The Role of Systems Change in Fostering Housing First:

Preliminary Findings from the Gates Homeless Families Systems Initiative Evaluation

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Presentation Overview

- Background of the Homeless Families Systems Initiative

- Overview of the Evaluation Design and Methods

- Highlights of Early Findings
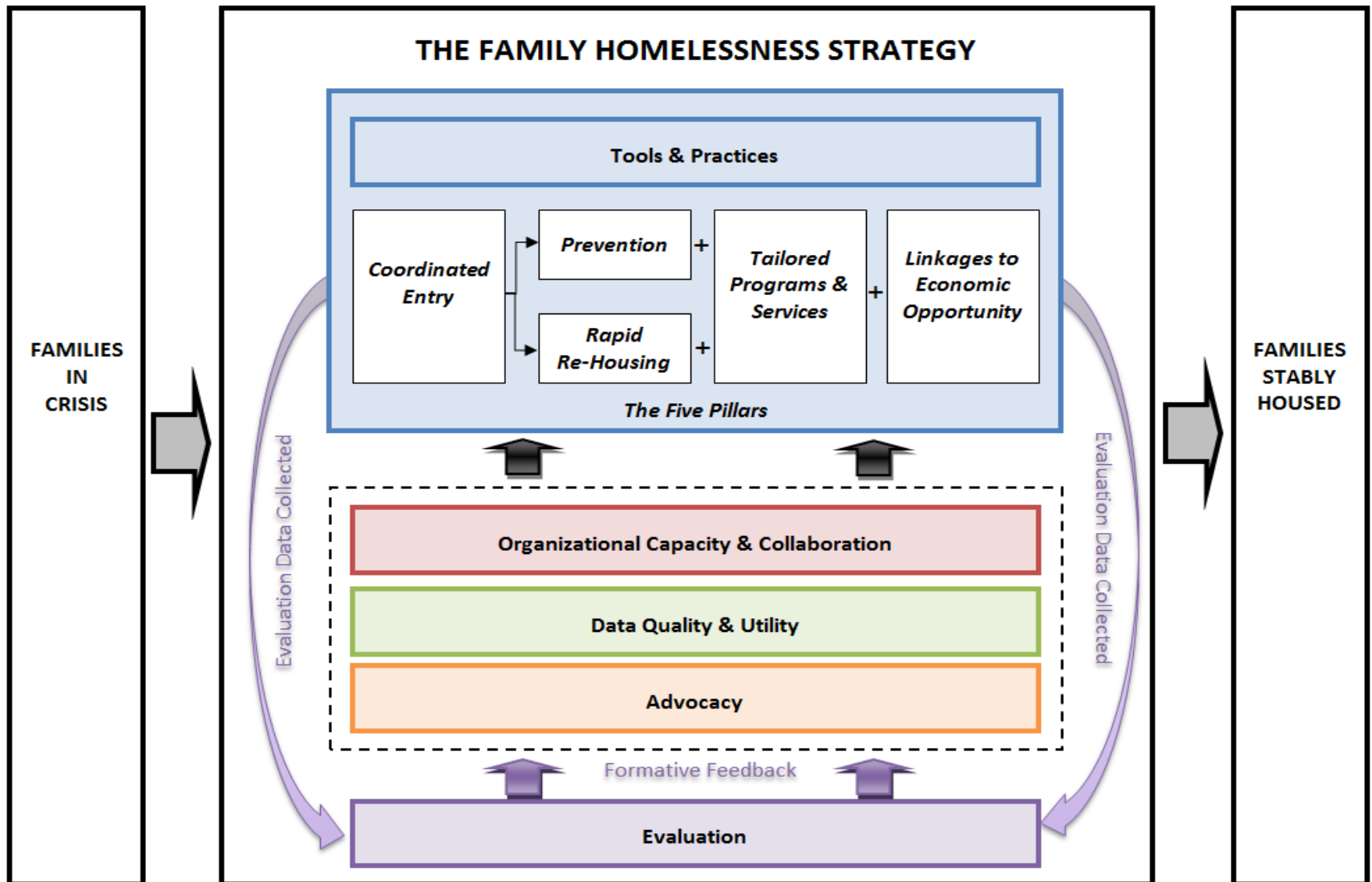
- Summary
  Implications
  Next Steps

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BACKGROUND

Family Homelessness Initiative

- Launched in 2009 by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

- Goal = reduce homelessness by reducing the time families spend homeless and the number of returns to homelessness

- Incorporated lessons from earlier Sound Families Initiative as well as research and best practices
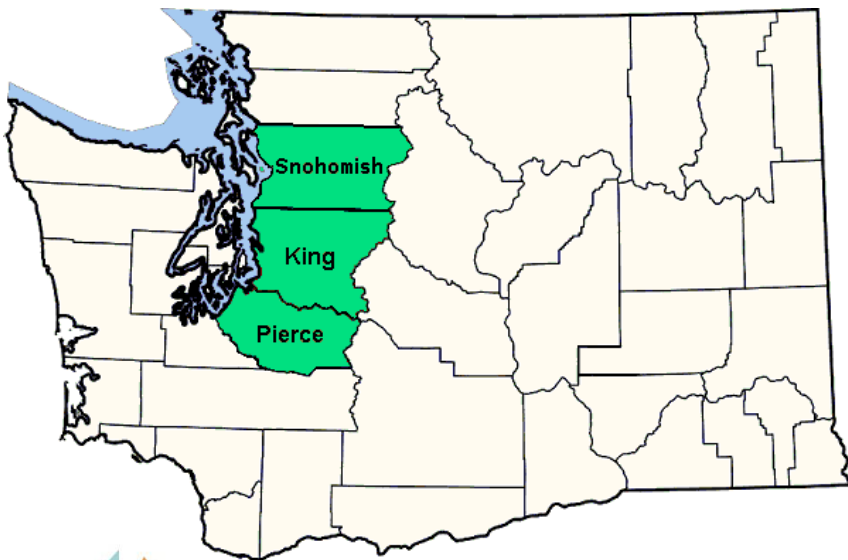
Theory of Action

THE FAMILY HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

Tools & Practices

Coordinated Entry → Prevention + Tailored Programs & Services + Linkages to Economic Opportunity

Rapid Re-Housing +

The Five Pillars

FAMILIES IN CRISIS

FAMILIES STABLY HOUSED

Evaluation Data Collected

Organizational Capacity & Collaboration

Data Quality & Utility

Advocacy

Formative Feedback

Evaluation

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Initiative Process and Resources

Tri-County Focus in Washington State

Building Changes as the intermediary
- Re-granting, TA, communication and other support

- 3 phase process for each county
  - Design, Plan, Implement

- Each county received infrastructure grants and System Innovation Grants (SIGS)
  - 149 grants totaling more than $25 million; $2.5 match requirement

- Other Gates/BC supports
  - Convenings, visits to other communities, grants to advocacy organizations

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

Key Evaluation Questions

How is the Initiative being **implemented**?

