

Pathways to Housing:
A Program for
Participant Based Transition Housing
in Windham County, Vermont

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The Pathways to Housing Program is an evolution of the HUD funded Town of Brattleboro Shelter Plus Care Program to encompass a larger group of the hard to house in Windham County with funding from sources other than HUD. The Program is envisioned to have up to 20 participants living in private rental housing with intensive case management and support services provided by area agencies. Program length of stay would be no more than 2 years. Upon completion of the Program, a participant will be able to obtain and retain housing in the community without the Pathways housing support and services.

Background:

The Town of Brattleboro is the recipient of a HUD grant to operate a Shelter Plus Care Program (SPCP). The Program is in the third year of its second five year grant period. Shelter Plus Care is for the chronically homeless who have persistent and severe mental health issues. Three area human service agencies, The Brattleboro Drop-In Center, Morningside Emergency Shelter and Health Care and Rehabilitation Services (HCRS) (community mental health) provide case management and supportive services to participants. The Brattleboro Housing Authority administers the HUD funded Section 8 housing certificates that enable participants to live in market rental housing. The Pathways to Housing Program is modeled on the SPCP.

Participants enter the Shelter Plus Care Program through any one of the three human service agencies. The agency which enrolls the participant provides the case management service coordination. The enrolling agency obtains the certification of homelessness which is done by Morningside and the mental health certification which is done by HCRS. The enrolling agency then coordinates housing search and lease up with the Housing Authority. Once the participant is housed, the enrolling agency's principle activities are centered on supportive services and case management for the participant. The participant is required to be actively engaged in mental health services and other activities and services. The case manager and participant develop the participant's plan and amend it as needed. The plan might include support activities such as AA and anger management, work skills development such as education and job

training, and life skills such as financial management and basic household maintenance and organization. The case manager meets on a regular basis with the participant to monitor their progress, give assistance as needed and address issues that have come up in any area of program activity.

Once a month the Program Managers from the three human service agencies, Housing Authority, Town along with a participant representative meet to review how each participant is doing in the program. The Shelter Plus Care Committee meeting is an essential component of the SPCP because it is here that vital coordination of services and problem solving takes place. Each participant is reviewed according to the seven criteria of program participation. [A sample review chart is attachment 1.] The attached chart shows that this review includes all aspects of the participant's engagement in the program as well as overall program elements such as who is on the waiting list and how many participants are in the program.

The Committee meeting is where all program decisions are made whether they affect the overall program or just one participant. The Committee must approve rents if they are over the HUD established Fair Market Rent rate. It sets and amends all the policies that guide the program. The Committee also decides whether the process to remove an individual participant should be started and monitors the activities of the participant once this process has begun. It is the Committee that ultimately decides if a participant should actually be removed.

The Committee meeting is an opportunity for sharing of participant and program needs. Through this collaborative process both the participants and the program are well served and their needs are addressed.

Who Will Be Served: Casting a Larger Safety Net for the Hard to House:

The Shelter Plus Care Program only addresses the housing needs of one select group of individuals that are found in the broad category of The Hard to House.

The Hard to House includes individuals and families that have a difficult time obtaining housing in the community for any one or more of the following reasons:

- Bad credit
- No rental history. (This is especially true for young people.)
- Unacceptable rental history because of housekeeping, rent payment problems or inability to get along with neighbors or the landlord.
- Incarceration
- Chronic homelessness

- Domestic violence
- Substance abuse
- Youth ages 16 to 21

In Windham County and throughout Vermont the number of Hard to House individuals and families are growing at a record pace. There are many reasons for this growth, among them are: higher screening standards by non-profit and government housing providers as well as private landlords; better access to credit and criminal history information; the length of time and costliness of removing bad tenants as well as the toll they take on other tenants; and the economics of supply and demand in rental housing. In addition public policy at the State and local level has focused recently on housing ex-offenders and teens.

