

PUSH-CR began enrolling families in November 2013. About 3 families each month are enrolled, and to date, 55 homeless, child welfare involved families in Cedar Rapids have been transitioned to fully furnished housing in various properties in Cedar Rapids. A service coordinator assigned to each family works closely with the Affordable Housing Network, the Department of Human Services, and the various providers working with parents and children to ensure progress and to resolve problems that arise.

A rigorous program evaluation is being conducted locally by the University of Iowa and a cross-site evaluation of all five projects is being conducted by the Urban Institute; these will continue through September 2017. Some of findings reported to date include:

- PUSH-CR is reaching a diverse segment of the population: 48% of children in PUSH-CR families are African-American or multi-racial.
- About 25% of parents were employed at the time they enrolled in PUSH; 63% were employed during their time in PUSH-CR.
- Among families involved with PUSH-CR for one year, statistically significant improvements have been found in the areas of home environment, parental capabilities, self-sufficiency, and family health.
- About 40% of children who were in foster care placements at the time their families began PUSH have been reunified with their birth family/relatives.
- Families report high levels of satisfaction with their housing and the services they are receiving, and express optimism about their future and the ability to maintain housing.
- Linn County DHS is now assessing all incoming child welfare referrals for housing needs.
- The City of Cedar Rapids, with assistance from the regional IDHS office and AHNI, developed housing preference language (with HUD approval) to include families with open child welfare cases

PUSH-CR has a clear set of strategic objectives with measurable outcomes at family and systems levels. At the family level, these include: improving housing stability; keeping families together and avoiding unnecessary placements; reducing the length of time that children spend in foster care; and improving child and family functioning and well-being. At the larger systems level, the objectives include: raising awareness of housing needs in the child welfare system and implementing a process for screening for housing issues; improving access to affordable housing for families who typically would not be approved; demonstrating a collaborative community approach to addressing housing needs for a population of highly vulnerable families. Quality assurance is built in throughout the project, through internal teams with frequent data reporting and feedback; and inter-agency team of program staff from collaborating agencies that meet monthly to review project achievements and to troubleshoot problems; an advisory committee of senior management from collaborating agencies; and the ongoing external evaluations.

As an innovative housing program in Iowa, PUSH-CR demonstrates the best of community collaboration in service to one of the most vulnerable populations in the state, and with impressive results. In addition to assisting families, PUSH has already had an impact on the larger community: Linn County DHS is now assessing all income child welfare referrals for housing needs, and in planning for sustainability the service community has become energized around affordable housing issues. Please consider recognizing the program with a HousingIowa Award.