

**HOUSING AUTHORITY REENTRY:  
REDUCING THE RISK OF  
RECIDIVISM THROUGH HOUSING  
STABILITY IN UNION COUNTY,  
PENNSYLVANIA**

**A Literature Review and Evaluation of  
JUSTICE BRIDGE HOUSING  
PROGRAM, UNION COUNTY, PA**

**prepared for the  
Union County Housing Authority**

**June 2015**

**by**

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**Union County Housing Authority, Pennsylvania  
Justice Bridge Housing Program**

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Housing Stability in Union County, Pennsylvania**

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**CONTENTS**

Scope of this Report.....2

Justice Bridge Housing Program Overview: Six Key Components.....3

Research issue: Recidivism and Risk of Recidivism.....4

Research Issue: Cost Effectiveness.....6

Justice Bridge Housing Program Implementation.....7

    Program precursors.....7

    Initial funding.....8

    Process from selection to exit.....8

    Resources of the Union Housing Authority.....10

    Permanent housing options.....11

    Supportive services.....12

    Participant profiles.....12

    Participant evaluation.....12

Reentry Housing Best Practices Research Study Findings.....15

Other Public Housing Authority Reentry Programs.....17

Replication of Justice Bridge Housing Program.....18

References.....20

Appendix: Public Housing Authority Reentry Programs Compared and  
Contrasted with Justice Bridge Housing Program.....22

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*Securing housing is perhaps the most immediate challenge facing prisoners and jail inmates upon their release.... The process of obtaining housing is often complicated by a host of factors: the scarcity of affordable and available housing, legal barriers and regulations..., prejudices that restrict tenancy for this population, strict eligibility requirements for federally subsidized housing, and the fact that the families of many former inmates may not accept them into the household when they are released. Research has found that, among released inmates, those who do not have stable housing arrangements are more likely to return to prison than those with stable housing arrangements*

(Solomon, Osborn, LoBuglio, Mellow, & Mukamal, 2008, p. 198).

**Scope of this Report**

The Justice Bridge Housing Program (JBHP) of Union County, Pennsylvania was established in 2012 and is intended to demonstrate how a public housing authority can be a critical component of a county's reentry strategy by providing affordable, stable housing plus supportive services for justice-involved individuals. The Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, has funded research and evaluation to determine how JBHP could be replicated. Factors leading to successful replication have been identified through two types of literature review. First, the initial results of JBHP have been evaluated quantitatively, qualitatively, and in light of scholarly studies of reentry housing programs. Secondly, the core components of JBHP were compared and contrasted with other reentry housing programs that include a public housing authority. Though not a full formal program evaluation, this did produce strong indications of factors that would lead to successful replication. "Success" was defined along two dimensions: as decreasing the risk of recidivism, and as financial savings to the county.

Following is a summary of the flow of the report:

- The report starts by presenting an overview of the Justice Bridge Housing Program (JBHP) and explaining its six key components. Two general

research issues are considered –1) recidivism and the risk of recidivism, and 2) cost effectiveness.

- It then moves from the general research issues to the specific replication lessons of JBHP. The program's implementation is described in detail, with a quantitative profile of participants and qualitative reflections on the program from participants themselves.
- Findings from research studies on best practice reentry housing programs are then compared and contrasted with JBHP. Specifically, components of other reentry programs involving public housing authorities both across the United States and in Pennsylvania are compared and contrasted with JBHP.
- Recommendations for replication conclude the report, with discussion of aspects of JBHP which are unique to Union County as well as that are generalizable to other communities.

### **Justice Bridge Housing Program Overview: Six Key Components**

There are six components of the Justice Bridge Housing Program (JBHP) that together comprise the core of JBHP and also distinguish it from other reentry programs.

1. JBHP is operated by a public housing authority. The Union County Housing Authority (UCHA) manages all aspects of participants' housing, from finding available rental units with landlords willing to be part of the JBHP, to ensuring participants have adequate home furnishings, to implementing the rental assistance. The UCHA coordinates the Selection and Review Panel and chairs its monthly meetings. They also receive reports from service providers and maintain the program database which generates statistical reports.
2. Housing is delivered through tenant-based rental assistance. As an experienced provider of tenant-based rental assistance through the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCV), the UCHA developed the JBHP's housing component in accordance with HCV policies and procedures.
3. JBHP is situated in a rural geographic area. The population of Union County is approximately 44,900; its area is 317 square miles. There are no cities in the county, and just four boroughs (towns) that range in population from approximately 290 to 5,620. Most people, therefore, live in one of Union County's 10 townships.
4. JBHP targets a specific population. There are three eligibility requirements for participation in JBHP, in addition to involvement with the criminal justice system (typically recent discharge from jail or prison). Participants in JBHP must be

nonviolent, have a connection to Union County (typically previous residence) and with a mental health diagnosis and/or substance use disorder. In addition, persons with high risk of recidivism are targeted.

5. County and State Departments of Probation and Parole refer and supervise participants. The Union County and Pennsylvania Departments of Probation and Parole are the central clearinghouses for prospective program participants. Union County's Chief Probation Officer screens prospective participants and reports his screening report and recommendation to the JBHP Selection and Review Panel, which makes the final approval. Applicants' parole or probation officer attends the Selection and Review Panel meeting on their behalf. Each month the County Chief Probation Officer or state Department of Probation and Parole reports participants' compliance with conditions of parole or probation.

6. Community supportive services are provided externally to the public housing authority. Supportive services are provided to all participants by agencies other than the UCHA. The local Community Action Agency provides case management, including education in financial management, and the local regional behavioral health services organization provides counseling and therapies of various kinds. These services are paid for independently of the UCHA, either through participants' Medical Assistance or by other funding acquired by the provider organizations.

### **Research Issue: Recidivism and Risk of Recidivism**

**Difficulty of definition.** "Recidivism" is a difficult concept to discuss simply because it is defined differently across states and by various criminologists (Council on State Governments Justice Center, 2014). Therefore one needs to ensure uniformity of terms and meanings when comparing rates of recidivism of reentry or other criminal justice programs.

