

2019 INNOVATIONS IN REENTRY INITIATIVE GRANTEE

Toledo-Lucas County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

Success Story

In December 2019, the Toledo, Ohio Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) started a pilot project with the Reentry Coalition of Northwest Ohio, the Fair Housing Center, Lucas Metropolitan Housing (LMH), and other stakeholders to reduce barriers for people who were formerly incarcerated in securing affordable housing.

CJCC led the charge by advocating for the LMH Admissions and Continued Occupancy Plan (ACOP) to align with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s “Application of Fair Housing Act Standards to the Use of Criminal Records by Providers of Housing and Real Estate-Related

Transactions” guidance. This led to the formation of the partnership between the two agencies and the subsequent reentry pilot project. The project piloted dedicated LMH housing choice vouchers for participants who had been involved in the justice system, coupled with application assistance over and above the case management assistance already provided.

Through the pilot, CJCC, program partners, and LMH staff established processes for: (1) collecting and distributing housing choice voucher applications to program participants in the treatment group that needed housing; (2) processing applications; and,



Lessons Learned

To increase reach, program partners identified strategies to help participants self-identify as needing housing assistance. For example, case managers began discussing the program during parenting classes at the local correctional training facility (CTF).

Case managers initially found that, because the housing choice voucher application packet is lengthy and requires several documents, participants often had difficulty completing the application if they waited until they left the CTF facility. To mitigate these challenges, program staff are making several adjustments:

1. Case managers will start working with the participants prior to their release from the CTF. RIDGE case managers have begun meeting

with individuals twice per month during the application process to get a head start on application components that can take several weeks to acquire, such as receiving a copy of their birth certificate.

2. Case managers will track and compile application components and then submit only completed application packages to LMH on the participant’s behalf.
3. Case managers will use an online portal developed by LMH to improve the application submission process .

These adjustments have resulted in smoother application processes for participants.

Starting early on the more time-consuming application components narrows the timeline from an individual's release from the justice system to application submission and approval for housing assistance. Ideally, participants should be able to submit their housing voucher application packets on the same day as their release.

What worked?

Key factors that contribute to the program's success are:

- Use of a continuous quality improvement process to streamline and simplify the housing assistance application process.
- Partners' patience, perseverance, and flexibility in working with the LMH's new leadership to design and refine the application process.
- Collaborating with additional stakeholder organizations—such as Fair Housing, Legal Aid, and the Department of Neighborhoods—to help with program planning and implementation, allowing the team to collectively improve progress.

What did not work?

Program launch coincided with significant leadership turnover and restructuring at LMH, which meant that program partners had to work with new leadership to establish project plans and partnership agreements. This resulted in it taking more time than anticipated to begin implementation of the pilot program.

Additionally, given the complexity of the pilot program and lack of history working together, program partners found virtual communication to be challenging and shifted to in-person meetings to support program design and implementation.

What's next?

The team anticipates that the recent implementation adjustments described above will result in more applications and approvals for housing choice vouchers, on a quicker timeline than previously.

The next area of program focus is to increase the pool of area landlords willing to accept housing

vouchers. It has been a challenge to find a landlord to accept the housing choice voucher due to participants' recent felony convictions.

LMH has committed to maintaining adjustments to improve the housing choice voucher application process for people experiencing reentry in Northwest Ohio after the grant has ended.

For more information, contact:

Tom Luettker, *Reentry Coordinator at the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council*
tom.luettker@noris.org