How is the Initiative effecting **changes in the systems** of housing and service delivery for homeless families and the **organizations** within them?

What effect is the Initiative having on **families'** experiences, housing access and stability, and family stability?

What are **costs** of serving a family in a coordinated system in comparison to the status quo?

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Study Design and Methods

Component	Design	Methods/Data
Systems Level Track Implementation, system changes, aggregate outcomes	Comparative longitudinal case study • 3 WYFF counties • 2 contrast counties	• Annual site visits/ Ongoing contacts • Document review • Stakeholder surveys • Existing data
Organizational Level Examine impact on providers	Provider case studies in WYFF counties	• Interviews, focus groups, document reviews
Family Level Assess impact on families' experiences and outcomes	Longitudinal comparative cohort design • "Baseline" cohort (2010) • Intervention cohort (2015) • Propensity matched comparison groups	Cohorts (each ~families) • In-person interviews (baseline, 6, 12, 18 mths) • WA State DSHS data Comparison groups • WA State DSHS data
Examine long-term experiences in housing	Intervention cohort – RRH and shelter	30 month in-person interviews and State data
Cost Component Assess changes in costs/cost savings at the family level	• Build on family cohort study	• WA State DSHS cost data

Design Strengths

Longitudinal tracking of both systems and families

High retention rates in both cohorts
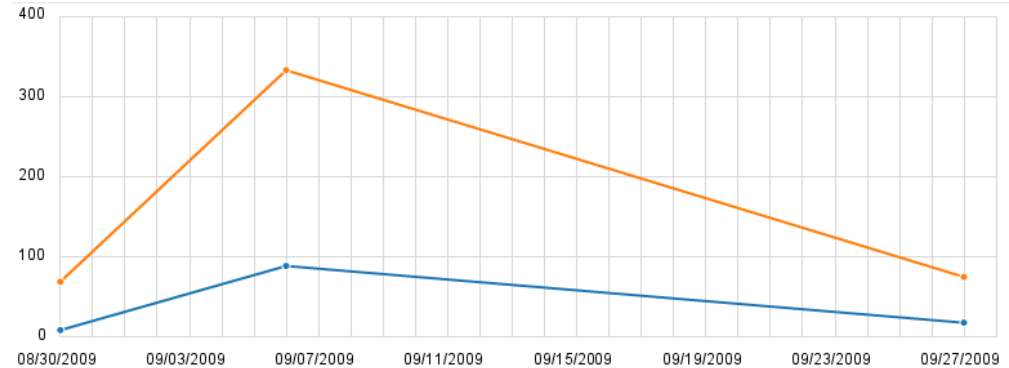
- Cohort 1 – Baseline n=467; 84% with an 18 month interview; complete data on 73%

- Cohort 2 – Baseline n=504; 82% with an 18 month; still calculating # with complete data

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Design Strengths

Compilation of WA State DSHS Integrated Client Database and primary data on families

Ability to examine representativeness of cohort samples with HMIS data

Ability to use qualitative data on systems to interpret changes in population and cohort samples
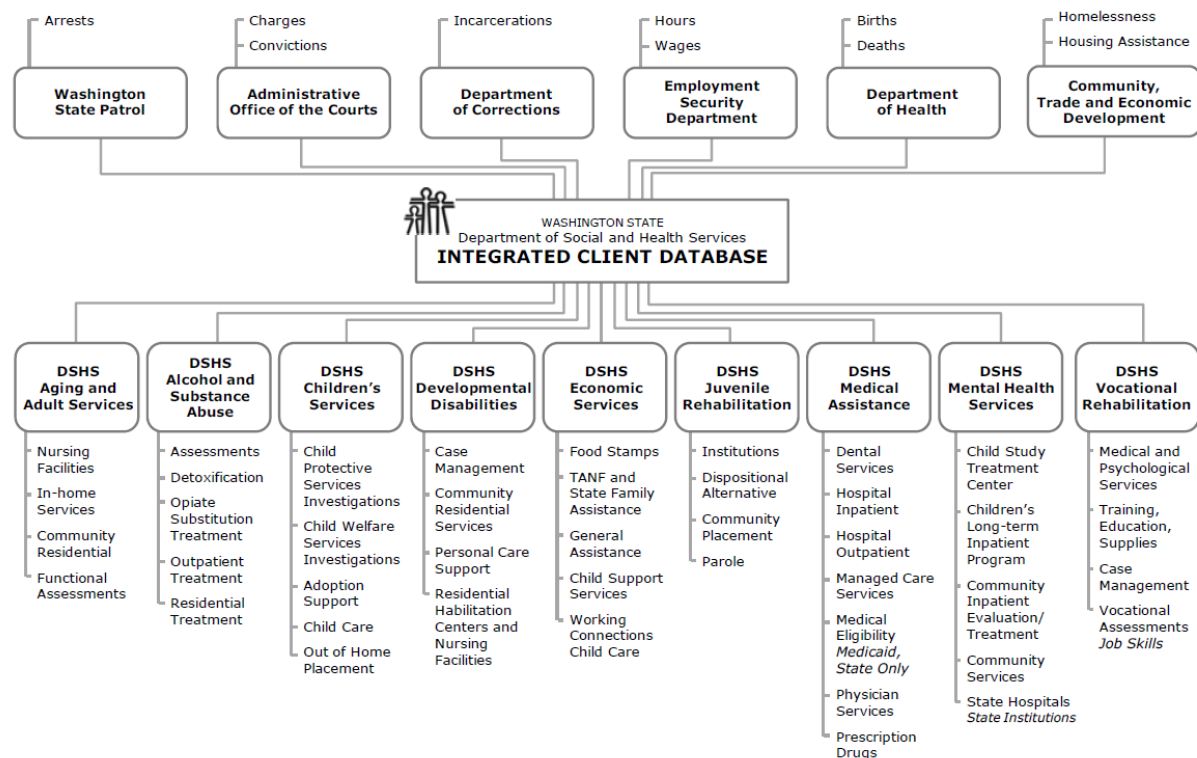
Design Challenges	Analysis Remedies
▪ Cohort families differ	▪ Propensity weighting ▪ Examine nature of the population served in the 3 counties over time with WA State DSHS data
▪ Context changed between cohorts	▪ Measure context, and include in models, if possible; construct propensity-matched groups from other areas of state
▪ Systems reform is happening across the country due to other federal, state, and local initiatives	▪ Compare systems findings with contrast communities as well as contextualize with more national findings on systems changes; focus is on contribution, not attribution

