

Increasing Impact: How Melanated Pearl Can Enhance Services Delivery to Homeless Individuals and Families in Clayton County

Date: April 21, 2023

To: Melanated Pearl Board of Directors

From: Mary Luallen, Board member

Subject: Transitioning to a Rapid Re-housing Strategy to Address Homelessness

Executive Summary

Melanated Pearl aims to improve the critical services provided to homeless individuals and families in Clayton County, Georgia. To achieve this goal, the organization will consolidate existing initiatives and restructure its services under a rapid re-housing strategy, which focuses on providing short-term rental assistance, case management, and support services to help individuals and families move out of homelessness and into stable housing. Rapid re-housing has gained momentum nationally and within Georgia, but organizations are not widely implementing the strategy outside metro Atlanta, GA. Research shows that rapid re-housing can offer individuals and families immediate access to permanent housing, which is more cost-effective than other strategies and can improve outcomes for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

To execute the new strategy, the Board should approve the restructuring of services under a Rapid Re-housing program and allocate the necessary resources to:

- Streamline and align projects to focus on providing rapid re-housing services.
- Expand the existing network to include partnerships with businesses and property managers.
- Champion a coordinated community effort.
- Use existing national and state resources to develop program policies, guidelines, and eligibility criteria.
- Develop a case management plan.

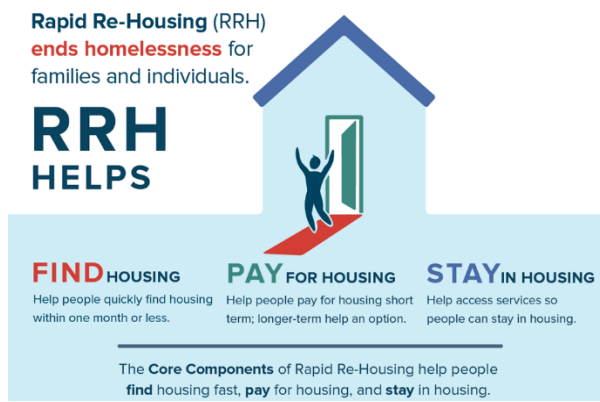
Introduction

Melanated Pearl is a nonprofit organization in Clayton County, Georgia, dedicated to empowering and uplifting women of color. As part of this mission, the organization has provided critical support to homeless women and families in the area for the past five years. The organization offers services and programs to address the immediate needs of people experiencing homelessness and housing instability, including emergency rental assistance, transitional housing, job training and placement, mental health and substance abuse counseling, and financial literacy workshops. Melanated Pearl also provides resources for basic needs such as food, clothing, and hygiene. However, Melanated Pearl can better serve the homeless population in Clayton County by consolidating existing initiatives and restructuring services under a Rapid Re-housing strategy. This restructuring aims to provide a more comprehensive and holistic support system to help individuals and families transition from housing instability and move towards self-sufficiency with long-term housing security. With the support of the Board, Melanated Pearl can pivot to providing an elevated level of critical services to homeless individuals and families in Clayton County and work towards creating a community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Background

Data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHR) to Congress indicated the rate of people experiencing homelessness in Georgia has decreased by 45.6% since 2007. However, despite recent progress, Georgia's rate of unsheltered homelessness remains higher than the national average, with 52% of people experiencing homelessness living in unsheltered locations (de Sousa et al., 2022). According to the 2020 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, Clayton County's estimated homeless population is the sixth highest in the state (Partners for HOME, 2022). The fact that many individuals and families are experiencing homelessness in Clayton County indicates there is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Rapid re-housing is a relatively new approach to addressing homelessness, and its implementation in Clayton County, GA, is not well-documented. However, the approach has gained more support due to an increase in individuals and families experiencing housing instability during the COVID-19 pandemic (Batko, 2020). Communities also recognize that traditional approaches to addressing homelessness, such as emergency shelter and transitional housing, are not always effective (Cunningham et al., 2015). Rapid re-housing is a model that provides short-term rental assistance, case management, and other support services to help individuals and families quickly move out of homelessness and into stable housing (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2022). Rapid re-housing aims to provide a bridge to permanent housing and help individuals and families achieve long-term stability.



