

Landlord Liaison Project

2010 Performance and Evaluation Report

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of the Landlord Liaison Project (LLP) is to increase the availability of both private market and non-profit owned rental housing for persons who face barriers to moving from homelessness to permanent housing. Expanding access to private market rental housing is a key strategy for ending homelessness by using existing housing inventory rather than building new units of homeless housing with high capital and ongoing operating costs.

The Landlord Liaison Project creates incentives for landlords to relax their screening criteria for homeless people with barriers to accessing permanent housing. Incentives include: qualified tenants who are provided with ongoing support services; a Risk Reduction Fund to cover damages that exceed security deposits; and the availability of a 24/7 response phone line.

King County is committed to ensuring quality investments of limited housing and support services dollars. The King County Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) Community Services Division (CSD) is conducting an initial evaluation of this project to ensure that project goals are met and to learn what works for future program enhancements and modifications needed to ensure success. This report is an interim evaluation, intended to study initial resources used and progress toward milestones. At this juncture, it is too early to evaluate the LLP for scalability or staffing and funding requirements to support ongoing operations.

Overall, the evaluation team has found the Landlord Liaison Project to be immensely successful in its first 10 months (March-December 2009).

- *Increased access to existing rental units.* Seventy-three landlords/property management companies signed on as partners with LLP by the end of 2009. This allows access to 159 rental properties in the community, ranging from large, multi-unit apartment complexes to single family homes. 85 percent (62 landlords) report that they would not have rented to this population without the LLP.
- *Individuals and families successfully placed in private market housing.* Between March and December 2009, the Landlord Liaison Project placed 147 households in permanent housing. Clients housed by LLP have serious barriers to obtaining private market rental housing. About half of the households (48%) have a criminal background. Another 25 percent have very poor rental histories and the remaining households report other barriers to renting such as poor credit or drug or alcohol problems. Barriers like these can prolong the search for rental housing, and often result in tenants paying higher rents, renting substandard housing and/or living in unsafe neighborhoods.
- *Successful retention of housing.* Fully 96 percent of LLP client households retained their housing six months after moving in.

The early success of the Landlord Liaison Project continues. In early 2010, the Landlord Liaison Project steeply increased the number of clients served and housed and is on track to more than double the number of households moved into non-time-limited private market rental housing this year. In the first quarter of 2010, 86 households were placed in housing (compared with 147 for all of 2009) and first quarter financial assistance to clients totaled \$58,177 (compared with \$59,250 for all of 2009).

BACKGROUND

Increasing access to existing units in the housing market is a primary strategy in the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness in King County. The Interagency Council (IAC) of the Committee to End Homelessness charged a workgroup with examining the issues surrounding access to and maintenance of housing for homeless households and to design a plan of action to increase access to permanent housing for such households. The workgroup was composed of service providers serving a broad array of clients, nonprofit housing providers and representatives from United Way of King County, the City of Seattle and King County.

The workgroup designed an integrated model to reduce barriers to entering permanent housing and make tenancy successful for formerly homeless individuals and families. The model was based on local and national best practices, input from area landlords and homeless clients, research on rental market trends and the characteristics and service needs of homeless and at-risk households.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Landlord Liaison Project creates incentives for landlords to reduce the screening criteria for homeless people with barriers to accessing permanent housing. Landlords are assured of:

1. rapid response to landlord concerns in case of issues that may arise with a tenant;
2. continued support for the tenants once housed, including support services;
3. limited financial assistance for move-in costs and eviction prevention; and
4. availability of a Risk Reduction Fund, which reduces landlord exposure to excessive damage costs and/or nonpayment of rent.

Clients are linked to the Project through a partnering homeless service provider who commits to providing necessary case management services and supports to tenants in housing.

The YWCA of Seattle, King and Snohomish Counties was selected by a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process to manage the Landlord Liaison Project. YWCA LLP staff provide outreach and engagement with landlords, provide direct assistance to clients to find appropriate housing (in partnership with the client's case manager), maintain relationships with the landlords and service provider partners, administer rental assistance funds to pay for move-in costs, time-limited rental payments to landlords and eviction prevention funds. Additionally, LLP staff members oversee charges to the Risk Reduction Fund.