Though the numbers fluctuate, the Brattleboro Housing Authority reports that it is currently screening eight applications to get one that will be accepted into public housing. Local landlords report an increase in applications from unacceptable renters. And landlords who used to be willing to take higher risk tenants are no longer willing to do so. Morningside Shelter Case Manager, Rich Moore, reported recently that a landlord he used to count on to take the hard to house has now turned down three of Rich's applicants. According to the Brattleboro Community Justice Center, there are between five and seven serious ex-offenders who will need placement in Windham County in the next year. The human service agencies involved in the Shelter Plus Care Program are certain that twenty slots in a program for the Hard to House would be filled quickly and remain filled for the duration of the program.

The Pathways to Housing Program

Need

There is a growing need in Windham County for housing for those who are hard to house for all of the reasons listed above. In addition to his experience with the landlord noted above, Rich Moore reports that Morningside Emergency Shelter is currently working with five families that are very hard to house and anticipates that it will have at least fifteen more very hard to house families within the year. Through a program with the Vermont Department of Children and Families, Morningside helps to find housing for hard to house families enrolled in the Department's Reach Up Program. While it successfully places most participants, there are always some who will need more support and financial assistance than the State program offers. This group would benefit significantly from access to the Pathways Program. It should be noted that while these families are working with Morningside they are often being housed in local motels at a tremendous cost per week to the State welfare system. One family, currently unable to secure housing, has been at a motel at State expense for a full year.

The Brattleboro Area Drop-In Center served over 240 people in 2004. As one of the agencies involved in the Shelter Plus Care Program, it provides case management for ten to fifteen participants on an on-going basis. The Drop-In anticipates that it could carry a similar if not greater case number under the Pathways Program.

The United Way of Windham County released an extensive analysis of the transitional housing needs of youth in the County in August of 2004. This analysis, Brattleboro Area Youth Housing Feasibility Study, conducted by Sleeping Lion Associates, Inc. found that there is an annual need for transitional housing assistance for 10 to 13 youth. A staff person with the Community High School of Vermont has reported that five of her fifteen students need housing.

The Shelter Plus Care Program carries a waiting list of four to five families on a regular basis.

The Brattleboro Housing Authority reports that it is now screening eight applications for every one that is accepted. It is the opinion of the BHA that many of those who do not pass its screening would be ideal candidates for the Pathways Program.

The demographics of the need as expressed by these agencies is wide ranging from young to old, individuals to families, very poor to working poor. They have in common that for one reason or a variety of reasons they have now become hard to house. Additional profiles can be found under Attachment 4.

A New Approach to Meeting the Need:

The traditional approach in Vermont for meeting the needs of select groups within the Hard to House category has been through Supportive Housing or Transitional Housing in a purpose built facility. *The State of Vermont Consolidated Plan for Housing and Community Development Programs (April 2005)* defines Supportive Housing as permanent housing with supportive services where residency is not time limited. It defines Transitional Housing as similar to supportive housing but with time limited residency. Importantly, it further states, "Transitional housing can be provided in a purpose built facility or as part of existing housing in one structure or several structures, at one site *or in multiple structures at scattered sites*" (page 18 *italicizes added*).

While transitional housing in a purpose built facility is an essential form of transitional housing, it has three common constraints: finding the site, the costs of development and the economies of scale for need. In Vermont with our small communities, high property values and small populations, these constraints cause the development of purpose built facilities to take place slowly and be somewhat costly. Morningside House Emergency Shelter with the Brattleboro Area Community Land Trust looked for a

suitable property for over two years before they found one for their transitional housing program. Once found, the property must now undergo substantial rehabilitation after the Land Trust has obtained all local and State approvals. These two parts of the process will take an additional two years. In addition the partners have had to raise \$800,000 to \$900,000 dollars in funding for the property acquisition, permitting and rehabilitation. Once completed, this program will provide housing and services for five single young mothers with children for a long time to come. Should the program be changed or discontinued, the building will remain in affordable housing in perpetuity.

Transitional housing in scattered sites is a generally accepted means of providing transitional services either as a stand alone program for certain groups or as the next step in transition to full self reliance. For certain populations the scattered site or individual apartment model where the participant is living more independently and with the general community is more productive and beneficial than living together in one building. This finding is expressed in the Youth Housing Feasibility Study and by other service providers.

In order to meet the increasing need for housing and services for the hard to house, we believe a transitional housing program that relies on existing social service networks and housing providers is essential.