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections defines recidivism as the first instance of any type of rearrest or reincarceration after inmates are released from state prison (Bell, Bucklen, Nakamura, Tomkiel, Santore, Russell, & Orth, 2013). Using that definition, the recidivism rate in Pennsylvania has remained stable at 60% for the past 60 years (Bell, et al., 2013). It is thought that the recidivism rate for persons released from jails – i.e., county correctional systems – is lower, but no reliable statistics are available to confirm or refute that thought. What has been reliably demonstrated, however, is that the first year after release is the time of highest risk for recidivism (Bell, et al., 2013), "when the strains and obstacles of reentry often are most pronounced" (Garland, Wodahl, & Mayfield, 2011, p. 103).

**Criminogenic factors and the risk of recidivism.** According to the American Community Corrections Institute web site, "criminogenics is the study of specific needs that must be addressed in order to habilitate criminal offenders and

achieve lower recidivism rates.” Criminogenic factors, therefore, are factors that constitute risk of recidivism. There is widespread agreement on what these are.

The American Community Corrections Institute (2014) listed criminogenic factors in this priority order:

1. Anti-social cognition
2. Anti-social companions
3. Anti-social personality
4. Family and marital relationships
5. Substance abuse
6. Employment
7. Education
8. Leisure and recreation

Similarly, the Northampton County, Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (2013) reported risk factors in this priority order:

1. Anti-social personality
2. Anti-social attitudes and values
3. Anti-social associates
4. Family dysfunction
5. Poor self-control, poor problem solving skills
6. Substance abuse
7. Lack of employment/employment skills

Noted criminologist Mark Carey (2013) separated criminogenic factors into higher or primary risk factors and lower or secondary risk factors:

Primary:

1. Thinking/beliefs
2. Personality
3. Peer relations
4. Family

Secondary:

5. Substance abuse
6. Education
7. Employment
8. Leisure

Criminogenic research is also in agreement that treatment programs should address the primary criminogenic needs (American Community Corrections Institute, 2010), and should be targeted at ex-offenders who are at high risk of recidivism. According to the research of the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, “from the standpoint of policies designed to reduce crime, it is better to focus resources...on offenders who pose higher risk to society for criminal re-offending” (WSIPP, 2010, p. 90). Carey’s research (2013) concluded that the impact of treatment (programs) is most positive for ex-offenders at high risk of

recidivism, lower for those at moderate risk, slightly positive for low/moderate risk and significantly negative for people at low risk of recidivating.

**Housing stability and the risk of recidivism.** Stable housing is not itself a criminogenic need, and research has not found a causal link between homelessness and committing crime (Wodahl, 2006). However, numerous studies have concluded that stable housing is correlated with reduced likelihood of recidivism (Baillargeon, Hoge, & Penn, 2010; Diana T. Myers & Assoc., 2009; Lutze, Rosky, & Hamilton, 2014; Makario, Steinier, & Travis, 2010; Rydberg, Grommon, Heubner, & Bynum, 2014; Solomon et al., 2008; Walker, Hempel, Unnithan, & Pogrebin, 2014). This is because residing in safe and affordable housing creates a living situation in which criminogenic needs can more easily be met. Rydberg, et al. called the increased likelihood of recidivism as a result of housing instability a “collateral consequence” (2014, p. 422). A study of men and women released from prison in Ohio indicated that unstable housing correlates with lower levels of social bonds and higher levels of anti-social peer relationships, which are high risk factors for recidivism (Makario et al., 2010).

Networks of social relationships and connections to community make up “social capital,” and social capital is how people secure information and advice and obtain resources and benefits, and generally feel secure in the larger society. Social capital enhances feelings of acceptance in society and confidence about successfully navigating society. “Having access to housing facilitates successful reentry by enabling the acquisition, accumulation, and deployment of social capital among ex-offenders. Social capital allows parolees to navigate social interactions and access jobs, transportation, and finances” (Walker, et al., 2014, p. 315). Lutze, Rosky, and Hamilton, who studied reentry housing programs for high risk offenders in Washington State, came to the same conclusion (2014, p. 473),

Averting homelessness or transience by providing stable housing is likely to reduce exposure to deviant peers, social stigma, and the violation of public order laws related to living and working on the street and increase exposure to pro-social networks, constructive activities, and a sense of safety and well-being conducive to participating in treatment and other services.

**Conclusion: Justice Bridge Housing Program reduces the risk of recidivism.** By providing housing that is safe, affordable, and secure, the Justice Bridge Housing Program helps create a living situation in which participants can build social capital and meet their criminogenic needs, thus reducing their risk of recidivism.

### **Research Issue: Cost Effectiveness**

The community-wide effects of criminal justice policies and programs make determining their cost effectiveness a particularly daunting task (BJA Center for

Program Evaluation, 2011). Complete benefit-cost analysis would include sentencing policies, programming policies, and policing options (Washington State Institute for Public Policy [WSIPP] 2010); all associated governmental revenue, expenditures, and savings at both the state and local levels, as well as costs and benefits to all parties affected including inmates, victims, and the community at large (Henrichson, 2014). The costs of utilizing social services would be included. Complete benefit-cost analysis would also include all possible outcomes, including but not limited to recidivism, employment, homelessness (Henrichson), public safety (WSIPP), and family reunification. In accounting terms, determining the true cost effectiveness of the Justice Bridge Housing Program would include analysis of cost transfers and indirect costs as well as societal costs.<sup>1</sup>

Since the complexity of cost effectiveness analysis is beyond the scope of this report, we are comparing only the direct per diem cost to Union County of jail incarceration and rental assistance through the Justice Bridge Housing Program. Union County both incarcerates people in its own jail and sends people to jails in other counties. In both situations, Union County's average cost per person per day in jail is \$70.00. As of March 31, 2015, the average daily cost per participant in JBHP was \$24.50. Twenty dollars (\$20.00) was primarily rental assistance but also included the cost of the Housing Authority's self-sufficiency program, a service offered participants. The administrative cost to the Housing Authority was between \$4.00 and \$5.00 per participant per day. Because the amount of rent paid by participants varies depending upon their income, the monthly cost for rental assistance by participants ranged from a high of \$36.00 to a low of \$10.08. As of January 31, 2015, the total rental assistance cost of JBHP was \$44,110 from the program's start in July 2012 through January 2015. Assuming participants would have had to "max out" their sentence because they lacked approved housing plans, Union County saved \$108,080 in per diem jail costs for participants in the JBHP, for a net savings of \$63,970 as of January 31, 2015.