Landlord Liaison Project Timeline

2007: Committee to End Homelessness Interagency Council Workgroup forms and designs model based on national and local best practices.

2008: YWCA of Seattle | King | Snohomish selected to implement LLP. HHSF funding awarded for one-time start up costs for staffing, consultants, and office equipment. LLP begins recruiting landlords in December.

2009: *January:* Operations begin. Informational meetings begin with partner agencies/programs. *February:* First client referrals received. *March:* First client households secure private market housing. *Summer:* Two year case management requirement changed to one year to allow more agencies to participate. As of *December 31*, 147 households in permanent housing. 73 landlords representing nearly 160 properties, and 39 agencies partner with LLP.

2010: In the first 3 months of 2010, LLP houses 68 households, on track to possibly double the number of households served in 2009.

ACTIVITIES

The Landlord Liaison Project partners with landlords and service provider agencies to help homeless clients obtain private market rental housing. A coordinated package of services to clients, landlords and service providers helps clients to retain stable housing. The Landlord Liaison Project serves three main constituencies in pursuit of its goal of increasing access to both housing for homeless persons: clients (tenants), landlords and partnering social service agencies.

Clients: LLP assists clients with housing search, move-in costs and rental assistance, eviction prevention, tenant trainings, and mediation with landlords. Partner agencies provide support services to clients, and services are required for one year. The support services requirement from LLP calls for monthly monitoring for housing stability. Provider agencies may provide higher levels of support and case management based on the needs of the household. In case of a crisis where the tenant is unable to pay rent, eviction prevention funds are available for two years from move-in. Eviction funds are available as needed during that time, and LLP staff works with the referring agency to formulate a plan to address the tenant's underlying housing issues.

Landlords: Benefits to landlords participating in LLP include: qualified applicants to fill vacant units, tenants with support from local social services agencies and funds to cover move-in costs, short term rental assistance and eviction prevention, access to LLP's 24 hour call-in line to address issues, rapid response to landlord concerns from partnering agencies and the YWCA, access to training, and risk reduction funds for excessive damages to units and/or nonpayment of rent.

Landlord Risk Reduction Fund: The Landlord Risk Reduction Fund is a key component of the Landlord Liaison Project and a primary incentive to encourage landlords to rent to clients with poor credit and rental histories. The fund is a "damage reserve fund," based on national best practices, that provides added assurance to landlords by offering them the option to be reimbursed for excessive damages to a unit or limited legal costs beyond the amounts covered by a security deposit. The \$1 million Risk Reduction Fund is an important reassurance to landlords in renting to formerly homeless persons. Because the program model is working so effectively, to date landlords have not needed to file many claims to access the fund. In 2009, the Risk Reduction Fund provided \$2,663 to cover damages to three client units. In the coming year, as clients reach the end of their first-year leases and support services, utilization may increase, and additional follow-up analysis will be required.

Service Providers: The Landlord Liaison Project partners with human services agencies to help obtain and maintain housing for their homeless clients. With its strong relationships with local landlords willing to rent to tenants with barriers, the LLP provides access to housing for clients from agencies whose goals are to help persons who are homeless secure and maintain permanent housing. These service provider agencies often have relationships with landlords as well, but for those households who are especially difficult to house, the LLP may be the fastest and best way to get the households placed in housing.

Each partnering agency/program receives an orientation session when they sign up to be a partnering agency. The orientation covers partner expectations, the client application process, financial assistance forms, tenant education opportunities and other program questions. Partnership agreements with the LLP clarify roles and set expectations regarding the level and quality of services provided to tenants in housing.

LLP conducts trainings on relevant topics for tenants, landlords and service providers, and has developed quarterly newsletters to keep partners informed and to disseminate information about the program.

