

Coming Home: An Evaluation of the New York City Housing Authority's Family Reentry Pilot Program

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Fact Sheet

Summary

In November 2013, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) launched the Family Reentry Pilot Program (FRPP). Its goal was to reunify formerly incarcerated people with their families who live in NYCHA housing and connect them to an array of reentry services that would improve their quality of life and decrease the likelihood that they would have further involvement with the justice system. The participants—selected from applicants referred by reentry service providers—had the prospect of joining their family's public housing lease if they completed the requirements outlined in their case-management plans and remained free of justice-system involvement.

Vera's Role

To create and implement the pilot, NYCHA worked in collaboration with the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera), the Corporation for Supportive Housing, the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS), the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Services (DOCCS), the New York City Department of Correction (DOC), and 13 reentry service providers. And beginning in 2014, a team of researchers evaluated the pilot and conducted a population estimate of people who may be eligible for the FRPP.

Research Design

Vera researchers first conducted a study that examined the program's effects on participants' and family members' lives through semi-structured interviews of 29 program participants and 15 family members. Vera also collected bi-monthly reports from the reentry service providers that tracked the progress of FRPP participants. Second, the researchers interviewed 11 reentry service staff for a process evaluation of the program model and implementation.

The researchers analyzed all the interviews using NVivo software to perform a structured content analysis and organized the responses by theme.

Third, Vera estimated the number of people released from jail or prison who were affected by NYCHA's current admissions policies who could benefit from an expanded FRPP. To arrive at this estimate, Vera analyzed data from DHS and DOCCS on people returning to New York City from incarceration.

Findings

Vera found that the FRPP helped participants with various reentry needs beyond stable housing and that no participant was convicted of a new offense. While a number of interviewees said that reuniting with family was rocky at first, relations improved; family support lent stability to their efforts to secure employment and fulfill the other aspects of their case management plan. In several cases, participants stepped into important care-giving roles for elderly family members. Family members underscored the positive impact of the program on the lives of the program participants and the household, allowing families to be whole again and providing opportunities to support each other.

While service providers regarded the FRPP as a successful reentry housing program, all those interviewed said that the shortage of interested applicants was an obstacle. They identified four factors that depressed the number of applicants: widespread distrust of NYCHA among current and former NYCHA residents, difficulties enrolling youth, lack of follow-through on applications, and rigid eligibility requirements.

Vera estimated that at least 500 people released from incarceration may be eligible for the FRPP annually. If the program is able to overcome challenges to finding applicants, an expanded FRPP could provide the opportunity to reunite thousands of families in New York City public housing.

Recommendations

The lessons learned from the FRPP's implementation yielded the following recommendations for other public housing authorities considering their own version of the FRPP:



Consider broad eligibility requirements

Having broad eligibility requirements allows for discretion on the part of the program administrators and can increase the pool of eligible applicants.

Foster collaboration and partnership among diverse stakeholders

The various roles, perspectives, and expertise of the FRPP stakeholders allowed the program to address a wide range of reentry issues, and open lines of communication were essential to overcoming programmatic challenges.



Educate public housing residents on housing authority policies

Lack of trust or understanding about the public housing agency can adversely affect a program's success. Public housing authorities considering a family reentry program should consider campaigns to educate residents on existing policies.

The Family Reentry Pilot Program

The Family Reentry Pilot Program (FRPP) is a collaborative effort between the New York City Housing Authority, the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), the NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS), the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), the Vera Institute of Justice, and:

- > Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES)
- > Center for Community Alternatives (CCA)
- > ComALERT at the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office
- > Exodus Transitional Community
- > Fortune Society
- > Friends of Island Academy
- > Getting Out and Staying Out
- > Harlem Community Justice Center
- > Housing Works, Inc.
- > Osborne Association
- > Services for the Underserved (SUS)
- > STRIVE International
- > Women's Prison Association

For more information

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The Vera Institute of Justice is a justice reform change agent. Vera produces ideas, analysis, and research that inspire change in the systems people rely upon for safety and justice, and works in close partnership with government and civic leaders to implement it. Vera is currently pursuing core priorities of ending the misuse of jails, transforming conditions of confinement, and ensuring that justice systems more effectively serve America's increasingly diverse communities.

To read this report, visit www.vera.org/coming-home.

For more information, contact Ram Subramanian, editorial director, at rsubramanian@vera.org.

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statements and interpretations contained in this publication. Such interpretations do not necessarily reflect the view of the government.

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