**Conclusion. The Justice Bridge Housing Program is cost effective for Union County.**

### **Justice Bridge Housing Program Implementation**

**Program precursors.** Key program precursors in Union County were: a public culture that encouraged cost-effective innovation in human services in general and for justice-involved individuals in particular; a well-respected political champion; an active Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB); and a public housing authority already concerned about reentry housing needs.

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<sup>1</sup> The distinctions among benefit-cost analysis, cost analysis, cost-savings analysis, and cost-effectiveness analysis are beyond the scope of this report; we are using the terms interchangeably.



Union County was a particularly hospitable environment in which to develop and implement the Justice Bridge Housing Program. Its public culture was collaborative, oriented toward best practices, and focused on cost-effective services for all county residents. In addition, Union County had positive experience with both their Drug Treatment Court and Day Reporting Center, which led to a willingness to try other less-traditional interventions within the local criminal justice system.

At least some of the credit for building such a welcoming public culture should be given to the chair of the County Board of Commissioners, who has been a political champion of JBHP. His personal experience as an employer of justice-involved people had convinced him of the necessity of providing opportunities for reentering persons to become productive citizens. This Commissioner championed first the Treatment Court, then the Day Reporting Center, and then advocated for the Justice Bridge Program. He has urged, “Look at the big picture. We are taking individuals who are tax burdens and turning them into tax payers. Now the whole community benefits!” This Commissioner believes in “investing in people -- whether they be county employees or people in the criminal justice system.”

In addition to an existing hospitable public culture and political champion, JBHP also grew out of an active Criminal Justice Advisory Board (CJAB), which included participation of the chair of the Board of Commissioners, along with a proactive CJAB regional coordinator representing the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). (PCCD was founded in 1978 with the mission to coordinate local and state criminal justice systems on behalf of the state’s governor’s office.) After one CJAB meeting, during coffee together, the Commissioners’ Chair and CJAB regional coordinator discussed the CJAB’s need for a housing expert. So they “walked across the street” to the offices of the UCHA and asked its executive director to join the CJAB. Later, it was the regional coordinator who recommended that UCHA apply for initial funding for what became the Justice Bridge Housing Program.

**Initial funding.** The Union County Housing Authority received a grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency for the purpose of creating the Justice Bridge Housing Program and sustaining it for two years. The grant was used for rental assistance and other direct program expense including program staff. As explained above in the “Core Components” section, supportive services were funded by sources external to the Justice Bridge Program itself.

**Process from selection to exit.** The first step in the selection process is referral of prospective participants by probation or parole officers to Union County’s Chief Probation Officer. Secondly, the Chief Probation Officer screens prospective participants according to the six JBHP selection criteria:

1. Union County resident at the time of arrest

2. Likelihood of remaining compliant with conditions of Accelerated Rehabilitative Disposition (ARD), probation, or parole. Considerations include frequency of arrests, incarceration record, nature of crime (including level of violence), family/community support, and attitude toward compliance
3. Justice involvement – on county or state probation or parole, in county ARD, be a sentenced Union County inmate, or be an inmate in a state prison serving a sentence imposed in Union County
4. Diagnosis of mental health or substance use disorder, with demonstrated commitment to engage in an approved treatment program
5. Need for housing
6. Likelihood of becoming financially self-sufficient and therefore able to assume responsibility for housing costs at the conclusion of JBHP participation

JBHP is intended for justice-involved persons who, though non-violent, are at high risk of recidivism. High risk is implied by the fourth and fifth criteria – behavioral health diagnosis and housing need.

The JBHP Selection and Review Panel is key to the next steps in the selection process. The Panel is comprised of executive leaders of the Union County Housing Authority -- Executive Director and Housing Choice Voucher Administrator; representatives of the county and state criminal justice systems -- Union County Probation and Parole, warden of the county jail, Union County sheriff, and Pennsylvania Department of Probation and Parole; representatives of supportive services providers – regional behavioral health organization, Union County community action agency, and the Behavioral Health Alliance of Rural Pennsylvania; and citizen mediator and prisoner advocate. The Panel meets monthly to review program applicants, monitor progress of participants, coordinate services, and assist UCHA with program management decisions. The Housing Authority's Executive Director chairs the meetings. Panel members demonstrate a high level of commitment to the Justice Bridge program and to individual participants, illustrated by the warden's letter of recommendation to a potential employer of a participant, who had been discharged from his jail.

As the third step in the selection process, the Chief Probation Officer reports to the JBHP Selection and Review Panel his screening report and recommendation. He does not bring to the Panel an applicant whom he thinks has very little likelihood of success – i.e., the mental health disorder is too serious or alcohol or drug use disorder too entrenched, or the person has no employment skills and has never been employed. However, one deficiency among the six criteria would not prevent him from bringing the applicant's profile to the Selection and Review Panel.

The final step in the selection process is ranking of the applicant by each member of the Selection and Review Panel. Each member scores the applicant

by each criterion on a scale of one to ten, with ten indicating greatest compliance with the criterion, and calculates the total score. The Panel then discusses the ranking and accepts or rejects the applicant.

The selection process is a mix of the objective and subjective. There is no formal threshold score. One prospective applicant was accepted with a score as low as 49 out of 100. The Panel agrees that the selection criteria appropriately selects people *out* or *in* for consideration – i.e., the criteria are both broad enough and discriminating enough (interview August 26, 2014) to guide appropriate choices.

Upon acceptance in JBHP, the Union County Housing Authority contacts landlords to procure a rental unit. When possible, UCHA provides a choice of units to the participant. In addition, the Housing Choice Voucher Administrator often obtains household necessities. Supportive services are offered once the new participant is settled into his or her housing. At monthly meetings of the Selection and Review Panel, UCHA, Probation and Parole, and service providers report participants' compliance with their lease, conditions of probation and parole, behavioral health treatments, and case management.

From time to time a participant with substance use disorder enters a residential rehabilitation program. Using Housing Choice Voucher policies and procedures, Union County Housing Authority retains the person's rental unit by paying full rent to the landlord for a maximum of 90 days. The participant returns to the rental unit and continues in JBHP upon discharge from rehab. If a participant is rearrested, he or she is terminated from JBHP, but can re-apply and be re-admitted.

