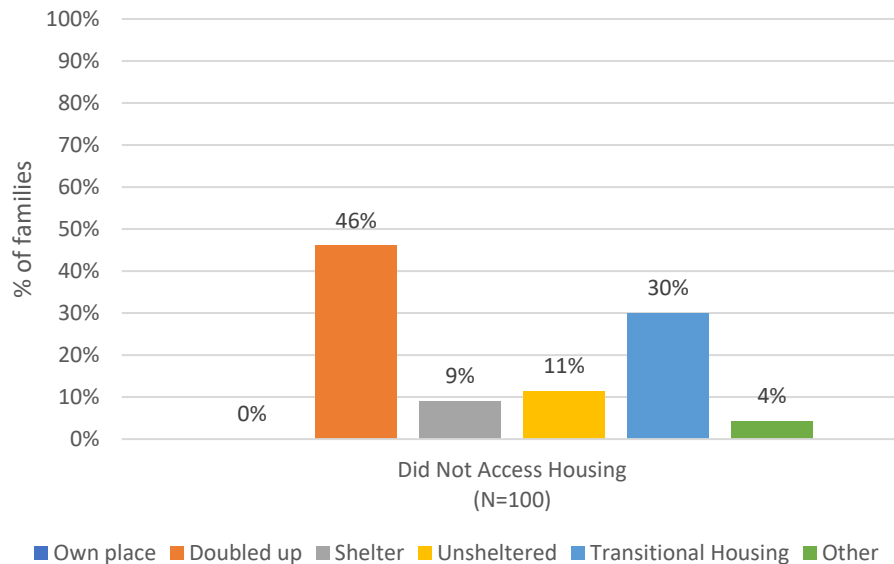
Also, not surprisingly, at each follow-up interview, families who never accessed housing were significantly more likely than other groups to rate their housing situation as a bad or very bad fit at all follow-ups (33% vs. 13% at 6 months, 42% vs. 17% at 12 months and 28% vs. 16% at 18 months), and less likely to rate it as very good, although the difference was not significant at 18 months (18% vs. 40% at 6 months, 18% vs. 33% at 12 months and 20% vs. 25% at 18 months).

Support from System

We examined the type of support families received through their case managers and others in the system, including receipt of lists of addresses and/or landlords, referrals to an online database of private landlords, help finding an apartment, help applying for a housing subsidy, help dealing with the public housing authority, and help with getting an ID or birth certificate. We explored differences among the trajectory groups in what supports were received at each six-month interview follow-up (see Appendix G).

Families who never accessed housing (Trajectory 5) were somewhat (but not significantly) less likely than all other groups to receive many of these types of support in the first six months after entry, but were more likely to receive a range of supports 12 and 18 months after entry. By 12 months, families who did not access their own housing were significantly more likely than those who were in their own housing to receive a list of addresses and/or landlords (22% vs. 10%), referrals to an online database of landlords (22% vs. 10%), and help in finding an apartment (17% vs. 7%). Likewise, 18 months after entry, families who did not access their own housing were significantly more likely than those who were in their own housing to receive help in applying for a subsidy (13% vs. 4%) and working with the public housing authority (14% vs. 6%), and with getting IDs and birth certificates (16% vs. 6%). The percentages of families receiving assistance at these later time periods were comparable to the percentages of those receiving assistance in other groups in the first six months after entry, although it is important note that the highest percentage was still less than a quarter of the families. These findings suggest that at least some of the families were still connected to some level of support in seeking housing.

Exhibit 6-10 presents examples of families' experiences in each of the five trajectories.

Exhibit 6-10. Examples of Cohort 2 Families' Experiences, by Trajectory

Trajectory 1   Entered early, stayed

Tom, Jessica, and their young daughter lost their apartment in a fire. They paid for motels for as long as they could afford to before contacting the system. After going through coordinated entry, they entered a family shelter, where they stayed for about six weeks before moving into their own apartment. They received diversion assistance to help them exit shelter, including money for a deposit for the apartment and help obtaining identification cards. The family did not receive any additional assistance from the system, and Tom and Jessica were able to support the family on income from both their jobs for the remainder of the study. Jessica also returned to school to pursue a degree and was optimistic about her career.

Trajectory 2   Entered late, stayed

Angela was a 36-year-old mother of two, living with her husband and working part-time as a home health aide. She and her children left their home because her husband was abusive. She lived in her car and her children stayed with relatives, while she looked for a safe place for them all to stay. She contacted coordinated entry and was referred to a rapid re-housing program. However, she found it difficult to find an apartment near her children's school and large enough for the three of them that she would be able to afford after the rapid re-housing assistance ended. After two months in her car, she and her children moved into a domestic violence shelter where they stayed until she found an apartment. She received money for a security deposit and moving expenses and six months of rental assistance. She increased her hours at work and was still in the apartment at the end of the follow-up after the assistance ended.

Trajectory 3   Restabilized

Sharon was sharing a house with her adult daughters, but family disagreements caused her daughters to move out, and she could not afford the rent on her own, as she was receiving income only from SSI for herself and SSDI for her 12-year old daughter. She contacted 211 to ask for housing assistance for herself and her minor child. She received rapid re-housing and stayed in a family shelter for six weeks while looking for an apartment. She stayed in the apartment for about six months but could not afford the rent on her limited income after her rapid-rehousing assistance ended. She moved out of the apartment and stayed with various friends and family while she looked for a more affordable apartment. By the end of the study, she and her young daughter had moved into a low-income apartment that she could afford.

Trajectory 4   Left – – · ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬ – – – – –

Ruby, an unemployed, 28-year-old, single mother of a baby moved out of her boyfriend's apartment when their relationship ended. She stayed in her car for a few days but was able to move into shelter soon after contacting coordinated entry. While in shelter, she was offered rapid re-housing assistance and found an apartment within two months. She stayed in that apartment with rental assistance for about six months but could not afford to pay the rent when her rental assistance ended. While receiving rapid re-housing, she was offered assistance to find a job but said she could not work because she did not have childcare for her baby. She left that apartment and moved in with an aunt who lived out-of-state where she remained for the rest of the follow-up period.

Trajectory 5   Never entered –

A single father with three children, Jacob was renting from his parents and had to suddenly move out of their house. He contacted his church for help and they told him how to contact the homeless system. At the time, he was working as a tow truck driver and received SNAP. He was offered diversion assistance to help him with move-in costs for a new apartment. While he was looking for an apartment, he stayed in a church shelter. Though he had income and assistance from the diversion program, he was turned down at all of the apartments he applied for. He believed that his criminal history and large family were the biggest barriers to accessing permanent housing. He lost contact with homeless providers and lived with his family and friends for the remainder of the 18 month period.

Family Perspectives on Challenges to Accessing Housing and Recommendations for Improvements

When asked whether there was anything that made it difficult for them to move into permanent housing, 84 percent of families in Cohort 2 cited one or more factors. Interestingly, families who did not access housing were no more likely to cite challenges than families who did access housing. Additionally, there were not differences between the two groups in the factors cited. The most common responses offered by families in both groups included the lack of affordable housing in their communities (noted by 28% of families) and problems with their rental history, especially with evictions, (noted by 24% of families). One HOH shared, "An eviction on my record made things really hard to find housing." Others indicated insufficient income to pay for application fees, security deposits, and rent (15%), as well as problems with their credit histories that dissuaded landlords from renting to them (12%). One family cited "bad credit and no consistent

rental history" as reasons she was not in housing. Nine percent of families indicated their criminal history or other legal issues posed barriers to finding apartments. Other reasons, cited by fewer than five percent of families, included personal reasons (such as divorce or a death in the family), restrictive program rules or eligibility criteria, landlords that don't accept assistance, and insufficient assistance.

We also asked families what one change they would make to the system to help families make it on their own. The most common answers, each cited by about 20 percent of families, included more and longer assistance; more help finding affordable housing, including help identifying landlords who would rent to them; more navigation and communication on the process from case managers and other staff; and easier access to assistance, including more assessment appointments, shorter waitlists, and fewer eligibility criteria.

More assistance:
  "More opportunities to help people to stay in the same community. It is not practical to move."