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SYSTEM CHANGES

Systems at Baseline (2010): Uncoordinated Continuums

Coordinated Entry	Prevention	Rapid Rehousing	Tailored Services	Economic Opportunities
• Lack of coordination • 1 county had coordinated system of entry but functioned as waitlist	• Typically one time assistance or limited • No coordination	• Focus on continuum (shelter to TH) • Providers focus on preparing families to be "housing ready"	• No system of services • Most families report receiving needed services	• Disconnect between shelter and education/ employment providers

Changing Systems:
Different Starting Points and Strategies

- Each county tackled the initiative in different ways

- Examples:
  - King County – focus on coordinated entry first, followed by pilots of diversion and rapid rehousing

  - Pierce County – implemented coordinated intake and prevention efforts quickly, until demand outstripped prevention resources

  - Snohomish County began with a systems pilot of all pillars

- All confronted challenges in fostering change, especially at provider level
  - Difficulties in changing business models
  - Reluctance to change criteria and admit families with specific vulnerabilities
  - Juggling different city and jurisdiction needs with overall county needs

Systems After Reform (2017): Focus on Coordination, Diversion, and Housing First

Coordinated Entry	Prevention	Rapid Rehousing	Tailored Services	Economic Opportunities
•Fully implemented coordinated entry •Evolution from version 1.0 to 2.0 to 3.0 •Movement from broad definition of homelessness to literally homeless to prioritization	•Snohomish County has Prevention Navigation as early warning system •Pierce and King Counties have limited prevention, but focus on diverting families from entering "the system" •Diversion resources are varied and funds are used creatively and flexibly	•Movement from continuum to housing first •Transitional housing decreased; some repurposed as PSH •Shelter still a key element (now operates as separate track outside CE in 2 counties)	•Focus on case management training •Focus on progressive engagement (mostly in King and Pierce) •Coordination, when possible, with other systems/services	•# of efforts to weave in education and employment, but none yet emerge as systemic •Among most promising efforts: -- coupling employment with RRH -- partnerships with community colleges to train families in specific high need job sectors

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Coordinated Entry

	ACCESS	ASSESS	PRIORITIZE	REFER
King County	211 to RAPS	VI-SPDAT – assessors in RAPS and across county	Bands of eligibility based on vulnerability	CE to providers based on band
Pierce County	Multiple points of entry	Own vulnerability tool	Prioritized based on vulnerability	CE to providers based on vulnerability
Snohomish County	Navigators	Own vulnerability tool	Prioritized based on vulnerability	CE to providers based on vulnerability
CHALLENGES	System bottlenecks	Balance between access and too many assessment points	Insufficient resources mean most families receive same assistance	Family documentation Delays/refusals Provider denials Side door eligibility

Distinctive Features of Coordinated Entry

King

Pierce

Snohomish

211 — Regional Access Points

90 Day Priority Pool

"No wrong door" approach
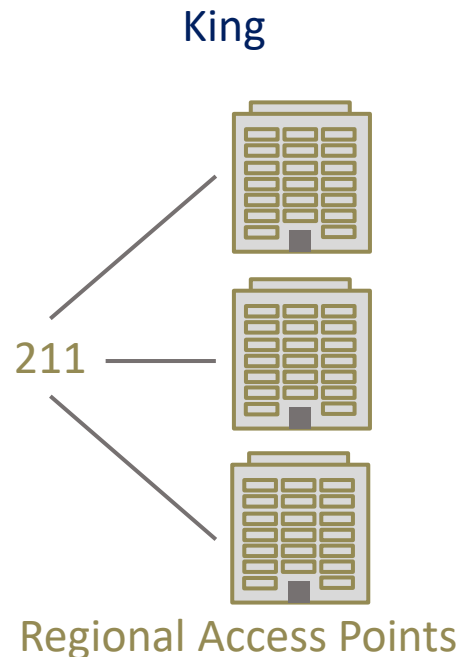
Diversion and employment at the RAPS

Deputizing more orgs to do diversion and assessment; 90 day pool gets refreshed

Navigators provide cm while families wait for referrals

Diversion Figures in as Main Element in System

DIVERSION CONVERSATION:

Brainstorm ideas, assets, options

Family to stay with?

Resources needed for housing?

Resources needed for job?

Challenge: Can function as a delay resource instead of diversion

From Continuum to Housing First

- Rapid re-housing grown in its focus, initially through pilots and SIGs

- Transitional housing declined through repurposing of stock, though still reluctance to eliminate for some specific populations

- Permanent supportive housing grown, especially in Snohomish County, in part as a result of re-purposed transitional housing

- Challenges for RRH:
  - Time to place families
  - Continued, though lessened, provider apprehension
  - Lack of coordination among funding sources

Context Changes Challenged System Change Efforts

In all 3 counties, changes in the economic climate has dramatically tightened housing markets and decreased housing affordability.