The Justice Bridge Housing Program is a temporary rental subsidy program, intended to support participants through the period of their parole or probation. The program's intention is that by the time of their exit, participants obtain affordable permanent housing – by segueing into the Housing Choice Voucher program, through private market rental housing, or some other means. Ideally, participants are able to “transition in place” – i.e., remain in their housing unit with rent subsidized permanently through the Housing Choice Voucher program, or by paying market rent. Supportive services not paid for through Medical Assistance or other insurance conclude at the time of exit from Justice Bridge.

**Resources of the Union Housing Authority.** The resources of the Union County Housing Authority itself became core components of the Justice Bridge Housing Program as it was developed. Chief among these resources was its expertise with the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCV), a national tenant-based subsidized rental assistance program for income-eligible households, funded by the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). UCHA used HCV as a model for housing policies and procedures for Justice Bridge. Importantly, UCHA had extant relationships with landlords willing to participate in their tenant-based rental assistance programs, and a reputation

with landlords for effective program administration. In addition, UCHA can tailor rental assistance to meet individual participant needs. For example, UCHA can offer landlords an incentive rental amount and additional security deposit to encourage participation in Justice Bridge, and can allow for court costs and fees when calculating participants' share of monthly rent.

The availability of Housing Choice vouchers at the time JBHP was established was a second major resource of the UCHA. Housing Choice Vouchers provide affordable housing through federally-funded subsidies on a permanent basis, as long as the voucher-holder meets eligibility criteria, primarily income. Therefore, UCHA anticipated that Justice Bridge Housing Program would truly become a "bridge" from its time-limited rental assistance to permanent affordable housing provided through the Housing Choice voucher program.

Thirdly, the UCHA offers Family Self-Sufficiency services to its Housing Choice voucher holders, which UCHA also makes available to participants in JBHP. Provided by the local Community Action Agency, Family Self-Sufficiency includes case management and incentives to increase earned income, which are primarily matched funds to meet particular needs related to meeting employment or education goals. Because of its successful experience with Family Self-Sufficiency in the Housing Choice Voucher Program, UCHA built resources for this program into its funding sources for Justice Bridge.

The Union County Housing Authority had another type of resource that it brought to JBHP in the person of its Housing Choice Voucher Administrator. She partners with the UCHA executive director in overall administration of JBHP. But she also nurtures personal relationships with most everyone involved in the program – service providers and criminal justice personnel on the Selection and Review Panel, landlords, and the participants themselves. Landlords trust her to understand their business and property management concerns. Participants trust her balance between advocacy for and encouragement of them on one hand, and accountability standards on the other. Her warm and compassionate nature, along with high competence as an administrator, help bring about acceptance of the program. Participants appreciate her practical helpfulness – finding apartments, giving them a choice of residences whenever possible, and making sure they have necessary household items.

**Permanent housing options.** As a "bridge" program, JBHP is not permanent housing. Instead, it provides a rental subsidy during participants' time on parole or probation, reducing homelessness or housing instability, and thus reducing the risk of recidivism. At the time of its inception, Housing Choice vouchers were anticipated as a seamless transition from JBHP to affordable permanent housing, enabling participants to "transition in place," thereby remaining in the same rental units. Union County Housing Authority (UCHA) had a supply of turnover vouchers available. However, by the third year of the program, UCHA had fewer Housing Choice vouchers available, significantly reducing the permanent housing

options for participants challenged by difficulties finding employment due to their criminal record, lack of transportation when driving license is suspended, and various court-imposed fines and fees.

**Supportive services.** An array of supportive services is integral to the Justice Bridge Housing Program and critical for participant success. Service providers are represented on the Selection and Review Panel, where they are part of the approval process for applicants and report monthly on participants' accomplishments and challenges. The cost of services is not part of the JBHP budget; costs are paid through participants' medical insurance (generally Medical Assistance) or other revenue sources of provider organizations.

The local behavioral health organization provides comprehensive services to address mental health needs and alcohol or other substance use disorders. Services include case management at various levels, peer-to-peer support, in-home skills training, psychiatry, outpatient therapy, drug and alcohol care management and inpatient, partial hospitalization, or outpatient treatment. The local Community Action Agency provides comprehensive case management to assist participants to set and attain goals around income, employment, transportation, education, and family functioning. Family Self-Sufficiency -- mentioned above as a resource of the Public Housing Authority -- is contracted out by the Union County Housing Authority to the Community Action Agency. Family Self-Sufficiency encourages participants to increase their earned income.

**Participant profile.** Each participant has been accepted into the Justice Bridge Housing Program according to the criteria explained above. In summary, each was convicted of non-violent offenses and had behavioral health issues, primarily substance use disorder, and was considered at high risk of recidivism by the County Department of Probation and Parole. About 90% are between the ages of 22 and 35, with the average age 31; about 40% are female. Nineteen people were accepted into JBHP from its inception in November 2012 through January 2015, with 6-11 active at any one time. Of the 19, two dropped out voluntarily, and seven (37%) recidivated. Six received Housing Choice Vouchers while in JBHP. As of this writing, no one has yet graduated from the program.

**Participant evaluation.** As part of a larger study on reentry programs in rural counties of Pennsylvania, two professors of criminal justice at Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania interviewed eight JBHP participants in spring 2014. DMA analyzed interview transcripts to determine which program components JBHP participants experienced as helpful or effective in reducing their own risk of recidivism, or conversely unhelpful or ineffective in reducing their own risks of recidivism. The primary focus of analysis was on the risk factors mentioned above: thinking/beliefs, personality related risk factors such as impulse control, peer relations, family, substance abuse, education, employment, leisure, and development of social capital. The secondary focus of analysis was on other

program components that the participants found particularly helpful (i.e., positive or beneficial) or unhelpful (i.e., negative or detrimental).

All JBHP participants articulated a clear awareness that stable housing was important for their success. When asked their opinion of these statements, “I believe that housing stability plays an important role in successfully completing probation or parole,” and “I believe the Justice Bridge Housing Program will help me maintain stable housing,” six people “strongly agreed” and two “agreed” with each. This agreement came from participants who expressed some dissatisfaction with the size or location of their apartments as well as from participants who were completely satisfied.