Program Overview:

The Pathways to Housing Program is a *participant based* transitional housing program using scattered sites. Like a purpose built facility, it will be intermediate length housing, up to 2 years, and combined with intensive case management services. However, it will not group people in similar situations together in either a house or some other shared living arrangement. Instead, like the Shelter Plus Care Program, participants will be housed in non-profit and private rental housing in the community with financial housing assistance provided through Pathways.

There are other participant based scattered site transitional housing programs across the country. A quick Internet search found a number of such programs with many similarities to the Pathways Program. The key to a successful program is that it addresses a local need with proven local resources. This is exactly what the Pathways to Housing Program does: It builds from the very successful long term Shelter Plus Care Program and makes use of the extensive human service and housing networks in Windham County.

Windham County is very fortunate to have a strong ethic of collaboration and cooperation among agencies and housing providers which provides a solid foundation for the Pathways Program. The program service area will correspond to that of the Agency of Human Services District and the service

area for the Alliance for Building Community. The 19 Towns in the service area are listed in Attachment 2 along with the area agencies and housing providers that have agreed to participate in the program and those that will be approached to participate. In every meeting where we have presented the Pathways program, we have been approached by agencies or landlords interested in being included.

The Pathways to Housing Program will utilize area agencies to serve as the entry point for participants and to provide case management services. To varying degrees, agencies will be folding existing programs or clients under the Pathways Program. For example, HCRS has a strong dual diagnosis program of case management and services but it has no housing component. They would like to fold this program under Pathways in order to utilize the housing component and the coordination of services. Youth Services has a Transitional Living Program for youth from 16 to 21 which includes a housing stipend and service coordination. They see very real benefits in working under the Pathways Program in housing search and support and service coordination. Morningside will use Pathways as another means to find housing and service coordination for those at the shelter.

The agencies will form a Program Oversight Committee and will meet at least monthly to approve participants for the program, coordinate service delivery and review each participant's progress. The Housing Authority will serve as the administrator of the housing subsidy and ensure that apartments meet minimum health and safety standards before occupancy. The Housing Authority and agency case manager will work together to identify available apartments, negotiate the lease with the landlord and resolve any tenancy issues should they arise.

Brattleboro has 2,500 units of rental housing, 700 of these assisted by Federal or State programs and the rest in the private market. Access to units in both the assisted and private markets will be crucial for the program. The goal is to have no more than three participants housed with any one provider in order to minimize risk to the provider. Many area housing providers have already agreed to house participants. This includes private landlords, the Brattleboro Area Community Land Trust and Brattleboro Housing Authority. Other large non profit housing entities in the community will also be approached to participate and it is anticipated that they will be willing to do so.

Pathways to Housing Program Administration

The overall administration of the Program will be done through three key mechanisms:

Program Oversight Committee: A Committee of the key partners involved in the Program. The Agencies represented will be : Vermont Agency of Human Services, Field Services Division; Morningside Emergency Shelter; Brattleboro Area Drop-In Center; Health Care and Rehabilitation Services

(community mental health); and Brattleboro Housing Authority The Committee will also have representation from the area landlords and a consumer or program participant. The Committee will set overall Program policy, monitor the program and its finances and handle all other program management and administrative matters. This Committee will review applications to the program and decide on acceptance.

Monthly Case Manager Participant Review Meetings: A meeting each month of all case managers involved in the Program. The case management review will include discussion of each participant's program needs and progress. Case managers will be encouraged to coordinate service delivery among participants and maximize existing community offerings. For example, the Brattleboro Community Land Trust will be offering programs in "Financial Fitness for Renters and First Time Homeowners". Case Managers would sign their participants up for the Land Trust program and coordinate transportation to it. To the extent needed, case managers will offer group sessions to participants as would be done under a purpose built facility based transitional housing program.

Also present at these meetings will be the program housing administrator to ensure that any and all housing issues are addressed and monitored.

The local Shelter Plus Care Program has been extremely successful in large part because of the communication and coordination that occurs at its monthly case management meetings. Based on this experience, these monthly case manager meetings will be an integral part of the Pathways Program.

Housing Coordination and Administration: The Pathways to Housing Program will provide a housing subsidy to participants set at 30% of their gross annual income. The Program will generally follow the income determination and administration rules used under the HUD Shelter Plus Care Program.