STAFFING

The Landlord Liaison Project is delivered by a staff of seven individuals (6.25 FTE):

1 FTE Program Manager: Responsible for staff supervision, monitoring quality assurance and agreements with partnering service agencies, contact compliance, budget and policy development.

3 FTE Housing Specialists: Liaison with landlords, service providers/ case managers, client intake and housing assessment, housing information and referral, assistance with housing applications and housing placement, administering rental assistance, participating in tenant mediations and unit inspections.

1 FTE Housing Education Specialist: Training for tenants, landlords and service providers.

.75 FTE Administrative Analyst: Manages database, reporting, and contract compliance.

.5 FTE Program Assistant: Reception, payment processing for all client assistance.

BUDGET

The Landlord Liaison Project is funded by a collaboration of funding partners including King County, the City of Seattle and United Way of King County.

- King County’s Homeless Housing and Services Fund (HHSF) provides funding for project staffing and administration. The King County Veterans and Human Services Levy (VHS Levy) funds financial assistance to clients, including rental assistance and eviction prevention.
- The King County VHS Levy provided funding for the \$1 million Risk Reduction Fund. The Risk Reduction Fund is a key component of the Landlord Liaison Project, assuring landlords that if units are damaged by clients, the Risk Reduction Fund will cover the cost of repairs, excessive damage and unpaid rent.
- City of Seattle levy funding is used for time-limited rental assistance, including eviction prevention and move-in costs.
- United Way of King County (UWKC) provides flexible client assistance not covered by other sources including: move-in costs, security deposit assistance, credit/background checks, housing repairs to ready a unit for move-in, rental arrears and utility assistance. UWKC provides funding for staffing costs related to housing chronically homeless households, and UWKC Ready to Rent paid for the development and implementation of tenant and landlord education curricula.

	2009 Budget	2009 Costs
Staffing (HHSF and UWKC)	\$ 452,708	\$ 452,708
Landlord Training (UWKC)	\$ 19,940	\$ 837
Client Assistance (UWKC)	\$ 60,000	\$ 2,203
Rental Assistance (Seattle)	\$ 205,000	\$ 32,376
Rental Assistance (VHS Levy)	\$ 250,000	\$ 24,670
Total	\$ 987,648	\$ 512,794

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Who was served by the project?

Clients / Tenants

At the end of 2009, with 10 months of placing clients in housing, the Landlord Liaison Project had housed 147 households (271 different individuals).

- One-half of the households served are families with children and one-half are single individuals without children.
- 71% of households are chronically homeless or have been homeless for a long period of time.
- 17% of all households are veterans.
- Approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of all clients (73%) are persons of color.

LLP reports client-level data on the primary barrier to housing for each client. About half of the households (48%) have a criminal background. In terms of rental history, 16 percent of households had a prior eviction, 4% have debts to former landlords, 4% have never held a lease, and 1% have a bad reference from a previous landlord.

CLIENT BARRIERS TO HOUSING	%
Criminal Background	48%
Prior Eviction	16%
Insufficient finances	14%
Poor Credit	10%
Former Landlord Debts	4%
No Prior Tenancy History	4%
Alcohol or Drug Problems	1%
Bad Reference From Previous Landlord	1%
Other	1%

All LLP clients moved into private market rental units. The majority of the properties are managed by private, market landlords. Nonprofit housing providers include St. Andrew's Housing Group, DASH (Downtown Action to Save Housing), YWCA, some King County Housing Authority managed buildings and Pioneer Human Services. LLP focused on those nonprofit housing providers with strict screening criteria that screened out many homeless households, working with them to adopt alternative screening criteria.

Sixty-eight percent of clients have a rental subsidy and 32% have no subsidy. Of those with subsidies, Section 8 is the most common source, and the LLP has been key to accessing rental units for Section 8 subsidy holders with barriers to renting in the private market.