In response to open-ended questions asking them to describe various aspects of their post-discharge situations and participation in JBHP, the largest number of statements had to do with change in a way of thinking and beliefs about themselves.

- “The program gave [me] the ability to get [myself] together.”
- “The JBHP helps me feel a sense of independence. I’m able to have my own place and get help at the same time...It gives me a sense of completion – some validation that somebody trusted me enough to want to fund me and help with housing.”
- After his first JBHP apartment did not work out, John appreciated that “they already had another apartment...I’ve never had to be, ‘Crap – I don’t have a place to live,’ which is very heartwarming and it’s something that makes me feel very comfortable.”
- From a mother: JBHP “relieved me of the fear of not being able to take care of my children...I feel more secure about my choices...The biggest thing that [JBHP] has done for me is given me peace that I can raise my children in a household not like the one I was raised in.”
- In spite of living in a small apartment and being unemployed with thousands of dollars in fines in four counties, Scott said, “I’m happy. Believe it or not, I’m happy...That I’m in the program is a miracle in my eyes. JBHP is giving me the opportunity to get it together.”
- A similar sentiment from Tyler: “I’m glad I got into this program. I thought after being in jail for ten months it would feel weird to be free. I didn’t sleep the first night but after that I was good. I was just happy.”

The second largest number of statements had to do with building social capital through community connections along with a sense of being part of a broader community. This could include access to mainstream benefits.

- The most clearly articulated sense of building social capital came from Amy: “Now what I see as the community is so much bigger than people just walking down the street. I’ve realized the people with the authority are part of the community because now I can see the police or anybody who works in these [county government] buildings [and I] say ‘hi’ because they know me on a more personal level and...though I’m young and still

learning and not really part of society yet, you know it helps me feel part [of the community].”

- “With a job and the positive reaction I have in the community I think I could succeed.”
- Reflecting on accepting “the crazy gift” of affordable housing, Jerome said, “We all need each other.”
- “Without [JBHP] I wouldn’t be part of the community.”
- Several participants mentioned use of benefits such as Food Stamps, CareerLink, other resources available at the Day Reporting Center, and local food pantry.

One participant expressed a negative sense of community, or a sense of alienation from the community: “I feel like people judge me that I’m getting free housing and I’m a drug addict and a convicted felon but I just kind of block it out and tell myself that somebody somewhere is proud of me and wants me to do good.” This woman used a positive way of thinking about herself to offset the feeling of community judgment against her.

Participants made a few references to other criminogenic factors -- peer relations, family, substance abuse, education, and employment – in the context of JBHP.

- Allen found it easier to control his abstention from alcoholic beverages in his own home, as opposed to sharing housing with a friend who does drink, because “it wouldn’t be correct to tell someone he can’t drink in his own house.”
- Several participants contrasted the “peace” of having their own home instead of living in the “chaotic” or even “hostile” environment of their parents’ homes, sometimes caused by alcohol or drug abuse of family members.
- Along with a few other participants, John regained a positive relationship with his family while in JBHP.
- Most participants mentioned the favorable location of their JBHP apartments – within walking distance of jobs or employment possibilities, meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous, child’s school, and county Probation and Parole office.

Two aspects of the Justice Bridge Housing Program, neither of which is captured in the list of criminogenic factors, were stressed by participants as being of particular help to them. First, they appreciated the ease of the program. Several participants contrasted this easiness with the difficulty of parole and the general difficulty of navigating the transition from jail to life out of jail.

- “I don’t see the housing as a program. I just signed the lease and pay my rent.”
- “If I had a question or needed something fixed or whatever,...everything got done right in a timely [and respectful] manner.”

- “The program is easy.” Union County Housing Authority took care of paperwork and finding apartments.
- JBHP provides “a chance – my being successful is different from the program being successful.”

Secondly, the participants greatly appreciated the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Administrator of the Union County Housing Authority, who is the face of JBHP to participants. The HCV Administrator is key to the successful implementation of the Justice Bridge Housing Program. In her primary role as HCV Administrator, she has developed relationships with landlords; she is cognizant of HCV policies and procedures, on which the housing component of JBHP is based; she has relationships with JBHP services providers; she helps to facilitate monthly meetings of the Selection and Review Panel; she prepares paperwork and finds apartments for JBHP approved applicants, attempting to offer a choice of housing units. She also helps new participants obtain furniture and other household necessities by “putting the word out to [her] co-workers and friends.”

- The HCV Administrator “was just all positive, there was no negativity...I hate to disappoint that woman and I’m glad and I’m thankful [for] her.”
- Regarding the HCV Administrator’s concern that Amy keep her apartment neat and clean, “I thought that was very good...to be on top of things like that.”
- Union County Housing Authority staff “really do want to help people.”
- The HCV Administrator “is very good at her job; she makes you comfortable; she returns your phone calls; she’s there to talk to.”
- The HCV Administrator is “easy to work with.”

Summary. Qualitative analysis of interviews with participants indicates that the Justice Bridge Housing Program addresses criminogenic factors and reduces the risk of recidivism for persons involved with the criminal justice system who are non-violent, at high risk of recidivism, and with behavioral health diagnoses. By providing stable housing, JBHP fosters positive, self-enhancing thinking and builds the opportunity for social capital and positive community connections. The housing helps participants avoid family or peers that may undermine their sobriety and/or compliance with terms of probation or parole. In addition, the Justice Bridge Housing Program itself is structured and staffed to produce optimal outcomes for participants.

### **Reentry Housing Best Practices Research Study Findings**

Research studies on housing reentry programs, though not numerous, suggest best practices for implementation, with the aim of cost-effectiveness while reducing the risk of recidivism. The Justice Bridge Housing Program has been implemented in accordance with these best practices.