Finding acceptable rental units will be done by the case manager, participant and Housing Authority working with those who have signed up to provide housing. This same team will monitor all issues relating to participant housing and work out any problems that arise. Through years of working closely together, local landlords, community human service agencies and the Housing Authority have developed excellent relationships and trust which will serve them well in providing the housing services under the Pathways Program.

Any apartment rented under the Program must meet the HUD established Housing Quality Standards which are used in both the Shelter Plus Care Program and HUD Section 8 Voucher Programs. These are standards which the landlords are familiar with and have been in use for years within the community and country.

A frequently asked question is whether there will actually be units available to rent given the tight housing market in the area. We believe that there will be based on our conversations with area landlords and the following experience the Brattleboro Housing Authority had with its traditional Section 8 Voucher Program. The BHA received 75 Vouchers for persons with disabilities and was able to have every one of the Vouchers in use within 18 months. Area landlords have demonstrated over and over their willingness to participate in housing subsidy programs and with a wide range of tenants. In developing the Pathways Program, landlords have been consulted with and the needs they have presented have been incorporated into the Program.

Pathways to Housing Program Operation

Participant entry to the Program: Participants will come in through the principal participating agencies (Morningside Emergency Shelter, Brattleboro Area Drop-In Center, HCRS, and the Field Division for the Agency of Human Services) or the agency they are working with such as Youth Services or the Offender Re-Entry Program. Using an entrance evaluation process developed by the Program Oversight Committee, agency staff will work with the applicant to complete any paperwork needed for acceptance to the program. The entrance evaluation process will be done in strict conformance with privacy laws and yet endeavor to be as inclusive as possible on behalf of the applicant.

The entrance evaluation process will assess the applicant's background, housing history and identify the problems which prevent the applicant from getting into housing and/or remaining housed. The application will also ask about the applicant's commitment to change in order to be successful in the program. Through the application process, the agency staff will be assessing the applicant's willingness and ability to follow the structure of the program including attending required meetings and following through on assigned tasks. Criminal and credit reports will be obtained as part of the screening process. If the agency staff or Program Oversight Committee feel that a specific type of screening such as with a mental health counselor should be included they will arrange for this with the appropriate agency. In this example it would be HCRS, the participating community mental health agency.

The agency staff will consult with other agency personnel that have worked or are currently working with the applicant.

The Program Oversight Committee will review any required materials, discuss the applicant with the agency staff and meet with the applicant. Based on this and program wide considerations, the Committee will decide to accept the applicant or not.

Case Management and services: The agency that is most appropriate for the participant or already providing case management will be the one that provides this service under Pathways. If an agency recommends a person or family to the Program, that agency will provide the case management. In situations where this is not possible, then other agencies involved in the program who have indicated an ability to take on more participants will be contacted to provide the case management. Every attempt will be made to match participants with the agency best suited to address their needs. Thus, a participant whose overriding need is better housekeeping, rental payments and neighbor relations would be assigned to a case manager from Morningside Shelter or the Drop-In Center, as this is an area of expertise for them.

Case Managers will draw on the abundance of human service and governmental agency assistance in Windham County to tailor a program of services to each participant in the Program. Given the varied and serious needs of program participants, the supportive services used by the Program will be varied and structured.

Through the monthly case managers meetings, they will be able to coordinate supportive services to ensure that economies of scale and non-duplication of services are attained. Thus, for example, if many participants needed money management skills, this could be arranged as a class for all of them instead of separate classes for each participant. Or, as demonstrated earlier, the Pathways participants could all be enrolled in an on-going community workshop such as the Financial Fitness through the Land Trust. With on-going communication on individual participants, case managers will be able to share resources, coordinate services and combine efforts.

To remain in the Program, a participant must attend all required sessions, trainings etc.. They must demonstrate progress at meeting the goals they have set with the case manager and they must be tenants in good standing. This will be defined by the Program but generally will mean that the participant is complying with all terms of the lease especially with regard to housekeeping, rent payment and relations with neighbors and the landlord.