  "I would make sure families had more leeway. Stay on and make sure families are okay before releasing them from services."

Help finding affordable housing:
  "Make it easier for families like myself with low income or only receiving child support and TANF to obtain affordable housing."

  "Make it easier to use a Section 8. Make landlords accept the vouchers."

  "For landlords not to have income requirements."

More navigation and communication:
  "Tell us what resources are available and how to access them."

  "Better communication!!!"

  "Hire more people to help. They have too many cases for one person and they're too busy to help. Call people back. Do what they say they're going to do."

"Provide on-going assistance. Someone checking in on us. Follow-up to make sure we're staying stable."

Easier access to assistance:

"I would change the way to get into programs. For example, why do I have to be living in my car before starting the process?"

"It's hard to juggle kids, work, agency paperwork, requirements, and appointments. I miss work and lose pay."

"I would make [assistance] accessible to more people who need it. Less restrictions."

Other answers, including prevention assistance; assistance with education, employment, and childcare; or health and behavioral health services, were noted by fewer than five percent of the families.

Section 7. The Family Impact Study: Effects of Systems Reform on Families' Employment, Income, Parent-Child Intactness, and Children's School-Related Outcomes

> *Families served after systems reform (Cohort 2), compared to families served prior to reform (Cohort 1), were significantly more likely to have increased employment and income, but did not experience significant differences in parent-child intactness, chronic absenteeism from school, or school transitions.*
>
> *In both cohorts, families with more human capital (e.g., higher education, higher incomes and employment) at baseline were more likely to have increased employment, income, and parent-child intactness throughout the 18 month follow-up period, while families who spent more time homeless in the year prior to system entry had worse outcomes. Family characteristics, with the exception of chronic absenteeism and school changes at baseline, were not related to chronic absenteeism among children. Children in both cohorts experienced comparable school moves over time.*

The Family Homelessness Systems Initiative's (FHI) primary focus was to reduce family homelessness and foster housing stability, but several additional outcomes were considered important secondary outcomes. These included changes in HOHs' employment, family income, parent-child intactness, and in children's school-related outcomes of absenteeism and school stability.

Employment

Economic opportunities was a practice pillar in the Initiative's Theory of Action, and each of the three counties spent considerable effort trying to develop different employment and education strategies to bolster families' human capital and their ability to gain income to strengthen their self-sufficiency. After systems reform, all three counties engaged in some employment programs, and more efforts were put into place than were found in the two contrast counties (see Rog et al., forthcoming in 2021); however, none of the counties were successful in creating sustainable programs or programs that served large numbers of families or in creating linkages with the more traditional employment support systems to focus more deliberately on this population.

Therefore, expectations were lowered for large or significant changes in employment and income during the follow-up period.

As described earlier, upon receiving initial assistance, families in Cohort 2 were already engaged in the workforce at double the rate of families in Cohort 1. On average, their hourly wages and the number of hours they worked were significantly higher than Cohort 1 families, contributing to significantly higher incomes for Cohort 2 families. At six months, these differences remained, but the proportion of increase between baseline and six months was comparable for both cohorts. Our six month analysis found that families in both cohorts experienced significant increases in employment six months after they received the initial assistance, but the difference in the amount of increase between the two cohorts was not statistically significant when individual differences were controlled (Rog, et al, 2018). These trends, as noted in Section 1, mirror what is seen in these two cohort timeframes across the broader populations in these three demonstration counties, as well as in all non-demonstration comparison counties.

Overall findings: Families served after systems reform (Cohort 2), compared to families served prior to reform (Cohort 1), were significantly more likely to be employed over the 18 months following receipt of initial assistance.

Employment - Descriptive Analysis: Over the course of the 18-month follow-up, families in both cohorts experienced significant increases in employment, but the difference between the two cohorts in the amount of increase from baseline to 18 months (10% for Cohort 2 and 14% for Cohort 1 as shown in Exhibit 7-1) based on descriptive analysis was not statistically different.

Over the course of the 18-month follow-up period, families in Cohort 1 worked an average of five months, while families in Cohort 2 worked significantly more, with an average of seven months. This significant difference between cohorts in the amount of time worked is true in King and Snohomish Counties, but represents a marginally significant trend in Pierce County.

Exhibit 7-1. Employment in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance [+]
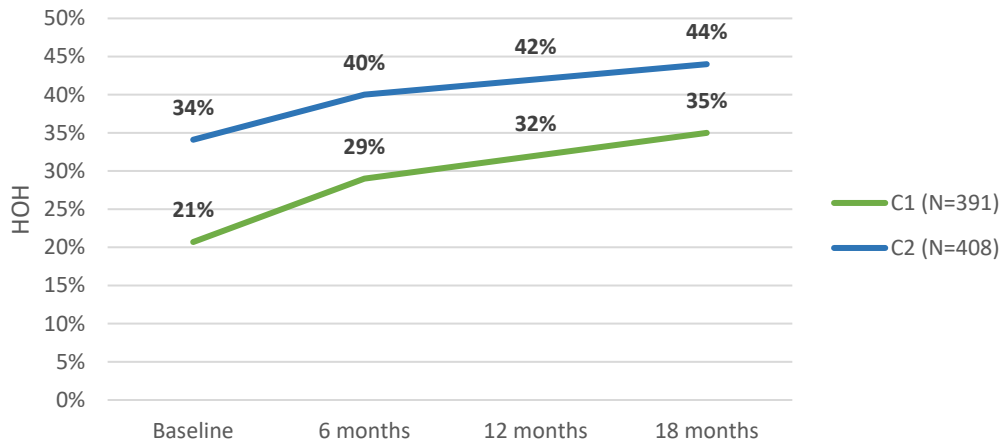
[+] Rates of employment for Cohort 2 families are significantly higher ($p < 0.01$) than for Cohort 1 families at each point in time over the 18 months following initial assistance. Both cohorts show significant increases ($p < 0.001$) in employment over the 18 months following initial assistance.

Exhibit 7-2. Months Employed in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance

	Cohort 1 (N=391)	Cohort 2 (N=408)
Total Months Employed Over 18 Months	5.2	7.1 ***
By time period:		
Entry – 6 Months	1.5	2.1***
6 – 12 Months	1.8	2.4***
12 – 18 Months	1.9	2.6***

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001

Additional descriptive analyses of employment show that both cohorts not only increase in their rates of employment, but also in the average number of hours worked and the average wages earned. As Exhibit 7-3 shows, at 18 months, for each cohort, the average hours worked increased by approximately four to five hours from baseline (a statistically significant change in Cohort 2, and a marginally significant trend in Cohort 1), and the average hourly wage increased by approximately $1 (a statistically significant change in both cohorts). At each wave, however, the hours and wages were significantly higher for Cohort 2 than Cohort 1. This pattern of differences across cohorts for hours and wages at each time point is generally consistent in all three counties as well, with a few exceptions: In King County, hours do not differ between the two cohorts at 12 months. In Pierce County, hours worked at 12 and 18 months stay consistent from Cohort 1 to 2,

and wages differ only at 6 and 12 months. In Snohomish County, hours no longer differ between cohorts at 12 and 18 months.

Across cohorts, families reported a wide range of jobs, though they were frequently in a handful of sectors or categories of jobs, including food service, retail, caregiving/in-home care/daycare, customer service or telemarketing, office administrative assistance or clerical work, warehouses, health care support, and housekeeping and cleaning.

Exhibit 7-3. Average Hours Worked and Wages Earned in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance [+]

	Cohort 1		Cohort 2	
	Hours Worked	Wages Earned	Hours Worked	Wages Earned
Baseline (N=81, 139)	26	$10.36	32 **	$12.55 ***
6 Months (N=112, 165)	30	$10.70	36 **	$12.80 ***
12 Months (N=124, 172)	31	$11.14	35 *	$13.87 ***
18 months (N=136, 181)	32	$11.33	36 *	$13.55 ***

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001. [+]Among those employed at each time period.

Employment - Multivariate Analysis:

Logistic regression examining employment status at 18 months following initial assistance (Exhibit 7-4) indicates that Cohort 2 HOHs were more likely than Cohort 1 HOHs to be working at 18 months, controlling for individual characteristics, including employment status, upon receipt of initial assistance.