Homeless intervention services in Clayton County, including rapid re-housing programs, are delivered by local nonprofit organizations and funded mainly through federal, state, and county dollars. Funding sources include the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Georgia Department of Community Affairs, and the Clayton County government. Recent support for rapid re-housing in Clayton County shows a growing awareness of more effective and efficient ways to address homelessness while prioritizing the needs and dignity of homeless individuals and families.

Analysis

Focus on Long-term Solutions

Rapid re-housing offers individuals and families immediate access to permanent housing and provides supportive services such as case management, employment assistance, and financial aid to help maintain their housing stability over time (National Alliance to End Homelessness, n.d.). This approach focuses on long-term solutions rather than temporary relief rental assistance may provide. A report issued by The Urban Institute highlights research that found that individuals who received rapid re-housing services were more likely to be stably housed after one year than those who received transitional housing or were in emergency shelters (Cunningham et al., 2015).

In 2020, Partners for HOME, a collaboration between the city of Atlanta, the United Way of Greater Atlanta, and other community-based organizations, launched the LIFT initiative in Atlanta, Georgia to

address homelessness and housing insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2020, the collaborative has rapidly re-housed 795 households and diverted 440 households from the city's homeless housing queue (Partners for HOME, 2022). This program is an example of how expanding temporary rental assistance to a comprehensive rapid re-housing approach can effectively address homelessness and housing instability in the metro Atlanta region. Rapid re-housing can provide both immediate access to permanent housing and financial support to prevent families and individuals from losing housing in the first place.

Improve Cost-effectiveness

Rapid re-housing can be more cost-effective in the long run than solely offering rental assistance, as it provides permanent housing solutions rather than temporary ones. Rental assistance can become a reoccurring need for families. In contrast, rapid re-housing can help families become self-sufficient over time by providing wrap-around services and support while immediately placing families in homes. In addition, combining rapid re-housing with temporary rental assistance can also be more cost-effective than delivering these interventions separately, as it can reduce the overall cost of providing supportive services and rental assistance to the same individual or family. The Urban Institute's review of research noted several studies that found rapid re-housing was a more cost-effective intervention than other approaches, such as transitional housing and shelters (Cunningham & Batko, 2018). The 2016 Family Options Study determined that the average monthly cost per family for rapid re-housing (\$880) was significantly less than for emergency shelters (\$4,819) or transitional housing interventions (\$2,706).

Better Outcomes

Rapid re-housing has produced favorable outcomes for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, including higher rates of housing stability, increased income, and improved health and well-being (Gubits et al., 2016). Compared to traditional interventions, rapid re-housing also reduces the length of time that families experience homelessness (Gubits et al., 2016). According to a 2013 HUD report, 82 percent of people exited rapid re-housing programs into permanent housing (Cunningham et al., 2015; HUD, 2013). An evaluation of the same programs also found that only 10 percent of families exiting the rapid re-housing program returned to homelessness after one year (Burt et al., 2016). In an analysis of people who exited Georgia homeless programs during the state's first year of implementing rapid re-housing, researchers determined that the odds of returning to shelter were 2.5 times greater for transitional housing recipients than those rapidly rehoused (Rodriquez, 2013).