The Program Oversight Committee will develop a process for notification to participants when it is found that they are not complying with either the services or housing components of the Program. This process will involve communication in writing and through the case manager early on so that the participant can change their behavior and remain in the Program. However, it will clearly establish a set progression that will be followed in the event that the participant does not change. Only participants that clearly have no intention of returning to full participation will be removed from the Program, however this must be done in a manner and timeframe which minimizes the detrimental impact of the participant's actions on their neighbors, landlord and overall Program accountability.

Housing assistance: Once accepted into the Program, the participant, their case manager and the Housing Authority will identify potential rental units suitable for the participant and begin the process of looking at units and discussing tenancy with landlords.

Rents in the program will be set at 100% of the HUD established Fair Market Rent (FMR) for the area. The participant will be expected to pay 30% of their gross income towards the rent with the Program contributing the balance. In some cases, it may be necessary to accept a rent that is greater than 100% of the FMR which will be under the purview of the Oversight Committee.

Generally, the Program will follow the HUD Section 8 provisions for the computation of income and rents. The Program Oversight Committee can make variations to these as it feels necessary for the Program. For example, one deviation from the Section 8 provisions will be that when a participant's income goes up, the amount they pay towards rent will not. However, the additional amount that would have been contributed to rent will be collected and held in an escrow account for the participant. When the participant leaves the program, these funds will be available to them to assist with new or additional housing costs or any other expenses. This is another mechanism that will assist the participant to be able to obtain and retain housing in the community upon completion of the Program.

The apartment and building must pass the HUD Housing Quality Standards used under the Section 8 Tenant based Voucher Program. The inspection of the building and unit will be done by the Housing Authority.

The lease term will be established by the case manager, Housing Authority and landlord. Usually these will be for one year but may be for a shorter duration.

There will also be an addendum to the lease which allows for program specific lease terms. These terms will include a provision so that in the event that the participant leaves or is removed from the program before satisfactory completion, they must vacate the housing. Program rules will specify how this will be handled and give the participant no more than 60 days to vacate the unit.

Landlords will be eligible for compensation for damages and lost rent under program specific provisions. In discussing the Program with area landlords, they cited these and the need to be able to remove a non-compliant participant as important to minimizing their risk in participating in the Program.

Participant Completion of the Program

A participant can only be in the Pathways Program for two years. Assuming the participant has worked the Program successfully, after two years they should be in a very good position to obtain and retain housing in the community outside of the Pathways Program.

Working with their case manager they will identify their housing options and be able to pursue them. With two years of satisfactory housing and a good reference from their landlord, case manager and the Housing Authority, their ability to be accepted into housing will be significantly improved. While in the Program they will have applied to various assisted housing providers and, probably be high enough on the waiting lists to be screen by many of them. They also may be able to remain with the landlord they have had through the Program depending on their income situation and/or if they have or will be shortly receiving a regular Section 8 Voucher.

Further, given other work under the Program, the participant should have additional resources and skills that will help them in all areas of their life including housing such as job training, money management, life skills etc.

Though the housing subsidy ends after two years, a participant's involvement in the supportive services may continue voluntarily for as long as the participant and agency feel is appropriate. This can be of great assistance in the final transition from the Pathways Program to full independence.

Measures of Success

- ❖ Program participants will be successful in their housing while in the Program as measured by their rent paying on time and absence of lease violations.
- ❖ Program participants will be active engaged participants in their transitional housing program as measured by the monthly reports from their case manager.
- ❖ Fewer families and individuals will live for three months or longer in motels, at the Emergency Shelter or 'bunking in' with family or friends.
- ❖ The Hard to House will have an avenue to improve their future and become stable renters as measured by the number of applicants to the Program and participants in it.
- ❖ Program participants will go on, after program completion, to being dependable renters or homeowners.

ATTACHMENT 1

Participating Area Agencies, Organizations and Businesses:

To date the following entities have expressed a strong willingness to participate in the Pathways Program. The participation can be through case management, provision of services, referral to the program, funding for specific groups within the program, or other more specific means of support for the program or participants. For example, the United Way is willing to assist with fund development and its Help Fund will be made available to participants.