Within each cohort, HOHs with greater odds of being employed at 18 months are those who were employed at entry, had higher incomes at baseline, and were of Hispanic ethnicity. HOHs with a lower odds of being employed were those who had a spouse or partner, had more nights homeless prior to

> **Logistic Regression**
> Examines the influence of cohort on differences in dichotomous variables such as whether one is employed or not, controlling for the potential influence of other key variables included in the model. The odds ratio indicates the probability that the outcome will occur given each covariate occurs. An odds ratio above 1 indicates the factor improves the odds of that outcome; an odds ratio less than 1 decreases the odds of that outcome. For example, families in Cohort 2 have greater odds than families in Cohort 1 of being employed (cohort having an odds ratio of 1.92), while families with a mental health indicator have lower odds of being employed than families without a mental health indicator (odds ratio of 0.7).

receiving assistance, had a mental health indicator, were older, or were convicted of a felony.

Exhibit 7-4. Predicting Employment in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance (N=762)

Covariate[+]	Odds Ratio
Cohort 2 (compared to Cohort 1)	1.92***
Age	0.99*
Race (compared to White)	
Black/African American	1.14
Multiracial/other race	1.02
Hispanic	1.46*
Spouse/partner	0.54***
Number of kids (compared to 0 or 1)	
2-3	0.81
4+	1.02
Education	
Less than HS	0.91
More than HS	1.24
Employed at entry	2.10***
Income at entry	1.15***
Ever convicted of a felony	0.65*
History of domestic violence	0.95
Substance abuse screen	1.01
Mental health indicator	0.70**
Number of nights homeless in year before entry	0.997 ***

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001. [+]County is included in the model as a covariate but results are not presented in the table; HOHs in Pierce County and Snohomish County were less likely to be employed than those in King County.

We ran additional models, using hierarchical linear modeling, to examine not only the effects of baseline factors on employment, but how changes over the 18 months in a number of variables, such as time spent in own housing, affect employment. These models, available in Appendix F, indicate that a greater number of nights in one's own place over the 18 months is significantly associated with an increased likelihood of being employed over time. Experiencing probation or parole over the 18 months also is associated with decreased likelihood of employment over time.

Income

Overall findings: Families served after systems reform (Cohort 2), compared to families served prior to reform (Cohort 1), had significantly higher incomes at baseline and experienced a greater increase in income over the course of the 18 months.

Income - Descriptive Analysis: Descriptive data[22] indicate that families experienced significant increases in income that varied between cohorts. As Exhibit 7-5 shows, although families in both cohorts experienced comparable increases in total median dollars between baseline and 18 months ($264 in Cohort 1 and $250 in Cohort), families in Cohort 1 experienced a higher rate of increase from baseline to 18 months than families in Cohort 2. That is, families in Cohort 1 experienced a 55% increase from $478 to $742 between baseline and 18 months whereas families in Cohort 2 experienced a 28% increase, from $900 to $1,150, in the 18-month period.

Exhibit 7-5. Monthly Median Income in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance [+]

[+] Median income is higher in Cohort 2 than Cohort 1 at each point in time over the 18 months following initial assistance. Median income increases significantly for both cohorts over the 18 months following initial assistance.

Income - Multivariate Analysis: Multivariate analysis of income, using ordinary least squares regression, found that Cohort 2 families had higher incomes at 18 months than families in Cohort 1, even when controlling on income at baseline and other characteristics (see Exhibit 7-6). Within each cohort, families with higher incomes at baseline, some college education (as compared to a high school degree), and four or more children (as compared to 0 or 1) had higher incomes at 18 months.

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[22] Descriptive data present non-adjusted median income for each cohort. Regression models include inflation adjusted measures.

Exhibit 7-6. Predicting Income in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance (N=758)[+]

Covariate[++]	Coefficient
Cohort 2 (compared to Cohort 1)	0.34 *
Age	0.01
Race (compared to White)	
Black/African American	-0.06
Multiracial/other race	-0.06
Hispanic	-0.14
Spouse/partner	0.07
Number of kids (compared to 0 or 1)	
2-3	0.25
4+	0.77 **
Education	
Less than HS	0.01
More than HS	0.47 **
Employed at entry	-0.08
Income at entry	0.20 ***
Ever convicted of a felony	-0.34
History of domestic violence	0.09
Substance abuse screen	-0.11
Mental health indicator	0.01
Number of nights homeless in year before entry	-0.001

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$ *** $p<0.001$. [+] Income is inflation-adjusted to account for differences over time in the value of a dollar and log-adjusted to account for skewness in its distribution. Using the log of income produces a more normal distribution. [++]County is included in the model as a covariate, but results are not presented in the table; findings do not differ significantly across counties.

Parent-Child Intactness

One of the hoped-for outcomes from increasing access to housing for families experiencing homelessness is the ability to maintain the intactness of their family or to be reunified with children from whom they had been separated, especially if separation was due, at least in part, to experiencing homelessness or being in unstable residential arrangements. Parent-child intactness refers to having all one's children living with one, and not being separated from one or more children either voluntarily or due to an order of Child Protective Services (CPS).

Overall findings: There were no significant cohort differences in rates of parent-child intactness at 18 months, controlling for status at baseline.

Parent-Child Intactness - Descriptive Analysis: Comparable percentages of families in the outcome sample in both cohorts have one or more children living away from the family at the time they receive initial assistance (23% for Cohort 1, 20% for Cohort 2). The majority of families were intact throughout the 18-month follow-up period, with

more than three-quarters of families in each cohort intact at each wave and 69 percent of the families in Cohort 1 and 72 percent in Cohort 2 remaining intact for the entire 18-month follow-up period. Among non-intact families, 18 percent of families in Cohort 1 and 13 percent of families in Cohort 2 remained separated for the whole period. The remaining families experienced reunifications and/or separations at one or more times during the 18-month period, with four percent or fewer families experiencing a separation at each wave and five percent or fewer families experiencing a reunification. During each six month timeframe of the follow-up period, the percentages of families who were intact, were newly reunified, always or newly separated were generally comparable across time periods and cohorts (Exhibit 7-7).[23] All three counties had comparable patterns of findings.

The most common reasons parents identified for a child being out of the home across both cohorts included another parent or family member having legal custody, removal by CPS or a court, and the HOH choosing to have the child live away while homeless or for another reason.

Exhibit 7-7. Parent-Child Intactness in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance

	B-6	6-12	12-18
Cohort 1	**(N=337)**	**(N=346)**	**(N=375)**
Intact	74%	74%	75%
Apart	18%	21%	21%
Newly Separated	3%	1%	2%
Newly Reunified	5%	4%	3%
Cohort 2	**(N=320)**	**(N=327)**	**(N=393)**
Intact	77%	78%	77%
Apart	15%	15%*	16%
Newly Separated	3%	4%*	3%
Newly Reunified	4%	3%	4%

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001. Significance compares families in Cohort 1 to families in Cohort 2 for each category; + Among families with an eligible child in the household.

Parent-Child Intactness - Multivariate Analysis: Exhibit 7-8 presents a multivariate logistic regression predicting parent-child intactness at 18 months. There were no significant differences between the two cohorts. The results indicate that, by far, the

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[23] The only significant differences in parent-child intactness over time for families in the two cohorts were that during the 6- to12-month timeframe those in Cohort 2 were less likely to be separated for the whole period and more likely to be newly separated than those in Cohort 1.

most significant and primary characteristic determining parent-child intactness at 18 months was parent-child intactness at baseline. Families with HOHs with higher baseline incomes and those with more than a high school degree and those with less than a high school degree were both more likely than those with a high school degree to be intact at 18 months. Families experiencing a greater number of nights homeless prior to entry, who were multiracial, and who had four or more children were less likely to be intact at 18 months.