SWOT Analysis

The Melanated Pearl leadership team conducted a S.W.O.T. analysis around restructuring for a rapid re-housing program. The analysis identified several strengths, such as strong community connections, a dedicated volunteer base, and the successful implementation of multiple initiatives to support homeless individuals and families. However, the analysis also highlighted weaknesses, such as a lack of donor tracking, financial instability, and expertise in proposal writing. The organization's extensive network can help with outreach and

S.W.O.T ANALYSIS	
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Well connected within the Clayton County community <input type="checkbox"/> Strong social media presence <input type="checkbox"/> Large volunteer base <input type="checkbox"/> Dedicated committees for all key initiatives <input type="checkbox"/> Organization-owned transportation/vehicle <input type="checkbox"/> Ability to secure federal and state support through grants <input type="checkbox"/> Backbone support for the Oystershell Community Collective Initiative <input type="checkbox"/> Successful implementation of multiple initiatives to support homeless individuals and families: Access to Water, Transitional Housing & Eviction Prevention, Emergency Rental Assistance, Mobile Wrap-around Services, Homeless Hygiene Kits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Inability to track donors <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of collaboration with the business community <input type="checkbox"/> Involved in too many initiatives <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of expertise in writing professional proposals for fundraising <input type="checkbox"/> Limited experience as a Continuum of Care provider <input type="checkbox"/> Financial instability
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> No NGOs within the service areas offering similar services to the community <input type="checkbox"/> Availability of grants from philanthropic foundations in the state <input type="checkbox"/> Availability of federal and state funds <input type="checkbox"/> Partnering with Continuum of Care (CoCs) in neighboring counties <input type="checkbox"/> Leveraging resources from the National Alliance to End Homelessness and The Georgia Rapid Re-Housing Learning Collaborative. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Inability to stay connected with highly mobile, target populations <input type="checkbox"/> Limited pool of full-time employee candidates with experience delivering services for homeless populations <input type="checkbox"/> No Continuum of Care collaborative in Clayton County <input type="checkbox"/> Housing market - low vacancy rates and increasing cost of rent

engagement in the community and mitigate some of the weaknesses related to expertise around fundraising and experience delivering a rapid re-housing program.

Opportunities identified include the availability of grants and the absence of other organizations in the local area that provide similar services. Threats to the organization's strategy include the ability to stay connected with target populations, a limited pool of employment candidates with experience delivering services to the homeless, and the absence of a Continuum of Care collaborative in Clayton County.

Recommendations to Capitalize on Strengths and Opportunities

1. *Expand the existing network to include partnerships with businesses and property managers.*

Rapid re-housing programs rely on access to affordable housing units. Building partnerships with landlords and property managers can help secure housing units for program participants and provide ongoing support for maintaining housing stability. Expanding the network to include local businesses can help establish a pipeline of financial support to sustain the program long-term. Beyond financial support, partnering with companies can provide program participants with job training and employment opportunities.

2. *Use existing national and state resources to develop program policies, guidelines, and eligibility criteria.*

Clearly defining program guidelines and eligibility criteria is important to ensure the program is effective and serves those who need it most. Policies should include maximum rental assistance amounts, length of rental assistance, and the types of supportive services available. The organization can avoid reinventing the wheel and benefit from the knowledge and expertise of other successful programs by leveraging existing national and state resources, such as HUD's Rapid Re-housing Toolkit and Performance Benchmarks.

Recommendations to Address Weaknesses and Threats

1. *Streamline and align projects to focus on providing rapid re-housing services.*

The organization should concentrate resources on providing rapid re-housing services that are the most effective in addressing homelessness. It is important to avoid spreading the organization's resources too thin across multiple initiatives that may not be as effective in providing long-term stability for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

2. *Champion a coordinated community effort.*

A coordinated community effort is essential for the success of a rapid re-housing program. One organization cannot address the complex issue of homelessness alone. In Clayton County, there are currently 21 organizations providing different types of resources for homeless families. Establishing an association of organizations that share a communitywide commitment to end homelessness will help deliver resources efficiently and effectively to support individuals and families in need.

3. *Develop a case management plan.*

Rapid re-housing programs provide more than just housing assistance. Case management is essential to help participants access supportive services, such as employment assistance, financial counseling, and mental health services. Developing a case management plan that outlines the types of services and support available is critical to the organization's success in implementing a rapid re-housing strategy.

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