SUBSIDY TYPE	%
Section 8 Subsidy	36%
ShelterPlus Care	26%
HHSF Subsidy	20%
HPRP	2%
Other	7%
THOR	6%
Subsidy – type unknown	3%

Landlords

Seventy-three landlords/property management companies signed on as partners with LLP by the end of 2009. This allows access to 159 properties across King County, ranging from large, multi-unit apartment complexes to single family homes. 85 percent (62 landlords) report that they would not have rented to this population without the LLP.

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PARTNERING LANDLORDS	# Properties
East King County	18
North King County	5
South King County	110
Seattle (Incorporated)	50
Total as of 5/17/2010	183

Service Providers

In the first year of operations, LLP partnered with 39 service agencies/programs. In 2009, the agencies/programs who referred the most clients to LLP were Favor (26 referrals), Evergreen Treatment Services / REACH (23 referrals), Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (10 referrals), and Friends of Youth (9 referrals). All of these agencies can be characterized as serving clients with particularly high service needs.

What services were provided by LLP?

Housing Search: A total of 161 households were screened and accepted into the program by LLP staff in 2009. Of these, 147 had been placed in housing by the end of the year. Housing search and placement services they received included: housing search, background checks, help with rental applications, and lease negotiation.

Interventions / Mediations: By the end of 2009, LLP staff had been involved in 87 interventions / mediations on behalf of housed clients with landlords and case managers. Twenty-nine percent of households placed in housing required an intervention (43 of 147 households placed). Some households required up to three interventions. Of the 43 households requiring an intervention, most have only required a single intervention, but some have needed up to three interventions. Causes for mediations include disruptive client behavior in the apartment complex or non-payment of rent.

Interviews with program staff and data analysis have not yet shown any predictors or trends in the need for interventions. Program staff report that often those clients with the highest barriers to obtaining housing do very well once housed, and occasionally those who are easiest to house (with the fewest formal barriers to renting) are the most difficult to keep housed.

24-7 Hotline: As of December 31, 2009, landlords had placed no calls after hours or on weekends to the 24 hour, 7 days per week phone line. Excellent working relationships with landlords and LLP staff responsiveness, along with landlord training, can be credited for keeping the number of crises to a minimum.

Financial Assistance: 51% of all households received some type of financial assistance from LLP in 2009.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE	2009 Total	Number Households	Average per household
Rental Assistance	\$ 55,546	68	\$ 817
Client Assistance	\$ 2,203	38	\$ 58
Risk Reduction Fund	\$ 2,663	3	\$ 888

What resources were required?

Cost per Housing Placement

The annual cost per unit for LLP-provided services to obtain and retain housing (combining service and operating costs) is detailed below. Please note that this figure includes total LLP costs to deliver the program, including recruiting and maintaining relationships with landlords and partner agencies in addition to housing placements for clients. This figure does not include non-LLP costs such as rental subsidies or partner agency costs for support services.

Total budget for 2009	\$ 512,794
Households served	147
Cost per household	\$ 3,488
Households successfully housed	142

Staffing Ratios

The LLP staff to client ratio for 2009 was 49 households (90 individuals) per full-time Housing Specialist (3 FTEs). The staff to client ratio should also be calculated considering the entire LLP staff team, as each member of the staff is deeply involved in delivering the program for clients. The full staff ratio for 2009 was 24 households (43 individuals) per Full Time Equivalent staff.

In 2010, the number of clients per LLP staff will likely substantially increase, given that operations started in March 2009, hiring of staff occurred throughout the start-up year and client referrals have ramped up as operations and partnerships have matured.

Note: These ratios relate only to the direct LLP staff functions of the project – it is important to keep in mind that the LLP leverages critically important support services provided by LLP partner agencies and local and federal rental subsidies to maintain housing.

Leveraging / Maximizing Resources

The Landlord Liaison Project is a unique collaboration of public and private funders from the City of Seattle, King County and United Way of King County. The LLP also leverages support from:

- Partnering service provider agencies/programs that refer clients to the LLP provide a minimum of one year of support services to help the clients maintain housing. The term “support services” refers to agency willingness to be available to advocate for clients and to conduct at least monthly home visits.
- Rental subsidies (both long-term and time-limited subsidies) from federal, state and local sources including Section 8, ShelterPlus Care, HPRP and THOR, along with local HHSF subsidies.