Exhibit 7-8. Parent-Child Intactness in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance (N=731)

Covariate[+]	Odds Ratio
Cohort 2 (compared to Cohort 1)	1.30
Age	1.02
Race (compared to White)	
Black/African American	1.01
Multiracial/other race	0.53*
Hispanic	1.75
Spouse/partner	1.11
Number of kids (compared to 0 or 1)	
2-3	0.45
4+	0.28*
Family intact at baseline	154.30***
Education	
Less than HS	1.82*
More than HS	2.82***
Employed at entry	0.76
Income at entry	1.12*
Ever convicted of a felony	0.83
History of domestic Violence	0.90
Substance abuse	0.88
Mental health indicator	0.78
Number of nights homeless in year before entry	0.997**

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001. [+]County is included in the model as a covariate but results are not presented in the table; there are no significant differences across the counties.

Children's School-Related Outcomes

Two final secondary outcomes with respect to children's schooling included school attendance and school transitions. We examined both of these outcomes for school-aged children only.

Overall findings: There were no significant cohort differences in school-aged children's chronic absenteeism or number of school moves.

School Attendance - Descriptive Analysis: With respect to school attendance, we focused our analysis on absenteeism, examining changes in the percentage of children who were chronically absent (i.e., had six or more absences from school in the last three months[24]) over the course of the 18-month follow-up. As Exhibit 7-9 indicates, the rate of chronic absenteeism remained stable across the 18-month period for families in Cohort 2 (22% to 21%), and decreased (non-significantly) for families in Cohort 1 (30% to 21%), so that both cohorts had comparable rates at 18 months.

Exhibit 7-9. Percentage of Target Children Experiencing Chronic Absenteeism in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance
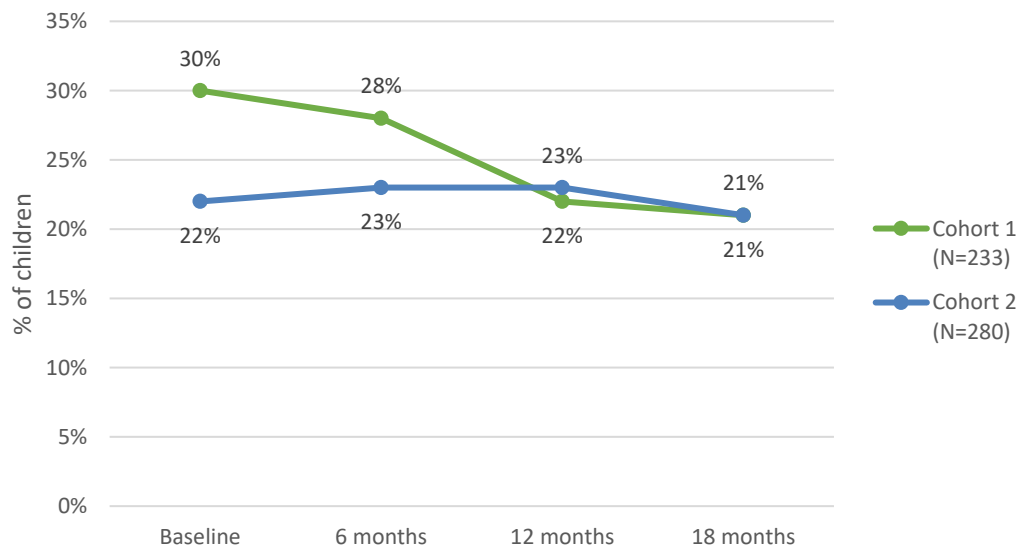
* p<0.05   ** p<0.01   *** p<0.001

School Attendance - Multivariate Analysis: Multivariate analysis, using logistic regression, indicated there was no association between cohort and chronic absenteeism rates at 18 months (see Exhibit 7-10). Children who experienced chronic absenteeism at baseline were significantly more likely to experience it at 18 months. Children who changed schools for a move at baseline were less likely to experience chronic absenteeism at 18 months. Other individual characteristics were not related to the outcome.

Exhibit 7-10. Predicting Chronic Absenteeism among School-Aged Target Children 18 Months Following Initial Assistance (N=367)

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[24] This measure is consistent with measures of chronic absenteeism used by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). If the interview was conducted during the summer, HOHs were instructed to report on the last three months of the previous school year.

Covariate[+]	Odds Ratio
Cohort 2 (compared to Cohort 1)	1.25
Child age	1.07
Child gender	0.99
Race (compared to White)	
Black/African American	0.81
Multiracial/other race	0.62
Hispanic	0.59
Any child living away at baseline	0.53
Child is in good or excellent health	0.73
Any special needs at baseline	0.98
Chronic absenteeism at baseline	5.19***
Changed schools for a move at baseline	0.61*
Parent education (compared to HS)	
Less than HS	1.52
More than HS	0.81
Number of nights homeless in year before entry	0.0009
Number of moves in 18 months following entry	0.99

*p<0.05   **p<0.01   ***p<0.001.* [+]County is included in the model as a covariate, but results are not presented in the table; families in Pierce County were less likely than those in King County to report chronic absenteeism.

School Transitions – Descriptive Analysis: As Exhibit 7-11 indicates, 24 percent of school-aged target children in Cohort 1 and 32 percent of school-aged target children in Cohort 2 changed schools upon receipt of their families' initial assistance. In subsequent waves, the percentage of children in each cohort that changed schools due to a move increased, such that by 18 months, fewer than a third of children (27% and 28%) had never changed schools due to a move and 7-8 percent of children had changed schools three or four times.[25]

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[25] We estimated a multivariate model of school changes but do not present it as none of the covariates included in the model are associated with the outcome.

Exhibit 7-11. Cumulative Count of School Transitions due to Housing Among School-Aged Target Children in the 18 Months Following Initial Assistance

	Cohort 1 (N=147)	Cohort 2 (N=169)
Baseline		
0	76%	68%
1	24%	32%
6 months		
0	58%	53%
1	36%	42%
2	6%	5%
12 months		
0	37%	37%
1	45%	43%
2	16%	18%
3	2%	2%
18 months		
0	27%	28%
1	37%	37%
2	29%	27%
3	5%	7%
4	2%	1%

Examining Patterns of Factors Related to Secondary Outcomes

Exhibit 7-12 provides a summary of the findings across employment, income, and parent-child intactness. Overall, families after reform realized increases in HOHs' employment and income, but no differences in their intactness. Not surprisingly, individual factors also played a strong significant role in predicting these outcomes. Having a higher income and more than a high school education at baseline generally was linked to better outcomes for families while having spent more time homeless prior to system entry was linked to worse outcomes. Other factors, such as being older in age, being multiracial or Hispanic, having a spouse or partner, more children, an intact family at baseline, a mental health indicator, or a felony conviction played a role for individual outcomes but did not form a pattern across outcomes. Being in one's own housing over the 18 months also fostered obtaining employment.

Exhibit 7-12. Summary of Trends across Secondary Outcomes[+]

	Employment	Income	Parent-Child Intactness
Cohort 2 (systems reform)	🟩 Green	🟩 Green	
Older HOHs	🟥 Red		
Multiracial			🟥 Red
Hispanic	🟩 Green		
Spouse/partner at baseline	🟥 Red		
More children		🟩 Green	🟥 Red
Family intact at baseline			🟩 Green
More than high school education at baseline		🟩 Green	🟩 Green
Employed at baseline	🟩 Green		
Higher income at baseline	🟩 Green	🟩 Green	🟩 Green
Prior felony conviction	🟥 Red		
MH indicator at baseline	🟥 Red		
More nights homeless in prior year	🟥 Red		🟥 Red

[+]Green cells indicate improved outcomes and red cells indicate worse outcomes.

Section 8. Examining Patterns of Outcomes by Race and Ethnicity

In all three counties, families who are Black/African American and other non-White races as well as those who are Hispanic are disproportionately represented among families experiencing homelessness, even among families living below the poverty line.

While families participating in the evaluation are largely reflective of the racial and ethnic distribution of families in the HMIS in each of the three counties, small sample sizes for a number of racial categories, including Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Pacific Islander prevent us from disaggregating housing and homelessness outcomes by race. Instead, we have collapsed race into three categories for inclusion in multivariate models:

- *White alone;*
- *Black/African American alone or in combination with other races; and*
- *Multiracial/Other race (non-White, non-Black/African American)*

We also included a separate measure for Hispanic ethnicity.