- Vermont Agency of Human Services, Brattleboro Area Field Services Division; The Towns of Athens, Brattleboro, Brookline, Dover, Dummerston, Guilford, Halifax, Jamaica, Marlboro, Newfane, Putney, Somerset, Stratton, Townsend, Vernon, Wardsboro, Westminster, Whitingham and Wilmington.: Referral; Service coordination
- Brattleboro Housing Authority: Referral; Housing for participants and program housing administration
- Brattleboro Area Drop-In Center: Referral; Case Management and services
- Morningside Emergency Shelter: Referral; Case Management and services
- Health Care and Rehabilitation Services: Referral; Case Management and services
- Brattleboro Community Justice Center: Referral; Funding for ex-offenders
- Alliance for Building Community: General program support, fund development
- United Way of Windham County: Fund development, access to the Help Fund for participants.
- Youth Services of Windham County: Transitional Living Program
- Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA)
- Brattleboro Area Affordable Housing Corp.: Referral; services, access to Save Our Homes Funds for participants and general program support.
- Brattleboro Area Community Land Trust: Referral; Services and housing for participants
- Everett Real Estate Services: Referral; provision of apartments to participants
- Individual landlords: Referral; provision of apartments to participants

The organizations listed below are being approached as potential program partners:

- ❖ Retreat Healthcare:
- ❖ Vermont Department for Children and Families: Family Services Division.
- ❖ Vermont Department for Children and Families: Economic Services Division
- ❖ Vermont Department of Vocational Rehabilitation:
- ❖ Vermont Center for Independent Living:
- ❖ Northeast Family Institute
- ❖ Vermont Department of Corrections: Probation and Parole
- ❖ AIDS Project of Southeastern Vermont
- ❖ Brattleboro Inter Faith Council

ATTACHMENT 3

Budget for Pathways to Housing Transitional Housing Program

The budget presented below is based on the actual amounts from the Shelter Plus Care Program, SPCP has an on-going case number of 20 participants in housing within the community. The Housing Authority and social service agencies keep close track of their time for Federal reporting purposes.

	Per Month	Per Year
Average HAP for 20 units (10 – 1 bedrooms, & 10 – 2 bedrooms)	\$8,500	\$102,000
BHA Admin Fee (\$25.00/unit/month)	\$ 500	\$ 12,000
Funds to pay for first and last month rent, landlord losses (damages & rent)		\$ 20,000
Participant assistance for training, classes and Emergency Needs		\$ 15,000
Case management and other expenses associated with Service delivery will be charged under the Agencies existing funding for this work.		
TOTAL		\$149,000

The cost of this program for one year is equal to or less than the cost of development of one unit under the purpose built facility model.

ATTACHMENT 4
Participant Profiles

1. Mary and John rent a house from her family and are being evicted. They have 4 children full time- ages 7, 3, 2, and 11 months, and two other children (10 + 9) who stay with them on weekends. John is not the father of any of the kids. They are being evicted because they are behind in rent, and they no longer want to rent from family.

They have a combined income of \$926.00, the amount of her Reach-Up (welfare) grant. John has not worked in some time and is applying for social security disability. He will most likely get it as he was recently diagnosed with bi-polar disorder. Mary also appears to have significant mental health issues, though she is reluctant to address them now. Their rent is \$700/month but includes no utilities and that is the back breaker.

Mary has a history of relationships with domestic abusers, so she has no landlord references (she and John appear to have a positive relationship). John has lived in a variety of short- term places and his one long-term reference has been very hard to pin down.

They currently receive services form a number of agencies (Voc Rehab, EES, SEVCA, HCRS etc.) with case management from Morningside but have no help with rent.

2. Judy is a 27 year-old single mom with a 7 month-old son. She is currently living with her mother in a stressful, over-crowded situation. She receives \$580.00/month in welfare benefits and is in the process of applying for Social Security benefits. She was also recently diagnosed with bi-polar disorder and suffers from ADHD, and is also dyslexic. Part of the reason things are so stressful with mom is Judy believes mom is also bi-polar and has never been treated.

Judy has one local landlord reference she thinks will be positive, however she also has a conviction for cocaine possession and is on probation.

She does see a therapist at the Retreat and receives services from Voc Rehab, Starting Now, EES and goes to VT Adult Learning to acquire her adult high school diploma. She also has no assistance with rent and case management through Morningside.