Was the project effective?

The goal of the Landlord Liaison Project is to increase access to both private market and non-profit owned rental housing (not otherwise designated for homeless clients) for persons moving from homelessness to permanent housing throughout King County who have barriers that have prevented them from securing housing on their own. Measured outcomes include:

- Number of existing rental units accessed through the enrollment of landlords who previously would not have rented to homeless households
- Number of tenants successfully retaining rental units
- Landlord satisfaction with LLP

Increased access to private market rental units

Seventy-three landlords/property management companies signed on as partners with LLP by the end of 2009. This allows access to 159 properties ranging from large, multi-unit apartment complexes to single family homes. 85 percent (62 landlords) report that they would not have rented to this population without the LLP.

Successful retention of housing

Fully 96 percent of LLP client households retained their housing six months after moving in. By the end of December, only five households of the 147 housed had prematurely exited the program, due to evictions, disappearance, and inpatient treatment.

Despite the serious barriers to obtaining private market housing for this population, LLP staff succeeded in moving about half of the clients (49%) into permanent housing within 30 days of referral. This process includes housing search, background checks, rental applications and lease agreements. An additional 25% of clients move in within two months (within 31 to 60 days) of referral.

TIME FROM REFERRAL TO MOVE-IN	%
Same day	2%
Under 10 days	13%
11 to 30 days	34%
31 to 60 days	25%
60 to 90 days	9%
90 to 274 days (max)	11%
Not yet housed (as of 12/31/2009)	5%

Landlord Satisfaction with LLP

Landlord satisfaction with the LLP was measured by a survey of all partnering landlords, mailed to landlords in early June 2010. Landlords were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the project, to rate the key LLP services and to provide feedback on program enhancements and improvements. The survey was conducted using paper surveys via U.S. Mail, and 28 of 100 landlords responded. Key findings include:

- Landlords are very happy with the program, with 71 percent of the responding landlords reporting that they are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the LLP. Fully 75 percent of responding landlords would recommend the program to other landlords.
- LLP has built strong relationships with landlords, and the aspects of the program that landlords report the highest levels of satisfaction with are communications with LLP staff and the partnership overall.
- Landlords rate the financial guarantees of the LLP as most important to their participation: the Risk Reduction Fund, a form of insurance for landlords, is rated most

important by 79% of landlords, along with the availability of eviction prevention funds, rental assistance and move-in costs.

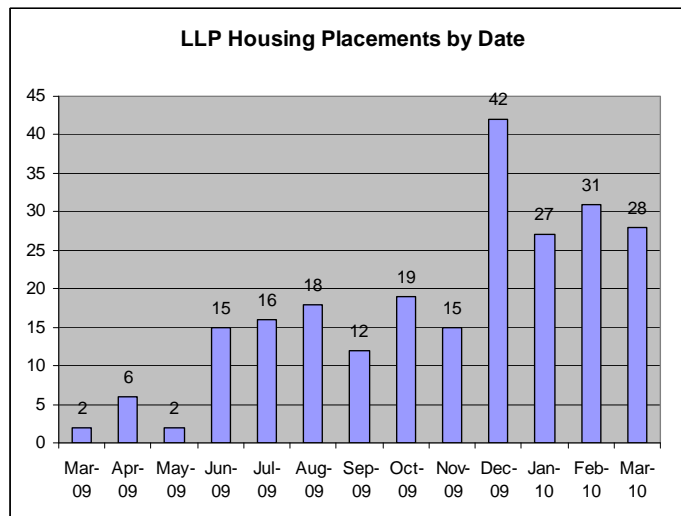
- When landlords report dissatisfaction, it is generally related to a desire to have the LLP fill more units, more quickly.

OBSERVATIONS / LESSONS LEARNED

This report is intended to provide feedback for project staff and funders about progress, emerging issues and possible enhancements or mid-course corrections. It is still too early to evaluate the LLP for formal outcomes, scalability or requirements for staffing and funding to support ongoing operations.