There were few differences in housing and family-related outcomes by race, adjusting for other characteristics. Across cohorts, there were no significant differences between families with a Black/African American HOH and families with a White HOH. Families with a HOH that was multiracial or another race tended to have better housing outcomes than families with a White HOH. However, families with a HOH identifying as Hispanic were less likely to access housing and, in turn, spent fewer nights in housing. Greater understanding of the barriers encountered by families headed by Hispanic HOHs is needed to clarify how best to add or modify interventions to provide more equitable access to housing.

Racial/Ethnic Disproportionality among Families Experiencing Homelessness

Prior studies have documented that families experiencing homelessness disproportionately identify as Black/African American or other non-White races (e.g., Rog & Buckner, 2007). Exhibit 8-1 displays the disproportionality of race among families experiencing poverty and homelessness in the three counties.

In King County, HOHs identifying as White made up the largest percentage of families in the population overall (72%) and among those living below the poverty line (46%), yet comprised only 26 percent of the families who received homelessness assistance (e.g., shelter, transitional housing, rapid re-housing), as measured by the HMIS. In contrast, HOHs identifying as Black/African American represented just five percent of the overall population in the county, 18 percent of the population living in poverty, and more than half (54%) of the families experiencing homelessness. Similarly, HOHs identifying as American Indian/Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, and other races were also over-represented among families experiencing homelessness. In addition to White HOHs, Asian and multiracial HOHs were underrepresented among those receiving assistance.
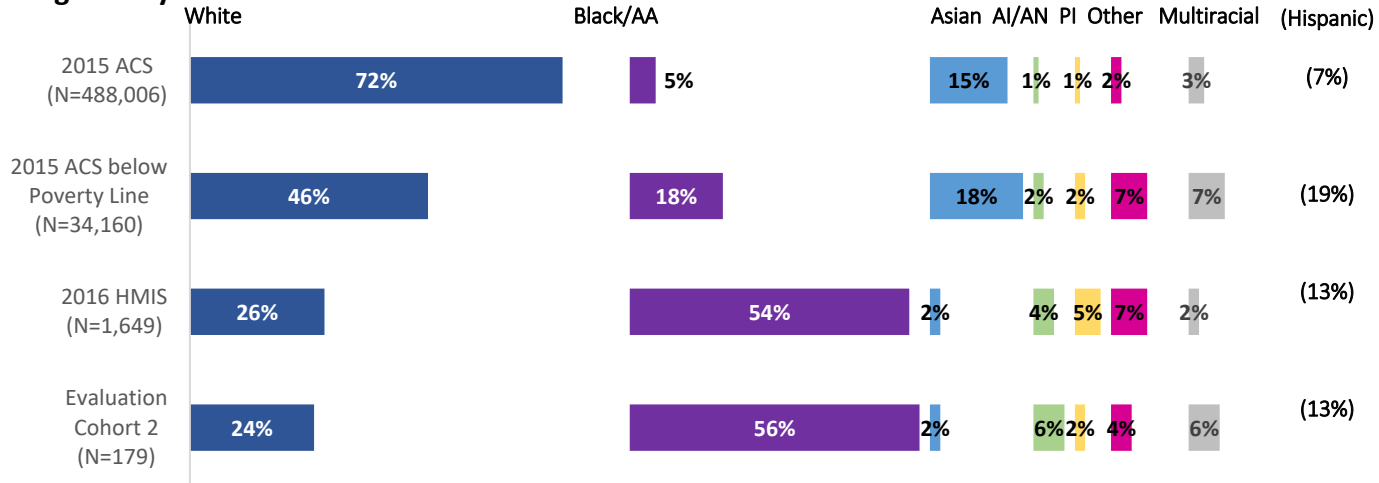
These patterns were similar in Pierce County. White HOHs, though the largest percentage of people experiencing homelessness, were underrepresented and HOHs identifying as people of color were overrepresented. For example, Black/African American HOHs were three times more common among people experiencing homelessness than among people living in poverty (32% vs. 10%) and 4.5 times more common than among the overall population (32% vs. 7%). Among other families, the largest percentage to receive homeless services were those identifying as other races at 13 percent.

Of all three counties, Snohomish County had the largest proportion of White families in the overall population (83%), living in poverty (72%), and experiencing homelessness (70%). Even so, HOHs identifying as Black/African American, Pacific Islander, and other races remained overrepresented among families experiencing homelessness.
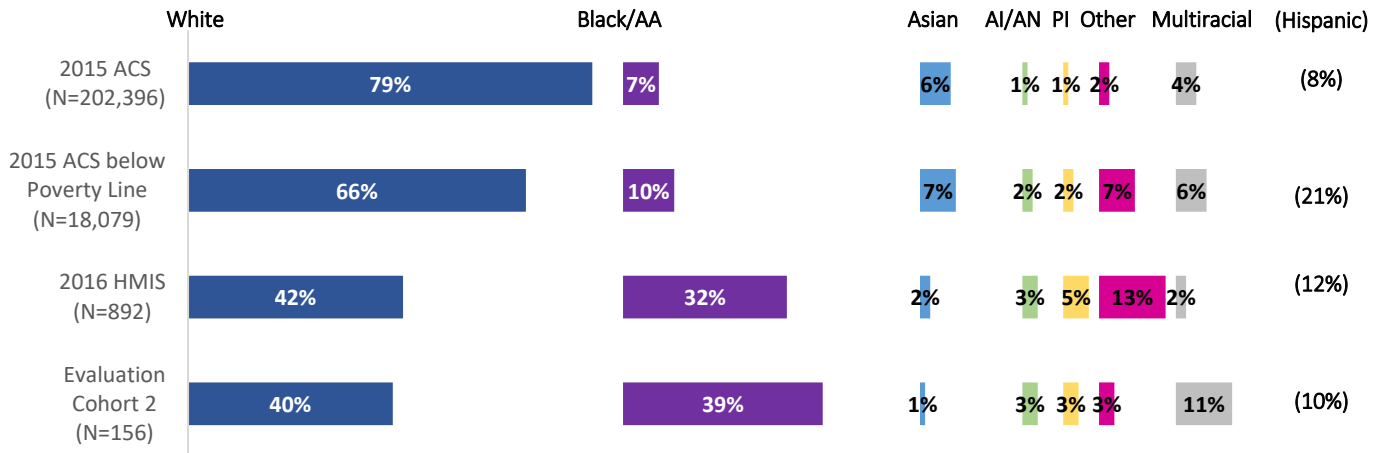
In all three counties, HOHs identifying as Hispanic were more common among families experiencing homelessness than families in the overall population, but less common than among families living in poverty. This suggests that Hispanic families living in poverty may have protective factors, such as family networks, that prevent them from experiencing homelessness at the same rates as other people of color living in poverty.
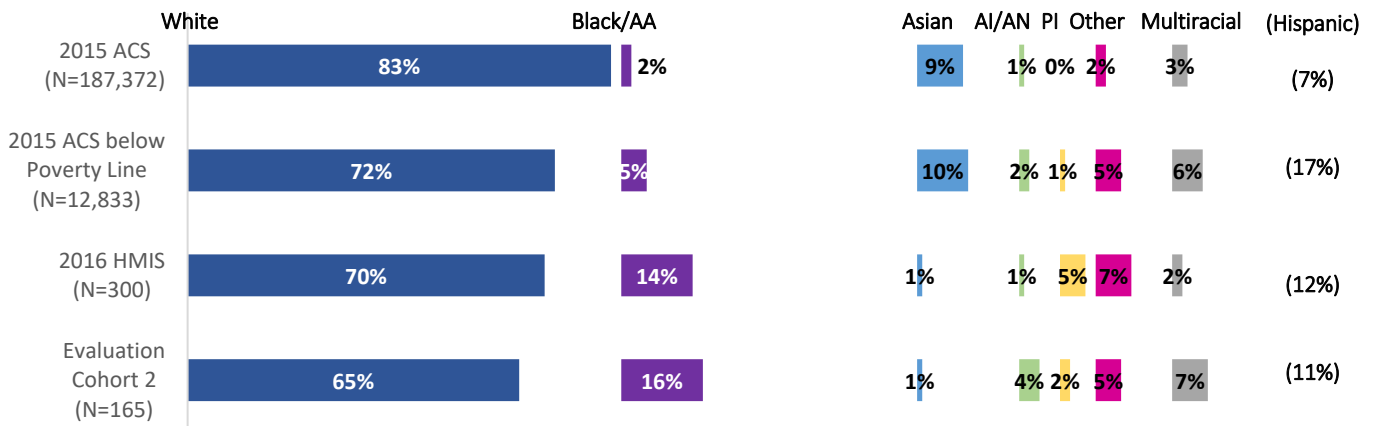
Exhibit 8-1. Racial/Ethnic Distribution by County