**The necessity for cross-systems collaboration.** A key theme in the research literature is that successful reentry necessitates collaboration among housing providers, providers of supportive services, and the criminal justice system, especially departments of probation and parole. In addition to the need to address criminogenic factors, persons discharged from prison or jail face daunting obstacles to meeting their needs for housing, employment, money, and transportation (Garland et al., 2011). A hope for overcoming these obstacles lies in “coordinated partnership and planning within established referral networks. Growing evidence suggest that enhanced case management approaches can increase access to community resources, and it is likely that such access would translate to progress in managing reentry challenges” (Rydberg, et al., 2014, p. 438). An evaluation by the National Institute on Justice of the first five years of implementation of the “Second Chance Act” (2013) found a focus across states on new or strengthened partnerships between corrections and the community to obtain and leverage comprehensive services needed by the reentry population. Corrections officials are “approach[ing] the job with less emphasis on compliance and monitoring and more on this rehabilitative philosophy and trying to identify this holistic set of needs that the people they were working with needed [to have met] to be successful” (National Institute of Justice, 2013, videotape).

Rural counties like Union seem particularly well suited to cross-systems collaboration. Some researchers have concluded that coalitions are more prevalent in rural areas than in urban – that personal connections are greater in rural areas (Wodahl, 2006), and these experiences are apt to foster cooperation and collaboration and the sharing of resources (Solomon et al., 2008). Collaboration is key to implementation of the Justice Bridge Housing Program, demonstrated by the diverse membership of the Selection and Review Panel and the collaborative nature of its work.

**Reentry programs need to be “housing-centered.”** “In spite of...challenges and the importance of establishing stable housing as a basis for success in other areas of reentry, few programs place housing at the center of the coordinated response supporting the transition from prison to the community” (Lutze, et al., 2014, p. 472). These researchers into the outcomes of Washington State’s reentry program praised it for having housing as its center piece. Residential stability is critical in order to “increase exposure to pro-social networks, constructive activities, and a sense of safety and well-being conducive to participating in treatment and other services” (p. 473). In other words, when criminal justice-involved people are stably housed, they are much more likely to engage with comprehensive supportive services or treatment. Similarly, Cortes & Rogers (2010) recommended increasing access to existing units as a key approach to expanding reentry housing options. Justice Bridge is a housing-centered program that creates access to housing.

**Successful design and implementation.** The Corporation for Supportive Housing, known nationally for the reentry housing programs they have facilitated

in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and other cities, undertook a program evaluation after five years of implementation (Corporation for Supportive Housing, 2011). Several of CSH's "lessons learned" are key aspects of the design and implementation of the Justice Bridge Housing Program

:

- Coordination among housing reentry program, court system, and probation/parole is critical to maintaining a strong connection with clients.
- Robust services are necessary to keep people housed.
- Cultivating champions within the corrections system is critically important. The County sheriff and Chief Probation Officer are active members of the Selection and Review Panel in Union County.
- Collective problem-solving and troubleshooting is necessary to identify systems barriers to effective housing placement and reduced recidivism. This occurs monthly at Panel meetings.
- Negotiations with housing authorities can result in expanded eligibility criteria for their programs. JBHP is administered by the housing authority.

#### **Other Public Housing Authority Reentry Programs: Justice Bridge Housing Program Compared and Contrasted**

Although it is not common throughout the United States for public housing authorities to operate programs specifically for the reentry population, there are some examples of programs similar to Justice Bridge Housing elsewhere in Pennsylvania and in other states. DMA's research into other programs focused on comparing their key components to the six key components of JBHP. As explained above, they are:

1. JBHP is operated by a public housing authority.
2. Housing is delivered through tenant-based rental assistance.
3. JBHP is situated in a rural geographic area.
4. JBHP targets a specific population.
5. County Department of Probation and Parole refers and supervises participants.
6. Community supportive services are provided externally to the public housing authority.

DMA obtained information on other reentry housing programs involving collaboration with a public housing authority (PHA).<sup>2</sup> Fourteen of these were in states other than Pennsylvania. Like Union County's Justice Bridge Program,

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<sup>2</sup> Not included here are the many PHAs that have loosened previously strict prohibitions against applicants or tenants with a criminal record, that consider applications from justice-involved individuals on a case-by-case basis, or that have an appeals process for denials based on criminal record. Also not included are collaborations with PHAs to house homeless persons or people with a behavioral health diagnosis. While these programs often include justice-involved participants, they are not reentry programs per se.

each of the 14 programs includes supportive services along with housing assistance. All reduce the risk of recidivism by stabilizing housing for reentry participants. However, the specific roles of the public housing authorities differ. The Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D. C. PHAs set aside Housing Choice Vouchers; Burlington, Vermont and Salt Lake City, Utah PHAs provide housing placement services but no rental subsidies; Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City PHAs waive their policies against criminal records so discharged inmates can join their family members who hold Housing Choice Vouchers or, in New Haven, Connecticut, live in public housing; Cuyahoga County, Ohio (Cleveland), King County, Washington (Seattle), and Oakland, California PHAs all operate site-based transitional housing and Portland, Oregon, provides transitional rental assistance; Spokane, Washington and Salt Lake City PHAs provide incentives to landlords to rent to people reentering. None of the 14 PHAs directly operates a reentry bridge housing programs as does the Union Housing Authority. Another importance difference is that each of the 14 is located in an urban environment, most of them in large cities. See the Appendix of this report for more information on the individual programs and how they are similar to or different from JBHP.

Union is not the only public housing authority in Pennsylvania that is part of a reentry housing program. DMA's research identified four others – Beaver, Clarion, Columbia, and York. Like the Justice Bridge Housing Program, each of the four includes both housing assistance and services, and by stabilizing housing for reentry participants, reduces their risk of recidivism. Clarion and Columbia are rural counties as is Union, but Beaver and York are urban counties, with the cities of Aliquippa and York respectively. Columbia County's program was partially modeled on JBHP. The roles of the housing authorities differ from program to program. Beaver PHA provides site-based permanent housing, Clarion PHA manages rental assistance, Columbia PHA provides short-term rental assistance, and York PHA has set aside three public housing units. See the Appendix of this report for more information on the individual programs and how they are similar to or different from JBHP.

Each of the eighteen reentry programs contains at least one of the six core components of the Justice Bridge Housing Program, but only the Columbia County, Pennsylvania program includes all six components. At this report's writing, the Columbia program was about to accept its first participant, so there is no program evaluation information available.

### **Replication of Justice Bridge Housing Program**

It is the hope of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, and of the Union Housing Authority that the Justice Bridge Housing Program could be replicated elsewhere in Pennsylvania or beyond. It is important, therefore, to determine which components of the JBHP, if any, are generalizable to other communities and which are unique to Union County.