King County

Rental Vacancy Rate & Unemployment Rate

Fair Market Housing Cost (2 Bed)

CE Launched

Legend: Rental Vacancy Rate — Unemployment Rate — Fair Market Housing Cost (2 Bed)
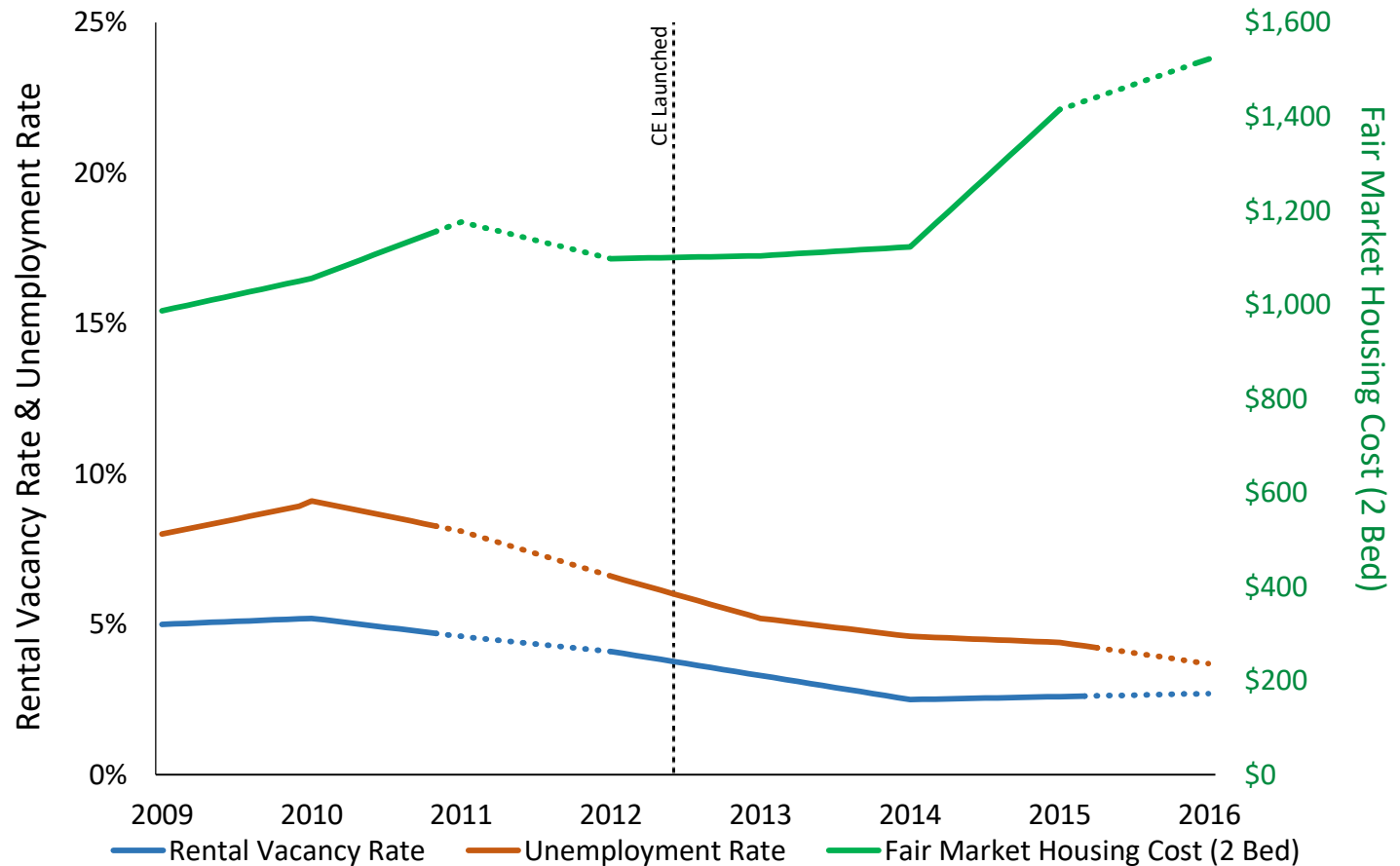
- - - - - Indicates baseline data collection period for Cohort 1 and Cohort 2

Rental Vacancy Rate: American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau
Unemployment Rate: Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics
Fair Market Housing Cost: Fair Market Housing Summary, U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development

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EARLY EFFECTS ON FAMILIES

Families entering the system after vs. prior to reform:

More likely to be older and to have lived in Washington longer, less likely to be Hispanic.

Families Served Before Reform Cohort 1 (N=467)	Respondent	Families Served After Reform Cohort 2 (N=504)
89%	Female	92%
32 Years	Age***	34 Years
[VALUE]	Hispanic*	[VALUE]
42%	White	43%
26%	Black	26%
2%	Asian	1%
3%	American Indian	4%
3%	Pacific Islander	3%
6%	Other	4%
16%	Multirace	19%
87%	Born in USA	91%
[VALUE]	Live in WA 5+ years***	[VALUE]
	Live in county 5+ years	70%
3%	Served Armed Forces	3%
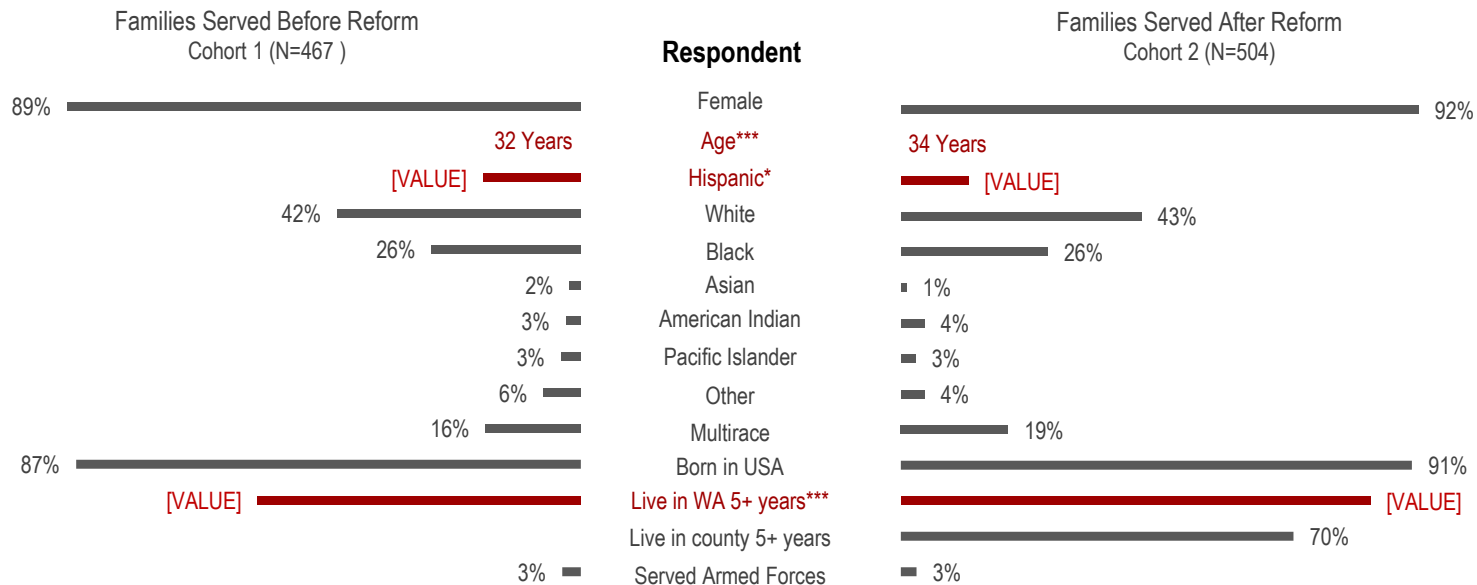
Families entering the system after vs. prior to reform:

Less likely to have children under the age of 2 and more likely to have a child living away from the family

Families Served Before Reform
Cohort 1 (N=467)

Family Composition

Families Served After Reform
Cohort 2 (N=504)

	# Children under 19	
1.8 Children		1.8 Children
25%	Spouse/partner	27%
[VALUE]	Children under age 2*	[VALUE]
10%	Currently pregnant	8%
[VALUE]	Child away***	[VALUE]
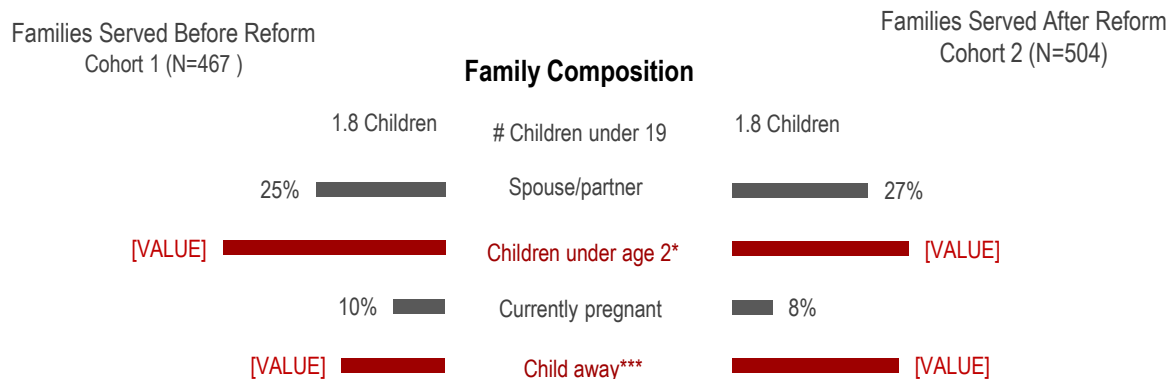
Families entering the system after vs. prior to reform:

Have relatively more human capital and resources; yet more than twice as likely to report current domestic violence.

Families Served Before Reform Cohort 1 (N=467)	Strengths & Barriers	Families Served After Reform Cohort 2 (N=504)
[VALUE]	< HS education**	[VALUE]
33%	HS education/GED	32%
39%	Some college	49%
96%	Ever employed	98%
[VALUE]	Employed at entry***	[VALUE]
$478	Median monthly income***	$797
[VALUE]	Family receives SSI/SSDI***	[VALUE]
$3,471	Median total debt	$6,222
[VALUE]	Has medical insurance***	[VALUE]
10%	Poor physical health scale	11%
49%	Any mental health indicator	55%
15%	Hospitalized mental health	17%
25%	Substance abuse screen	20%
21%	Hospitalized for SA	19%
[VALUE]	Recent DV***	[VALUE]
60%	History of DV	60%
17%	Convicted of a felony	18%
7%	On probation or parole	5%
9%	Open CPS plan	9%

Families entering the system after vs. prior to reform:

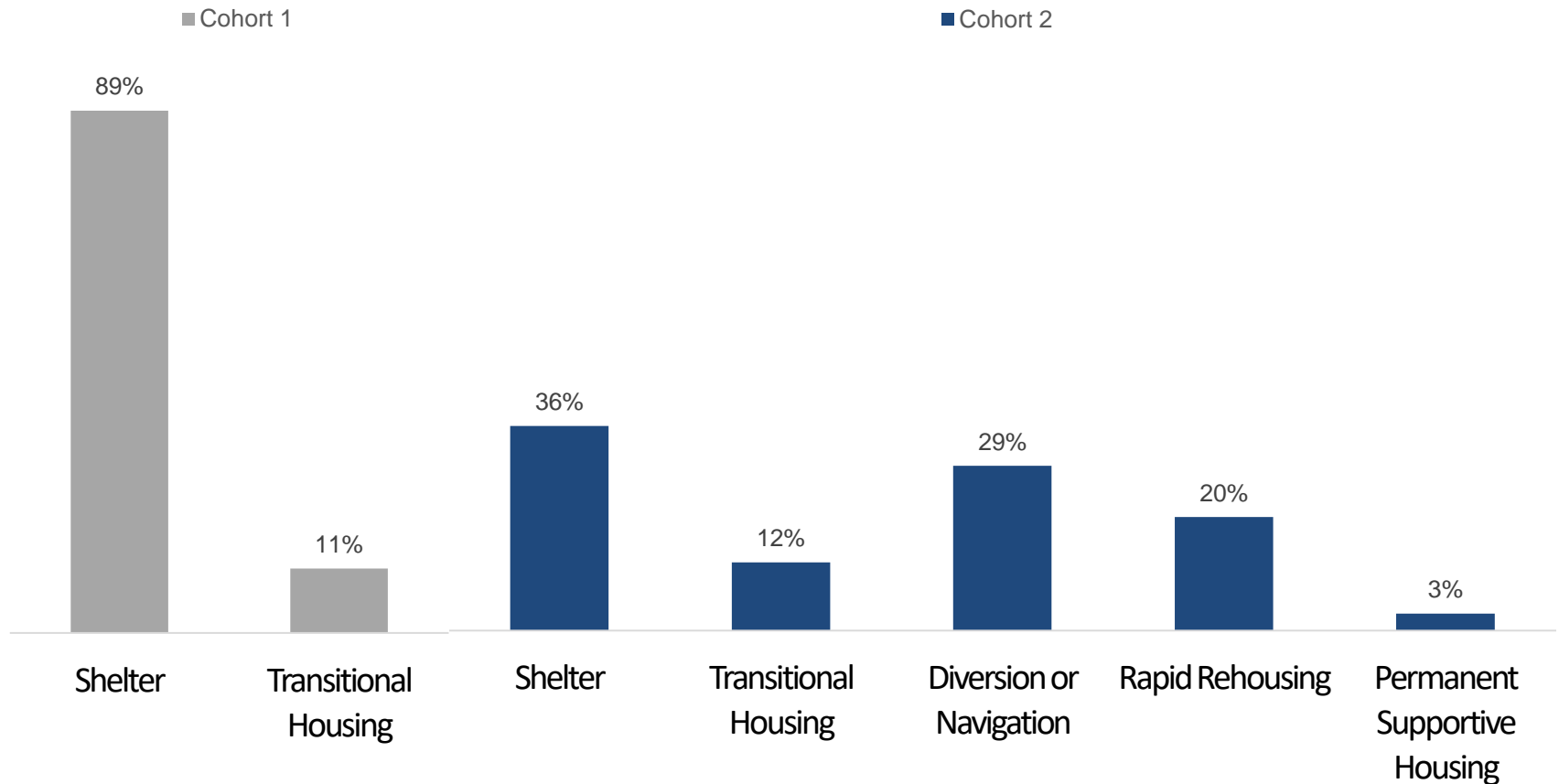# More likely to have experienced recent homelessness but are similar on all other homeless and housing measures