King County

	White	Black/AA	Asian	AI/AN	PI	Other	Multiracial	(Hispanic)
2015 ACS (N=488,006)	72%	5%	15%	1%	1%	2%	3%	(7%)
2015 ACS below Poverty Line (N=34,160)	46%	18%	18%	2%	2%	7%	7%	(19%)
2016 HMIS (N=1,649)	26%	54%	2%	4%	5%	7%	2%	(13%)
Evaluation Cohort 2 (N=179)	24%	56%	2%	6%	2%	4%	6%	(13%)

Pierce County

	White	Black/AA	Asian	AI/AN	PI	Other	Multiracial	(Hispanic)
2015 ACS (N=202,396)	79%	7%	6%	1%	1%	2%	4%	(8%)
2015 ACS below Poverty Line (N=18,079)	66%	10%	7%	2%	2%	7%	6%	(21%)
2016 HMIS (N=892)	42%	32%	2%	3%	5%	13%	2%	(12%)
Evaluation Cohort 2 (N=156)	40%	39%	1%	3%	3%	3%	11%	(10%)

Snohomish County

	White	Black/AA	Asian	AI/AN	PI	Other	Multiracial	(Hispanic)
2015 ACS (N=187,372)	83%	2%	9%	1%	0%	2%	3%	(7%)
2015 ACS below Poverty Line (N=12,833)	72%	5%	10%	2%	1%	5%	6%	(17%)
2016 HMIS (N=300)	70%	14%	1%	1%	5%	7%	2%	(12%)
Evaluation Cohort 2 (N=165)	65%	16%	1%	4%	2%	5%	7%	(11%)

Cohort Families' Race and Ethnicity

The evaluation focused on obtaining as close to a census of families in each cohort as possible, recruiting families to be representative of all families receiving assistance at the time. As Exhibit 8-1 shows, the Cohort 2 race distribution is comparable to that of all families found in each county's HMIS.[26] There are few notable differences between the HMIS and Cohort 2. In Pierce County, the evaluation includes more HOHs that identify as Black/African American (39% vs. 32%) and multiracial (11% vs. 2%), and fewer HOHs that identify as other races (3% vs. 13%). In Snohomish County, Cohort 2 includes slightly smaller percentages of HOHs that identify as White (65% vs 70 and larger percentages of families identifying as multiracial (7% vs. 2%). In all three counties, the percentage of HOHs identifying as Hispanic is reflective of the percentage of families in the HMIS.

The cohorts' sample sizes and their racial distributions limited the types of analyses we were able to conduct. The cohorts included small numbers of families in many race categories, including Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Pacific Islander and those categories were unequally distributed across county, thus prohibiting the ability to disaggregate the housing and homelessness outcomes by each of these groups. Instead, in our analyses we collapsed across three groups: HOHs identifying as
- White alone;
- Black/African American alone or in combination with other races; and
- Multiracial/Other race (non-White, non-Black/African American) races

In multivariate regressions, when including multiple discrete groups, one category must be the reference category. In the models included in these analyses, we used HOHs identifying as White as the reference category. Thus, the regression models compared the experiences of HOHs identifying as Black/African American or multiracial/other races relative to those identifying as White. We also included a separate measure for Hispanic ethnicity, comparing the experiences of HOHs identifying as Hispanic to those identifying as non-Hispanic. This approach allowed us to control on race and ethnicity in the multivariate models, along with a range of other characteristics that could affect families' outcomes.

Examining Patterns of Outcome by Race and Ethnicity

As the findings presented in the previous sections indicate, we found no significant differences between families with a Black/African American HOH and families with a

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[26] The baseline assessment tool asked HOHs to identify all of the race categories with which they identified. In order to be consistent with how HOH are likely perceived by service providers and others, we categorized as Black/African American, any individual who identified as Black/African along or with another race category (Ho et al., 2015).

White HOH in time to access assistance, access to and duration in permanent housing, time spent sheltered or unsheltered homeless, employment, income, or parent-child intactness, controlling for other characteristics (see Exhibit 8-2). Families with HOHs who are multiracial or other races tended to have better housing outcomes than families with White HOHs, such that multiracial or other race HOHs had a greater probability of accessing permanent housing earlier, had more nights in housing, and fewer moves. They were, however, less likely to be intact at 18 months than comparable White families.

Exhibit 8-2. Summary of Race/Ethnicity Findings across Housing, Homelessness, and Secondary Outcomes[+]

	Black/African American (compared to White)	Multiracial/Other Races (compare to White)	Hispanic (compared to non-Hispanic)
# of Weeks to Assistance			
Prob of/Time to Accessing Housing		GREEN	RED
# of Nights in Housing		GREEN	RED
Returns to Homelessness			
# Nights in Shelter			
# Nights Unsheltered			
# Moves		GREEN	
Employed at 18 Months			GREEN
Income at 18 Months			
Parent-Child Intactness at 18 Months		RED	

[+]Green cells indicate improved outcomes and red cells indicate worse outcomes.

There were a few differences for families with a HOH identifying as Hispanic. Families with Hispanic HOHs compared to non-Hispanic HOHs were less likely to access permanent housing, and they spent fewer nights in housing, but they were more likely to be employed at 18 months.

The pattern of findings regarding race is unclear. The positive housing findings for multiracial/other race families is difficult to interpret, in part because there are likely a mix of different racial backgrounds in this category. The limited findings for race suggest

that in our analyses it is a less important predictor of housing and other outcomes than are other systemic factors and individual resources (e.g., subsidy, history of eviction). It is extremely important to note that our study was not able to examine the role of race in getting initial assistance in the first place, either in Cohort 1 through individual contacts through the shelters, or in Cohort 2 through coordinated entry systems. We do know that county officials expressed concern that the assessment instruments being used through coordinated entry had racial biases that made it more difficult for some families to be prioritized for services.

Focus on Race in the Initiative

Identifying and addressing racial disproportionality in the receipt of homeless services was not an explicit focus of the Family Homelessness Systems Initiative at its inception. Instead, over the course of its implementation, racial equity in services and housing became a more salient issue nationally as well as in the three counties. Over time, largely after data collection for the Family Impact Study ended, the Foundation, Building Changes, and the counties increased their focus on the role of race in the provision of services.

Beginning in 2016, Pierce County was one of six communities to participate in the initial cohort of the Center for Social Innovation's Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities (SPARC) Initiative to examine the intersections of race and homelessness. The study revealed that across the communities, African Americans and Native Americans were overrepresented among populations experiencing homelessness, even disproportionate to their share among people living in poverty, and underrepresented among the staff of the homeless service providers, especially management positions (Olivet et al, 2018). By 2017, all three counties had begun examining their coordinated entry systems, including the distribution of assessment scores and referrals to housing assistance by race. The Gates Foundation, together with the Raikes Foundation, hosted a National Summit on Homelessness and Racial Equity, and Building Changes began requiring each county to spend 25 percent of its initiative funding to address racial disparities and supported grant-making to culturally specific organizations, including Mother Nation and the Chief Seattle Club in King County and the Multicultural Family and Child Hope Center and the Tacoma Ministerial Alliance in Pierce County.