**Components most likely replicable.** The Justice Bridge Housing Program has been designed and implemented in accordance with best practices. Core components that could be replicated in other places include: management and oversight by the public housing authority ensuring the program is housing-centered; targeted population of non-violent offenders with behavioral health diagnosis at high risk of recidivism; participant referral and supervision by the local department of probation and parole; and cross-systems collaboration with supportive services provided external to the housing authority. Other public housing authorities could model reentry housing on policies and procedures of the Housing Choice Voucher program. Other collaborations of housing, services, and criminal justice providers could develop the knowledge and understanding of reentry challenges and how to address those challenges. This is not to minimize, however, the commitment, time, attention to detail, and good faith effort required by all parties in order to establish and maintain a successful reentry housing program.

**Considerations for replication.** The Union Housing Authority's resource of Housing Choice Vouchers made JBHP truly a "bridge" program to permanent housing. Many PHAs do not have unused vouchers. The determination of permanent housing options would be a challenge to replication. In some places the program could be modified to become site-based. Master leasing, perhaps in collaboration with a permanent housing program targeted to people with behavioral health diagnoses, may be a possibility.

What are more problematic for replication are: the collaborative political culture of Union County with its champion of human services in general and of justice-involved people in particular; the eagerness of the current and past directors of the housing authority to try innovative means of meeting the housing authority's mission; the compassion of the Housing Choice Administrator which has led her to participant-centered program implementation; and the ease with which corrections and human services personnel joined JBHP. The political culture of a prospective replication county and the willingness and competence of its public housing authority leadership should be carefully screened. Fortunately, though political will along with people who are at the same time highly competent, highly compassionate, and expert navigators of bureaucratic regulations, may not coincide as commonly as one would hope, it does occur.

The rural nature of Union County with its one major town that is also the county seat, has been a core component of the success of the Justice Bridge Housing Program. It is unclear whether rural geography would be necessary for successful replication.

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- |                   |                     |
|-------------------|---------------------|
| Boop, Preson      | McConnell, Jennifer |
| Bridges, Maryanne | Quigley, Bruce      |
| Lizardi, Scott    |                     |
- Union County Justice Bridge Housing Program Selection and Review Panel
- Personal interviews with JBHP participants were conducted in spring 2014 by  
 Bowman, Edward, Ph.D. *Lock Haven University*  
 Ely, Katie, Ph.D. *Lock Haven University*

## Appendix

### **Public Housing Authority Reentry Programs Compared and Contrasted with Justice Bridge Housing Program Union County, Pennsylvania**

#### Reentry Housing Programs with PHA Collaboration – In States Other than Pennsylvania

- Differing roles for PHAs
  - All include housing assistance plus services
  - All reduce the risk of recidivism
  - All are urban
1. Baltimore, MD: 200 Housing Choice vouchers set aside for ex-offenders who are homeless.
    - a. Primary collaboration partners: Housing Auth. of Baltimore City, Mayor's Office of Human Services
    - b. Components similar to JBHP: rental assistance
    - c. Differences with JBHP: large city environment, permanent housing
  2. Burlington, VT: Reentry specialist at Burlington Housing Authority helps parolees locate and retain housing. May move in with family with current voucher. Started 2005.
    - a. Primary collaboration partners: Burlington Housing Authority, Department of Corrections, nonprofit service providers
    - b. Component similar to JBHP: collaboration with nonprofits, cultivation of landlords
    - c. Differences with JBHP: city environment, no rental assistance/subsidy
  3. Chicago, IL: Lifting of restrictions on criminal justice involvement to allow ex-offenders to reunite with families who are current S. 8 Housing Choice Voucher holders. 50 participants in Family Reunification pilot project of the Corporation for Supportive Housing.
    - a. Primary collaboration partners: Chicago Housing Authority, Cook County Housing Authority, Chicago and Cook County reentry organizations, social services agencies
    - b. Components similar to JBHP: collaborative program, housing + services
    - c. Differences with JBHP: Participants are housed with existing Section 8 voucher holders, large city environment
  4. Cuyahoga County, OH: Site-based transitional housing in public housing – units set aside by Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority, participants screened and selected by YMCA

- a. Primary collaboration partners: Cuyahoga Metro. Housing Authority, YMCA, Cuyahoga County and Cleveland Reentry organizations, referring social services agencies
  - b. Components similar to JBHP: collaborative program, housing + services
  - c. Differences with JBHP: large city environment, free housing, males only
5. King County, WA: Project-based subsidized transitional housing for released offenders reuniting with their children
- a. Primary collaboration partners: King County Housing Authority, YWCA
  - b. Components similar to JBHP: housing + services, priority for housing choice voucher upon program completion
  - c. Differences with JBHP: city environment, project-based
  - d. Note: King County HA also operates a master leasing program and site-based supportive housing program for chronically homeless, some of whom have been justice-involved
6. Los Angeles, CA: Waiving of criminal checks for ex-offenders whose families have current S. 8 Housing Choice Vouchers. No registered sex offenders or domestic violence perpetrators may participate. A Family Reunification pilot program of the Corporation for Supportive Housing.
- a. Primary collaboration partners: Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles, reentry organizations, social services agencies
  - b. Components similar to JBHP: collaborative program, housing + services
  - c. Differences with JBHP: Participants are housed with existing Section 8 voucher holders, large city environment
7. New Haven, CT: For limited number of participants, preference on public housing waiting list for reentry ex-offenders and elimination of criminal justice involvement as barrier to joining family members who are public housing tenants
- a. Primary collaboration partners: Housing Authority of New Haven and City of New Haven Re-Entry Coordinator
  - b. Components similar to JBHP: elimination of criminal justice involvement as barrier
  - c. Differences with JBHP: permanent housing, city environment, case management provided by housing authority, housing owned by HANH
8. New York, New York: Criminal justice waiver by NYC Housing Authority for “sponsor based” vouchers for participants, along with intensive services. One of the Frequent Users Service Enhancement (FUSE) programs developed by the Corporation for Supportive Housing.