Families Served Before Reform
Cohort 1 (N=467)

Families Served After Reform
Cohort 2 (N=504)

Homeless History

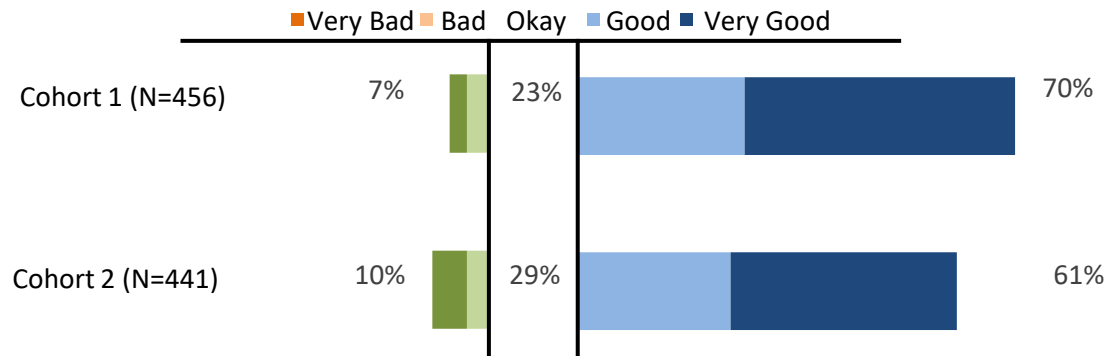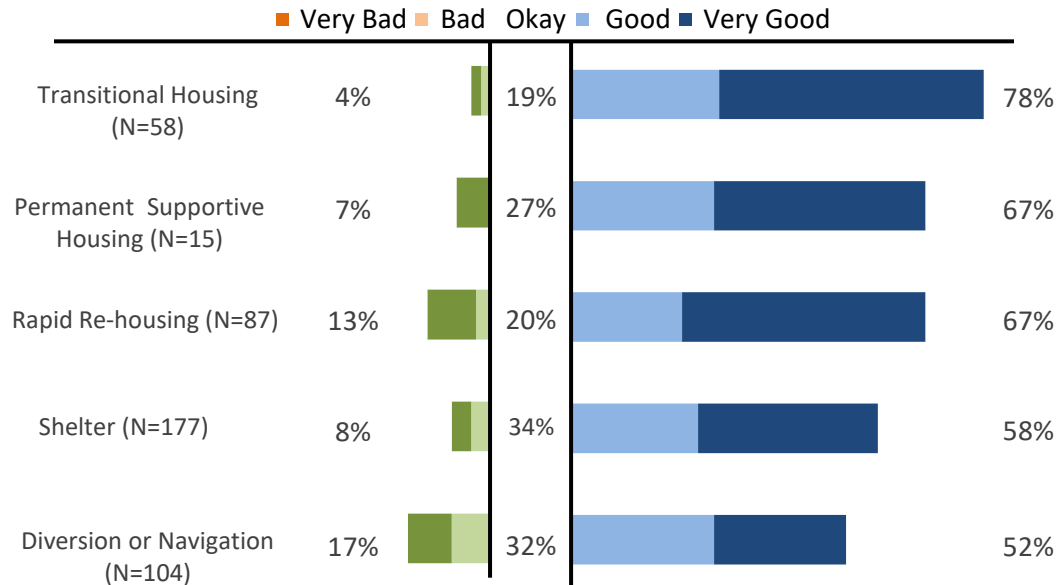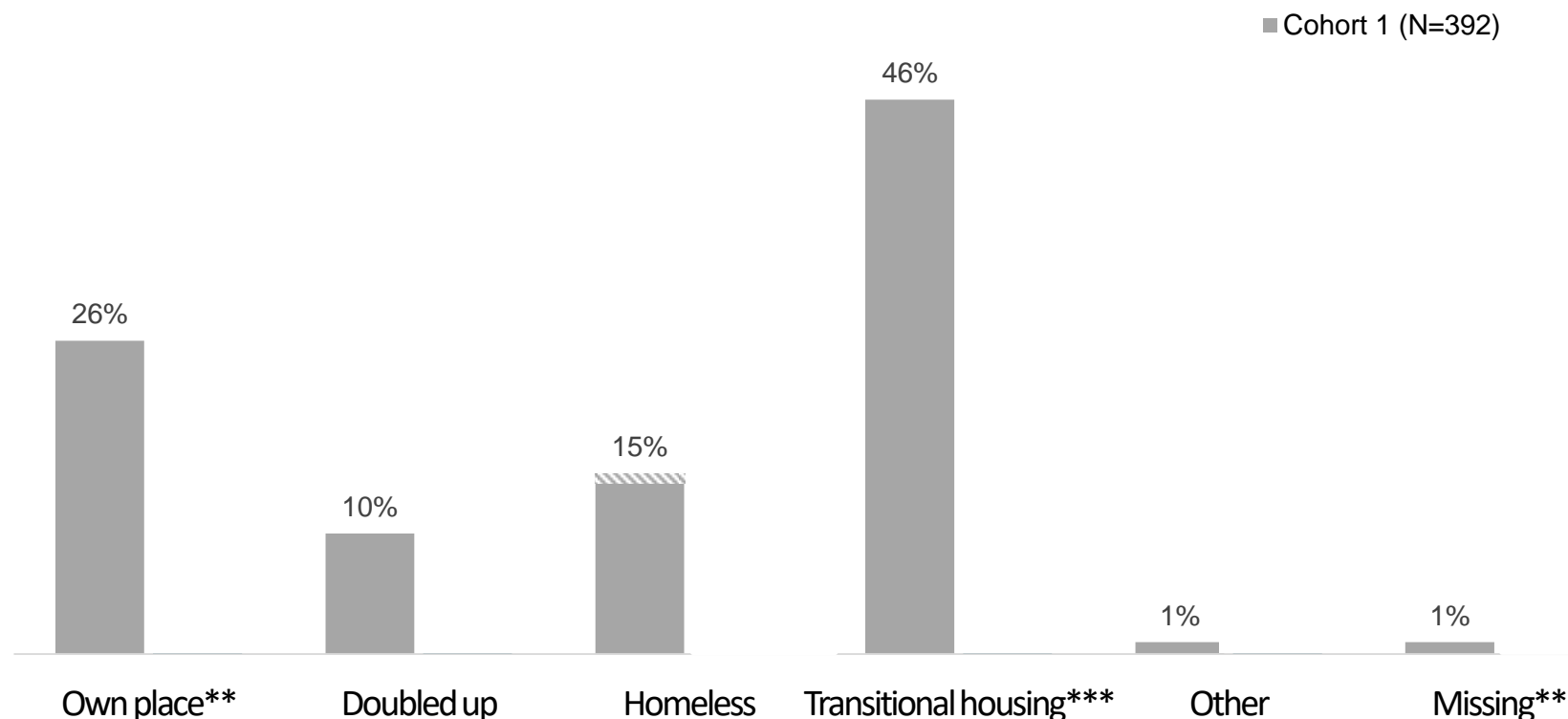|	Before Reform	After Reform
Homeless ever	44%	49%
Homeless as a child	17%	14%
Homeless past 2 years	21%	25%
Ever on a lease	45%	54%
Homeless last 180 days***	[VALUE]	[VALUE]
Homeless night before entry	10%	28%
Doubled up last l80 days	48%	52%
Own place last 180 days	49%	40%