Section 9. Summary and Implications

Summary of Findings

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's Family Homelessness Systems Initiative aimed to reduce family homelessness in King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties and foster families' housing access and stability by reforming their homeless service delivery systems. The reforms involved implementing coordinated entry for access to housing, changing the culture from one that emphasized shelter and transitional housing to one that prioritized access to permanent housing as soon as possible through the use of diversion and rapid re-housing. After these reforms, more families experiencing homelessness moved into their own housing and at a faster rate than families served prior to the reform. Families served after reform also spent more nights in housing and were no more likely than families before reform to return to homelessness, even with the competing pressure of an ever tightening housing market. These findings are highly significant and persist even when a host of family characteristics are considered.

Systems reform and subsidies appear to be much stronger factors influencing housing access and stability than individual factors. The overall systems reform has pushed for prioritizing housing as the first response to homelessness. Rapid re-housing and diversion, in particular, provided resources for families in Cohort 2 to enter market rate housing at a quicker rate than families in Cohort 1. The trajectory analysis suggests that early entry into housing helped to foster greater stability. In addition, having access to subsidies influenced housing outcomes in both cohorts. In Cohort 2, families who accessed housing were nearly three times more likely to have a subsidy than families unable to access housing during the 18-month time period, with even higher rates of subsidy among families accessing housing in the first six months.

A few findings are less positive, however. First, families' experiences in obtaining initial assistance were not much smoother than families' experiences prior to reform and took equally long, especially in King County. Our data were collected when the counties were relatively early in implementing coordinated entry (Rog et al., forthcoming in 2021). Several iterations of coordinated entry have occurred since our evaluation, and hopefully have improved the timing of the process and families' experiences.

Second, though families after reform compared to those before reform were less likely to experience sheltered homelessness, they were more likely to stay in unsheltered homeless settings, doubled up situations, and other situations, such as motels that they

paid for themselves. The amount of time families spent in unsheltered and other settings after reform was greatest in the first six months after receiving initial assistance, especially as they awaited entering housing, and subsequently decreased. In addition, since the time of our study, the counties (King County, in particular) have responded to the need for more shelter by increasing the number of shelter beds available for families and providing access to shelter immediately and not solely through coordinated entry.

Third, a quarter of the families served after reform did not access housing at all over the 18-month period following initial assistance. Being provided rapid re-housing rather than transitional housing, having a subsidy, and having higher incomes were among the most significant factors influencing families' access to housing. The absence of a relationship between access and most individual characteristics further underscores the importance of systems reform and provision of Housing First services to assist people in exiting homelessness.

Over the 18 months, families served after reform were also more likely to become employed and increase their income. Although some of this increase may be due to the added focus on employment and other economic opportunities through the Initiative in the demonstration counties, the increase in employment and wages in other counties during the same time, as evidenced in the secular trends analysis, suggests that these changes are likely due to the same positive economic conditions occurring between these two cohorts that made affordable housing increasingly difficult to find. As noted below, in both cohorts, having employment and/or more income improved a family's chance of accessing housing, staying in that housing, and not returning to homelessness.

Our data do not find any reform effects on parent-child intactness or school-related outcomes. We anticipated that increased housing stability may have helped foster family preservation, as well as family reunification for separated families. Among both cohorts of families, however, few families experienced child separations. Parent-child intactness at 18 months was influenced by a family's prior intactness, prior homelessness, and their education. Cohort reforms and their effects on stability did not influence whether a family stayed together or was reunited.

Absenteeism and school transitions appear to decrease for children in families in both cohorts over the 18 months after receiving their initial assistance in the system. The lack of a cohort effect in these outcomes is not surprising. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act has transportation provisions that predated the reforms and has done

much to decrease unnecessary movement in schools for children experiencing homelessness. In addition, supporting children's attendance is likely a strong emphasis for children while in shelter and other homeless service settings, and thus was not found to be related to differences in housing and homeless status in either cohort. The rate over time in both cohorts was statistically constant over the 18-month time period.

Employment, education, and income were strong predictors of housing outcomes, each increasing the probability of positive outcomes. In addition, such factors as larger families, having a recent history of homelessness or spending less time in one's housing prior to entering the system, and having recent evictions were all also related to multiple outcomes. These characteristics decreased the probability of accessing housing and the number of nights in one's own housing, and increased the number of nights in shelter and/or unsheltered, while having a recent eviction also increased the number of moves.

The behavioral health of the HOH also was a strong predictor of less housing stability. Having a mental health concern predicted more returns to homelessness, more moves overall, and more time in unsheltered situations. Similarly, having a substance use concern predicted more time in shelter and more moves.

With respect to race and ethnicity, people of color are overrepresented among those who experience homelessness; however, the findings reveal no evidence of poorer outcomes among families with Black or multiracial HOHs in the housing outcomes in the systems over time. Hispanic HOHs, however, did experience more difficulties in accessing housing and in turn, had shorter lengths of stay in that housing over the 18 month period observed.

Implications for Communities

The pattern of findings from the 18-month Family Impact Study has several important implications for communities nationally. Many of the findings reinforce the work that is underway through Federal and state efforts.

Prioritize getting families into housing as quickly as possible

Systems reform efforts in the three counties led to quicker access to housing for families, which in turn helped families stay in that housing longer; nearly half of the families in Cohort 2 remained in their own housing over the 18-month period. Getting families into housing with rapid re-housing and diversion appears to have been particularly helpful, whereas transitional housing appears to have made it more difficult

to access housing during this time period. Because the families were not assigned to these types of assistance randomly in Cohort 2, we cannot rule out individual factors that relate to these individual types of assistance. But we do know that, as a whole, the array of assistance available between the two cohorts made a difference in housing outcomes.

Maintain access to shelter separately from coordinated entry

Coordinated entry in two of the counties during the recruitment of Cohort 2 included shelter, not only housing resources. Since that time, shelter has been removed and access has been kept separate. County staff realized that the need for shelter and safety was immediate for many of the families and that it could take several months for families to be able to find housing with their rapid re-housing assistance or even with diversion resources. Having shelter access separate from access to other housing resources helped families go through limited screening to secure shelter and gave them a place to wait if no other options were available. For other communities as well, having shelter options for families who have qualified for coordinated entry will likely avert the need for some families to seek unsheltered situations.

Strengthen ties with employment agencies and work to increase families' human capital

A key pillar of practice in the Initiative's Theory of Action is access to economic opportunities. The data reinforce the importance of this pillar, with families in both cohorts more likely to obtain housing if they were employed and had relatively more education at the time they received initial assistance. Moreover, having relatively more income also helped a family obtain housing, spend more time in that housing, and spend less time in shelter. Over the 18-month time period as well, having employment led to greater time in one's own housing. Although the Initiative achieved some success in providing more economic opportunities for families, the level of desired coordination with mainstream employment systems was not achieved. Pilot efforts merging employment efforts with rapid re-housing could not be sustained, and efforts to fully wrap employment into coordinated entry were not possible. The findings suggest that these efforts may have merit, and so future systems efforts should continue to seek ways to strengthen the connection of employment and other economic opportunities with housing for families exiting homelessness. As families note in their responses to open-ended inquiries in our 30-month follow-up (paper in development), they did not always have sufficient earning potential to pay for market rate housing, and had to either work multiple jobs, work more hours, make certain that other working-age family members were working, or have others join the household who could contribute to the

household. For some, however, long-term stability may require subsidies, as noted below.

Bridge the homeless service system with the public housing authorities
The current study adds to the already substantial body of evidence showing that subsidies foster access to and stability in housing (e.g., Gubits et al, 2016; Rog & Gutman, 1997; Rog & Buckner, 2007; Shinn & Khadduri, 2020). For families in both cohorts, having a subsidy increased a family's probability of accessing housing and time in the housing, and reduced the probability of being homeless and moving. Although only 20 percent of each cohort had a subsidy such as a Section 8, the trajectory analysis in Section 6 shows that families with more successful trajectories were significantly more likely to have a subsidy than those who never accessed housing.

Helping families with limited earning potential and greater housing barriers bridge their assistance to a Section 8 subsidy or subsidized housing continues to be an important goal in tight housing markets. Although having a subsidy does not necessarily ensure that it can be used and the families can secure housing without subsidies, the evidence is compelling that subsidies play a critical role for some families in maintaining their own housing.