LLP is still in a growth and learning phase.

This interim evaluation covers the Landlord Liaison Project through December 2009. The first housing placements occurred in March 2009 and the LLP ramped up rapidly over the course of the year and into the first quarter of 2010.



In the first quarter of 2010, 86 households were placed in housing, compared with 147 for all of 2009. Financial assistance to clients totaled \$58,177 in the first quarter of 2010, compared with \$59,250 for all of 2009. The Risk Reduction Fund has seen 4 claims for a total of \$3,859 in the first quarter of 2010, compared with 3 households for \$2,663 in 2009.

There is a critical juncture for clients at one year of housing stability as leases are up for renewal and required support services end. One of the trends LLP staff has noted is the increasing number of interventions required for clients. LLP staff anticipate that as tenants reach the end of their one year of case management the LLP team will be called upon more and more to intervene in order to prevent loss of housing. The LLP team is usually the first line of response when a problem arises.

As the rate of housing placements has increased and some households have reached their one year lease renewal and regular service visits end, the number of households exiting their housing may be increasing. In 2009, five households lost their housing (2 evictions, 2 disappeared, 1 Inpatient treatment) and in the first three months of 2010 there were eight additional exits (3 to living with family or friends, 2 to transitional housing, 1 in jail, and 2 evictions).

Tenants sign a lease agreement and are provided with a minimum of one year's support services by partner social service agencies. Originally, the Landlord Liaison Project required partner agencies to commit to two years of support services. However, due to agency feedback that this requirement was a significant barrier to participation based on funding constraints, LLP reduced the support service requirement to one year. Most agencies reported that they did not have adequate funding to provide regular service visits and case management for more than one year.

True program capacity and ongoing cost to run the Landlord Liaison Project continue to be evaluated by funders.

At this time, the level of funding for ongoing staffing and operations to run the Landlord Liaison Project at an optimal success rate is being studied. The increase in the number of clients served and increased client financial assistance in early 2010 demonstrates that relying on 2009 spending rates will not predict 2010 costs. The start-up and first year funding provided was adequate to deliver the project to place 147 households in private market housing in 2009. The project's actual costs were less than budget allocations in that year, most likely due to project start up. The LLP budget in 2009 was under spent on client and rental assistance, spending \$56,460 of a \$500,000 allocation. This appears to be changing in the first months of 2010, as \$54,240 was spent in the first 3 months of 2010.

The Landlord Liaison Project is serving many clients with very high barriers to housing.

Originally designed to serve clients with a range of service needs, over time the LLP has evolved to serve clients with high service needs who are the hardest to house. It is important to note that these high need clients have housing support services committed for as long as they are needed rather than ending after one year. In order to preserve the strong landlord relationships that staff have built, minimize the number of interventions required and to preserve the Risk Reduction Fund, LLP will ensure that partnerships with agencies referring clients with ongoing support needs include a clear plan for long term case management services for these clients.

Tough economic times create an opportunity for the LLP.

As landlords struggle with vacancies and decreasing rents, the benefits of participation in the LLP have become even more evident. The LLP team is trying to take full advantage of this window of opportunity by working to build strong relationships with landlords that will last for many years beyond the current economic crisis.

Limited rental subsidy availability is a key limit to LLP capacity.

For clients without access to subsidies, affordability of units in the local rental market is limited. Additionally, some subsidies are not deep enough and do not last long enough to make private market units affordable long term.

Another potential future gap for LLP is a lack of flexible support services funding.

A number of emergency shelter and transitional programs cannot currently partner with LLP because they lack funding for home-based supportive services that continue after a household moves into a non-time-limited unit. Additionally, homeless households not otherwise connected to a supportive services program (ie Tent City residents or those living on the streets) cannot access the LLP. Creating a flexible pool of services funding as proposed in the original program model may allow for continued expansion of the program and further increase access to private market rental housing.