After Reform More Families Are Provided Housing-First Options

Families generally rate their housing assistance as a good or very good fit; more so for families prior to systems reform

Legend: ■ Very Bad ■ Bad □ Okay ■ Good ■ Very Good

| Cohort 1 (N=456) | 7% | 23% | 70% |
| Cohort 2 (N=441) | 10% | 29% | 61% |

Rapid rehousing receives the most positive ratings of the new options

Legend: ■ Very Bad ■ Bad ■ Okay ■ Good ■ Very Good

Option	Negative	Okay	Positive
Transitional Housing (N=58)	4%	19%	78%
Permanent Supportive Housing (N=15)	7%	27%	67%
Rapid Re-housing (N=87)	13%	20%	67%
Shelter (N=177)	8%	34%	58%
Diversion or Navigation (N=104)	17%	32%	52%

Families After Reform Are More Likely to Be in Their Own Housing Six Months After System Entry

■ Cohort 1 (N=392)

Own place** — 26%
Doubled up — 10%
Homeless — 15%
Transitional housing*** — 46%
Other — 1%
Missing** — 1%

**significant difference between cohorts, *p<.01*
***significant difference between cohorts, *p<.001*

More than half of the families in their own housing after systems reform we receiving assistance
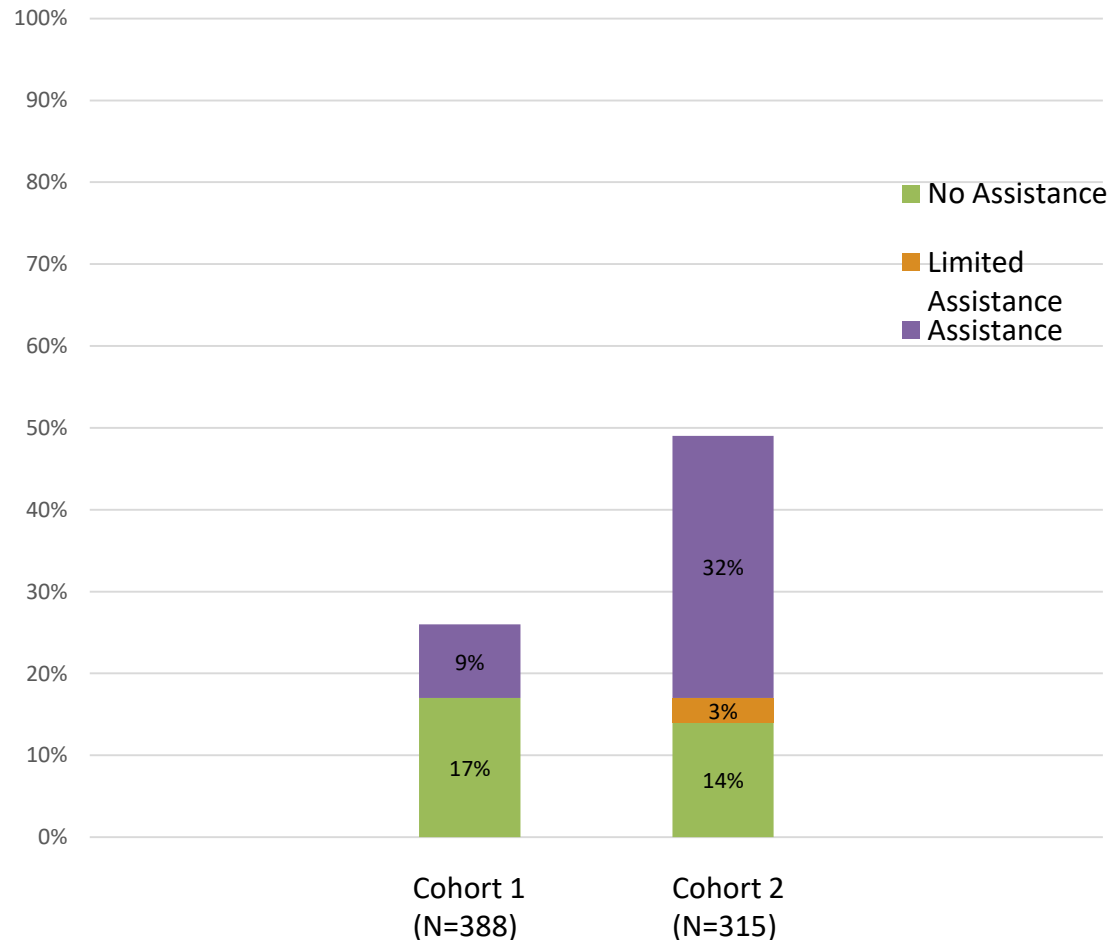
Families after vs. prior to reform in the 6 months following entry:

- spend more nights in their own home and doubled up
- spend fewer nights in shelter and TH, but more literally homeless

Average Number of Nights in Location in 180 nights Following
Systems Entry

	Cohort 1 (N=363)	Cohort 2 (N=362)
Own place	25.2	63.9***
Doubled up	9.1	31.1***
Homeless, in shelter	85.9	41.8***
Homeless, in a place not meant for human habitation	0.5	14.8***
Transitional housing	56.9	21.7***
Other locations	1.9	7.4**
Missing	0.1	0.5

Systems Reform Increased Housing Stability in the First 6 Months After Systems Entry

Predicting Nights in One's Own Housing in the 180 Nights after Entering the System (N=662)

Covariates[1]	# of nights
Cohort[2]***	⬆
Age	
Race[3]	
Black	
Multiracial or other race	
Hispanic	
Spouse/partner	
Number of children under 19 years old***	⬇
Children living away	
Education[4]	
Less than a high school degree	
More than a high school degree**	⬆
Employed at entry*	⬆
Income at baseline	
Ever convicted of a felony	
Nights in own housing in 180 days before entering the system	
Any reported DV in past 3 months	
Mental health indicator	

* p<0.05　** p<0.01　*** p<0.001

[1] County results are in model but not presented
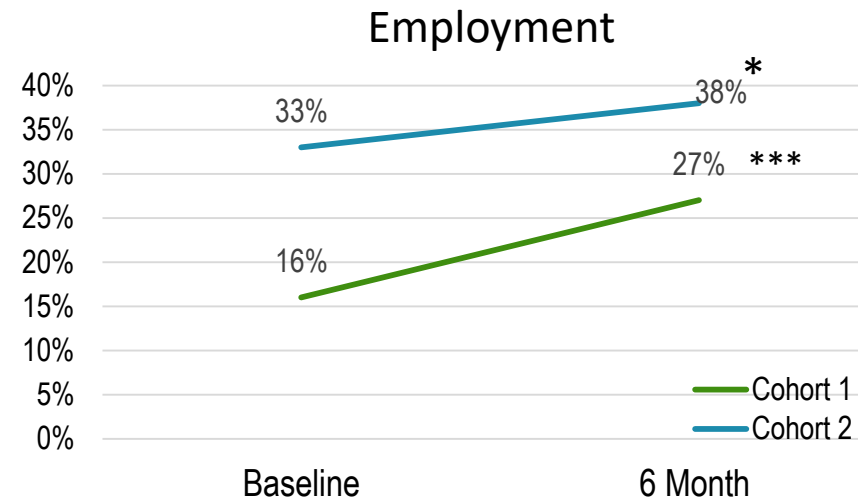[2] Compared to Cohort 1
[3] Compared to white
[4] Compared to high school graduate
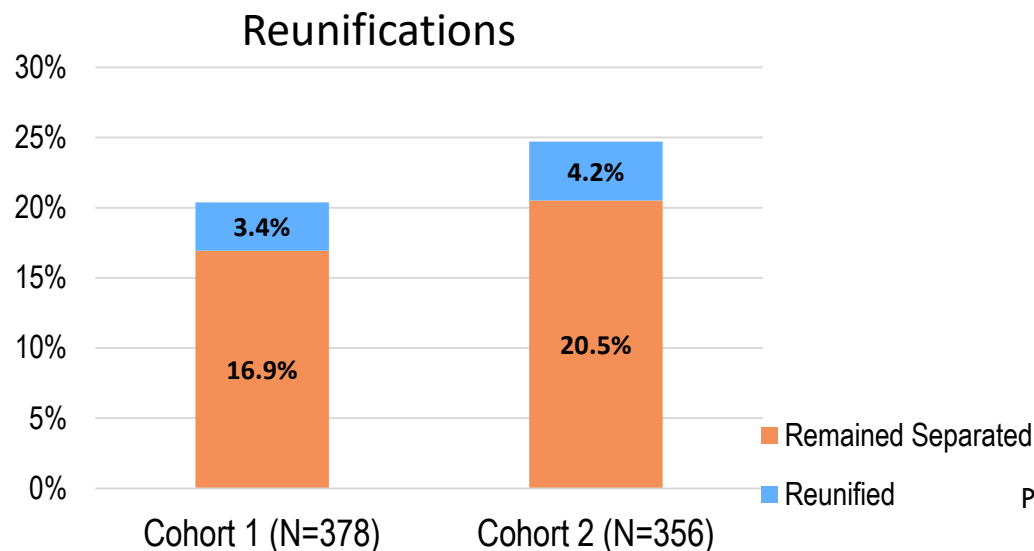
⬆ = significant positive relationship

⬇ = significant negative relationship

Reform has an effect, even when county and family differences are taken into account.

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Families in both cohorts experience similar changes over time in employment, income, and family reunification

Income

- $1,000
- $800 — $900 ***
- $800
- $600 — $562 ***
- $478
- $400
- $200
- $0

Baseline   6 Month

Cohort 1
Cohort 2

Employment

- 40% — 38% *
- 35% — 33%
- 30% — 27% ***
- 25%
- 20%
- 16%
- 15%
- 10%
- 5%
- 0%

Baseline   6 Month

Cohort 1
Cohort 2

*** Indicates significant change across waves

Reunifications

- 30%
- 25%
- 20% — 4.2%
- 15% — 3.4%
- 10% — 20.5%
- 5% — 16.9%
- 0%

Cohort 1 (N=378)   Cohort 2 (N=356)

Remained Separated
Reunified

Lessons Learned (So Far)

- Change and evolution is now expected; no more static status quo

- Systems shifted from a one size fits all to offering a range of housing assistance options

- Housing first orientation has led to greater access to and more days in permanent housing at six months, despite a tightening housing market.

- SIGs = flexible funding inspired innovation and piloting new ideas

- Flexibility of diversion = welcome tool to help with bottleneck

- Context changes rival system efforts and requires nimbleness

- Longer term data collection will provide greater insight into whether families remain residentially stable and the factors that relate to their stability

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