Consider providing additional supports to families who enter coordinated entry with larger numbers of children, histories of homelessness, and recent evictions
Few family factors predict a pattern of poorer outcomes, but those that do can be identified early. Families with multiple children, histories of homelessness, and recent evictions can be identified during coordinated entry and prioritized for additional supports to find and keep housing.

Families with relatively more children have been found to have difficulty exiting homelessness in other studies (e.g., Rog et al., 2017; Weinreb, et al., 2010). The finding likely reflects the limited housing available with sufficient bedrooms for families with four or more children. Having creative ways of identifying this stock and providing additional assistance to families with multiple young children may be warranted. In addition, family size may be given greater consideration not only in vulnerability scoring, but also in the service plan. Giving greater and specific support to large families may be warranted to ensure their ability to find appropriate housing. Finally, communities may want to examine the relationship between family size and length of time homeless in their own HMIS data to assess the extent to which those families are having more difficulty exiting their homelessness systems.

Also unsurprisingly, families' homeless and housing history played a strong predictive role in their success in achieving housing stability and exiting homelessness. Families who spent greater time in housing in the past were more likely to be housed in the 18 months after receiving initial assistance, and similarly, those with relatively more nights homeless in the months prior to receiving initial assistance were more likely to experience homelessness moving forward. These factors are considered in the vulnerability scoring, but may be further prioritized in service plans. Moreover, evictions appear to play a strong role among those who have experienced homelessness. Although research has found that evictions do not necessarily lead to homelessness (Greer et al., 2016), the current findings suggest that when families with past evictions experience homelessness, the ability to access housing and maintain stability is considerably weakened. Providing more housing location support, support in determining if those evictions can be countered with updated information on the families, and individual landlord mediation appear warranted in light of the strong role past evictions appear to play in undermining a family's ability to obtain housing.

Strengthen ongoing services for families with identified behavioral health needs
Families whose HOH has an indicator of a mental health condition or screens positive for a substance abuse condition at baseline are more likely to experience instability, either moving more, returning to homelessness from housing, or experiencing more time homeless. These families may warrant more case management as they move into housing to improve their stability, either through the homeless service system or through linkages with the behavioral health systems. Although not all episodes may be prevented, having consistent support while they are housed may help families during any crises determine if leaving the home is necessary or if there are alternatives that can help them retain their housing while they seek and receive recovery services.

Reduce the stock of transitional housing and/or consider repurposing it only for those who might have repeated difficulty accessing housing
Transitional housing, though playing a dominant role in many family homeless service systems until recently (Shinn & Khadduri, 2020), lacks a strong evidence base to support its continued role as a major part of communities' efforts. The Family Options study, a randomized study examining the long-term outcomes of several forms of housing assistance, found that families receiving transitional housing did not do any better than families who received no special assistance at 20 and 37 months after entering shelter (Gubits et al., 2016).

The current study also found that being in transitional housing significantly delayed families' time to access housing, and was a key factor related to the trajectory of families not accessing housing at all within 18-months of initial assistance. When examining the two cohorts, it appears that time spent in transitional housing in Cohort 1 has been swapped with time spent in one's own housing in Cohort 2. Families in Cohort 2 were able to access and stay in their own housing with a variety of initial assistance, including diversion, shelter, and rapid re-housing. Although this study did not follow families after they left transitional housing, the evidence from Family Options suggests that the families would likely not fare better than families who were given shelter only and may, in fact, fare worse than those who are able to maintain housing for significant periods of time (Gubits et al., 2016). Therefore, the study findings, building on the existing literature, support a de-emphasis of transitional housing. More research is needed to determine whether transitional housing has benefits for specific sub-populations, such as those experiencing domestic violence, or those who have repeated difficulty in maintaining their own housing.

Implications for Further Research and Evaluation

The current study provides the first evaluation evidence that reforming systems from status quo continuums to systems with a variety of assistance provided, emphasizing Housing First, results in more families being housed and for longer periods of time. Much was learned about families' experiences in accessing the system, the nature of the assistance they received, the success they had in accessing housing and achieving stability, and factors that facilitated and challenged success.

The data provide strong evidence that systems change has made a difference on families' access to housing and residential stability. Follow-on studies should focus on understanding the configuration of support that provides the strongest outcomes for the largest number of people. Moreover, as systems have now increasingly implemented dynamic prioritization procedures as part of coordinated entry and are targeting assistance to families with different histories and needs, it is important to examine how the targeting of different types of assistance is related to outcomes. More controlled studies on diversion assistance, for example, may provide a more definitive understanding of the role it plays in fostering access to and stability in housing.

Research and evaluation with a stronger racial equity lens is also needed. Especially in housing systems and communities that historically have had racial inequities and deep roots in structural racism, it is important to design studies that have sufficient numbers of each racial group to understand their experiences in the systems, their access to

housing, and their ability to receive the supports to remain housed. Designing these studies with the participation of families from the different groups would be critical to ensure that the studies are sensitive to the biases and inequities that may be operating, especially those that are more subtle or considered part of standard practice.

Methodological Considerations

The Family Impact Study offers a robust design, comparing two similar cohorts of families upon their receipt of assistance. Statistical weights were used to strengthen the cohorts' equivalence and a conservative approach was used to modeling outcomes, controlling for many covariates. The multiple, in-depth interviews with families provided a rich source of data on families' histories prior to receiving their initial assistance and their 18-month journey following their receipt. A key strength of the study is the integrity of the study samples. Response rates for any wave ranged from 70-85 percent across the cohorts, reducing attrition and allowing us to make more solid assessments of families' housing over time. Finally, having qualitative data on the evolution of the systems allowed the evaluation to link the developments with the quantitative data on families, and having data through the ICDB allowed us to assess the influence of secular trends and the generalizability of the sample.

In reviewing the findings, a few limitations need to be considered. As in any study in which a randomized design was not possible, there is always the possibility of differences in the groups (in this case, the two cohorts). With the rich data we collected at baseline and at three follow-up points, we were afforded a number of variables to use in controlling for the differences in families between the cohorts that could confound the results, through both the use of propensity score weighting and the inclusion of key covariates and time-varying covariates in the models. Despite these efforts, there still is the possibility of hidden biases that account for the difference in outcomes.

The nature of the context changed dramatically over the course of the study and continues to change. We attempted to include measures of the context in the models to control for the influences in the economic climate on outcomes. However, because these changes have been highly linear, they correlate almost perfectly with the two cohorts. To understand the role of context in a family's ability to exit homelessness, we examined whether quarterly vacancy rate (i.e., the quarterly vacancy rate at the time of a family's receipt of initial assistance) was related to number of nights in housing and number of nights homeless in the six-month period. Quarterly vacancy rate did not relate to either of these variables. In addition, the tightness of the housing market likely

worked against the Initiative achieving success in helping families find housing. The improvements in families' employment and income, however, are likely somewhat affected by the boom in the economic context, as suggested by our secular trend analyses as well.

Our study demonstrates that systems changes occurred and, in turn, had an effect on the experiences and outcomes of families. The Foundation sparked many of these changes and funded the way in which the counties implemented their initiatives. It is also important to recognize that other policy changes at the state and federal level also were occurring conterminously and likely also had an influence on the work of three counties as well as on other counties (as suggested in the secular trend analysis). Our forthcoming report will present our qualitative analysis of the systems changes in the three communities, describing the role that all efforts had in effecting the changes. In addition, our inclusion of contrast communities in the design offers a lens for understanding the ways in which the state and federal policy efforts were having an influence.

With respect to generalizability, we included only families who received some type of assistance from a homeless service provider in each cohort. We could not track families in Cohort 1 who were turned away because there was not capacity in the shelters, nor could we track families in Cohort 2 who went through coordinated entry in each county but who may not have been able to receive assistance. The samples are comparable between the cohorts, but we cannot generalize the findings of the study to families who were not successful in receiving assistance.

These qualifications aside, the study's methodology offered the first rigorous test of the role of systems change in affecting families' experiences and outcomes, and provides strong evidence that a portfolio of approaches anchored in a Housing First orientation led to improved housing options for families experiencing homelessness over more traditional shelter and transitional housing options.

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