- a. Primary collaboration partners: NYC Housing Authority; NYC Departments of Correction, Homeless Services, Health and Mental Hygiene, and Housing Preservation and Development; Corporation for Supportive Housing; non-profit housing and service providers.
  - b. Components similar to JBHP: Rental assistance plus services
  - c. Differences with JBHP: all participants are frequent users, city environment
9. New York, New York: Family re-entry for 150 former inmates at minimum age of 16 released within the previous 18 months. NYC Housing Authority lifts restrictions on criminal justice involvement to allow parents to reunite with their children living in public housing. Upon completion of the program, ex-offender may be added to the family's lease. A Family Reunification pilot program of the Corporation for Supportive Housing.
- a. Primary collaboration partners: NYC Housing Authority, Vera Institute of Justice, NYC Depart. of Homeless Services, NYC Depart. of Corrections, NYS Depart. of Corrections and Community Supervision, Corp. for Supportive Housing, 11 nonprofit reentry service providers
  - b. Components similar to JBHP: Bridge program, monthly meetings of all involved organizations, CJ involvement lifted as barrier to housing, comprehensive supportive services
  - c. Differences with JBHP: Housing owned by NYCHA, participants may be minors, big city environment
10. Oakland, CA: Site-based transitional housing for single mothers released from county jail
- a. Primary collaboration partners: Oakland Housing Authority, Alameda County Sheriff's Department Inmate Services Unit, nonprofit service providers
  - b. Components similar to JBHP: strong collaboration between housing authority and sheriff's department
  - c. Differences with JBHP: city environment, female participants only, site-based, participants have finished 8-week course while in custody
11. Portland, OR: Rental assistance for 18 months for transitional or permanent housing, employment required, supportive services
- a. Primary collaboration partners: Housing Authority of Portland, two reentry organizations, SE Works (workforce development organization)
  - b. Components similar to JBHP: Rental assistance on sliding scale according to income, services through SE Works very similar to services by various Union County agencies
  - c. Differences with JBHP: city environment

12. Salt Lake County, Utah: Housing Authority operates a housing placement service for inmates released from county jail. Program includes insuring against costly damages and eviction proceedings to mitigate landlord risk.
  - a. Primary collaboration partners: Housing Authority of the County of Salt Lake, provider agencies
  - b. Components similar to JBHP: Housing Authority expertise with landlords
  - c. Differences with JBHP: unclear as to rental assistance policy, city environment
  
13. Spokane, WA: Incentives to landlords to rent to individuals with justice involvement including non-refundable cleaning deposits, paying for application and background checks fees, first and last months' rent paid up-front, additional damage payments up to \$500 above security deposit, wrap around services for participants, accessibility of staff, and partnership with DOC and the Spokane Police Department
  - a. Primary collaboration partners: Spokane Housing Authority, Neighborhood Action Programs, Goodwill Industries, Department of Corrections/ Spokane Community Justice Center. The Spokane Steering Committee of 13 community organizations, government and the faith community meet monthly to provide feedback on the program. Part of the Washington State Re-entry Housing Pilot Program (RHPP).
  - b. Components similar to JBHP: Landlord incentives and contacts, multi-agency steering committee meeting monthly
  - c. Differences with JBHP: More comprehensive landlord incentives, no rental assistance, city environment
  
14. Washington, D. C.: 50 Housing Choice Vouchers assigned to a provider of Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) for former inmates who are also disabled. Comprehensive supportive services are provided or coordinated by the PSH organization. This is a pilot of the Frequent Users Service Enhancement (FUSE) program of the Corporation for Supportive Housing.
  - a. Primary collaboration partners: D.C. Housing Authority, PSH provider, services providers
  - b. Components similar to JBHP: Follows S. 8 program model with criminal justice involvement waived, housing + services, participants must have disability diagnosis
  - c. Differences with JBHP: Permanent housing, city environment

#### Reentry Housing Programs with PHA Collaboration – Pennsylvania

- Differing roles for PHAs
- Mix of urban and rural environments
- All include housing assistance plus services
- All reduce the risk of recidivism

1. Beaver County: Site-based (public housing) permanent housing for ex-offenders with behavioral health disorders in Aliquippa, PA; Beaver County Housing Authority owns and operates the housing, Gateway Rehab provides services.
  - a. Primary collaboration partners: Beaver County Housing Authority and Gateway Rehab
  - b. Components similar to JBHP: Housing component managed by PHA, services by nonprofit, participants behavioral health/Medicaid eligible
  - c. Differences with JBHP: Small city environment, permanent housing, one primary service provider, no families
  
2. CRAFT (Comprehensive Regional Adult Forensic Treatment) Program of Elk, Cameron, and Potter Counties: For inmates with mental health and substance use disorders who will be returning to Elk, Cameron, or Potter Counties; comprehensive services during incarceration/pre-release, reentry, and community integration; reentry and community integration include housing component managed by Clarion County Housing Authority. Behavioral Health Assoc. of Rural PA (BHARP) coordinates all case management and other services.
  - a. Primary collaboration partners: Clarion County Housing Authority, BHARP
  - b. Components similar to JBHP: Rural environment, bridge to permanent voucher, participants behavioral health/Medicaid eligible, S. 8 used as model for policies and procedures
  - c. Differences with JBHP: Services begin prior to release, one provider of services
  
3. Columbia County: Housing locator assistance and 6-12 months rental assistance managed by Columbia County Redevelopment Authority, intake and assessment done by community agency, other nonprofits provide services; part of larger ESG (Emergency Solutions Grant) program
  - a. Primary collaboration partners: Columbia County Redevelopment Authority, Columbia County Jail, Columbia County Probation, various nonprofit service providers, Bloomsburg University (outcomes tracking and evaluation)
  - b. Components similar to JBHP: Rural environment, housing component managed by PHA, services by nonprofit, Assessment Panel, formal program evaluation
  - c. Differences with JBHP: Assessment Panel has revolving membership, JBHP Selection & Review Panel has fixed membership; otherwise very similar to JBHP

4. York County: Three 1-bedroom units set aside in City of York for justice-involved individuals needing mental health treatment as part of larger Shelter + Care program
  - a. Primary collaboration partners: Housing Authority of the City of York, Mental Health Treatment Court, York County Health Choices, York Homeless Continuum of Care
  - b. Components similar to JBHP: Housing component managed by PHA, services by nonprofit, participants behavioral health/Medicaid eligible
  - c. Differences with JBHP: Small city environment, services optional for participants, master leasing