

OPRI



OAKLAND PATH REHOUSING INITIATIVE
2013 PROGRAM UPDATE

OPRI: Oakland's Sponsor-Based Housing Program

The Oakland PATH Rehousing Initiative (OPRI) is a sponsor-based rental assistance program designed to provide housing placement and ongoing subsidies and supportive services to people living on the street or in emergency shelters, and people exiting foster care or the criminal justice system. Developed as a partnership between the Oakland Housing Authority, the City of Oakland, Alameda County, and multiple non-profit agencies in 2010, OPRI connects some of Oakland's most vulnerable and at-risk households to housing and the services needed to increase housing stability and self-sufficiency.

New in 2012

Shelter Placements:

OPRI placed 25 households from Crossroads and St. Mary's Center Shelters into housing

AC Impact:

HUD announced funding for 25 more placements from homeless encampments.

New OHA Subsidies:

Oakland Housing Authority increased Making Transitions Work subsidies for 2013 to 165

The Partnership

Since March 2010, a closely-knit team of housing and services providers has placed more than 200 people into permanent housing, moving them directly from the criminal justice system, foster care, homeless encampments, and shelters into apartments where they hold their own leases. To date, more than 90% of the people placed have been able to maintain their housing.

The Oakland PATH Rehousing Initiative (OPRI) provides supportive housing for people exiting foster care, homeless encampments, shelters, and the criminal justice system. Community agencies implementing the program include:

- *Abode Services*
- *First Place for Youth*
- *LifeLong Medical Care*
- *Operation Dignity*
- *Volunteers of America*

New referral sites in 2012-2013 include:

- *East Oakland Community Project*
- *Building Futures with Women and Children*
- *St. Mary's Center*

Program Funding

- **Oakland PATH**

The City of Oakland's Permanent Access to Housing (PATH) Strategy provides a roadmap for ending homelessness in the City over a period of the next fifteen years. PATH is a companion to EveryOne Home, Alameda County's Homeless and Special Needs Housing Plan. The goal of both is to solve the problem of homelessness, rather than simply manage it. To make this shift, Oakland has re-focused its efforts from ameliorating homelessness to prioritizing housing stabilization in its system of care. The Oakland PATH strategy focuses on a Housing First model to rapidly re-house individuals

and families who are currently on the street or in emergency shelter. The services and subsidy administration for OPRI are contracted through Oakland's Department of Human Services, Community Housing Services Division.

- **Oakland Housing Authority**

The Oakland Housing Authority (OHA) is a participant in the Making Transitions Work (MTW) program, a national effort to allow public housing authorities (PHAs) to design and test local approaches for:

- Promoting self-sufficiency among assisted families;
- Achieving programmatic efficiency and reduce costs;
- Increasing housing choice for low-income households.

The MTW program provides OHA with a unique opportunity to improve the delivery of housing and supportive services to low-income residents of Oakland. As part of the MTW plan, OHA chose to focus on individuals who are not usually able to access housing authority services, or "hard to house" populations. The OHA OPRI program focuses on people living in encampments, seniors and families in shelter, and people exiting the criminal justice system.

- **AC Behavioral Health Care Services**

Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services (BHCS) has dedicated MHSA funding to support the engagement, case management, and ongoing services for people in encampments with serious mental illnesses. With BHCS support, OPRI was able to add a full-time case manager to assist 20 people who were living in Oakland's encampments. In addition to the direct services funded, BHCS provides entry into the behavioral health care system, so that mainstream mental health services will be more accessible.

Sponsor-Based Housing

OPRI uses a sponsor-based supportive housing model, placing clients in scattered site apartments throughout Oakland. The housing placement and subsidy assistance are supplemented with a services package designed to meet the particular needs of each target population. This model allows for intensive support for clients to stabilize in housing in an apartment that they lease independently and can maintain even after program services are tapered down.

In order to successfully reach “hard to house” clients, Oakland has streamlined the eligibility process, imposing few restrictions, other than homelessness and low-income status. Further, OHA and the providers strive to conduct all necessary screenings and inspections in a few short days so that people are housed as quickly as possible when they are seeking stability.

Tenant Profile: Kenneth (pictured on cover) is a 57-year-old OPRI client, referred from a homeless encampment in Oakland. He has worn many hats over the years: sous chef, Army airborne infantry, heavy construction, but he has never had a lease in his name and never paid rent for himself for as long as he can remember. He became homeless by “messing up,” according to him, after a tour in Vietnam. He began to sleep in bushes, under bridges, at friends’ houses, anywhere he could find. He first became aware of Operation Dignity about six years ago but says it took him several years to work up the courage to ask for help. “I was very hesitant, very stubborn...I wanted to do it on my own...and no matter what I did, the Operation Dignity staff always said ‘ok, well I’m here when you need me’ without any judgment.” Six years and many cold nights later, he finally moved into his own one bedroom apartment near Lake Merritt.

When asked what the first thing he wants to do in his new apartment is, he walks over to the door, shuts it, and lets out a mighty war-whoop that shakes the windows. “Yes!!!” he cries out. He says he feels a lot better now; that was the first thing he wanted to do. The second thing, it turns out, is “thank Abode Services and Operation Dignity for not judging me, for treating me like a man, like a person.”

Housing Placement

Unit Identification: Abode Services and First Place for Youth work with property owners and managers throughout the city to secure appropriate housing placements for OPRI clients. Abode and First Place have earned the loyalty of an extensive network of landlords through good communication and reliability. Many landlords actually seek out OPRI placements because they know they can count on OPRI team to support residents and respond quickly to any housing issues. Through these relationships, Abode and First Place are able to have units ready very quickly when clients are seeking housing.

OHA Eligibility: When a client has been identified, OHA verifies eligibility. This is a quick process to ensure basic requirements for income and history are met. Credit and tenant histories are not used to disqualify applicants unnecessarily.

Inspection: OHA or a certified inspector will then check each potential unit for habitability using a Housing Quality Standards checklist to verify safe living conditions for all tenants.

Placement: Once the unit passes inspection, the tenant can move in immediately. OPRI

providers assist with furniture, setting up utilities, and other necessities, and the client becomes a tenant.

Subsidy: In addition to housing placement and stabilization, Abode and First Place coordinate housing and case management services, provide ongoing subsidy administration, and oversee data entry and reporting for all OPRI placements.

OPRI Numbers

Population	Subsidy Funding	Housing Provider	Service Funding	Service Provider	2013 Slots
Homeless in Encampments	OHA/S+C/SHP	Abode	PATH/Abode /BHCS/SHP	Lifelong	97
Homeless in Shelters	OHA/SHP	Abode	PATH/SHP	St. Mary's, BFWC, Abode	55
Criminal Justice	OHA	Abode	DHS/VOA	VOA	48
Transition Aged Youth	OHA/DHS	First Place	PATH/FPFY	First Place	25
Totals					225

Homeless Encampments

One of the challenges to ending homelessness in Oakland is the proliferation of homeless encampments. While these “camping areas” are unauthorized and can present multiple public safety and health concerns, it can be difficult and even harmful to disperse encampment residents without presenting viable alternatives.

The OPRI strategy for people living in encampments has been for Operation Dignity to conduct initial outreach, to get to know people, provide helpful information about housing options, and connect them to LifeLong Medical Care for case management and housing placement referral. Both Operation Dignity and LifeLong assist people with gathering necessary documents and making arrangements to move, and LifeLong accompanies people to interviews and apartment viewing. Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services and Oakland's Community Housing Services Division contract services for this component. The Oakland Housing Authority and Shelter Plus Care provide subsidies.

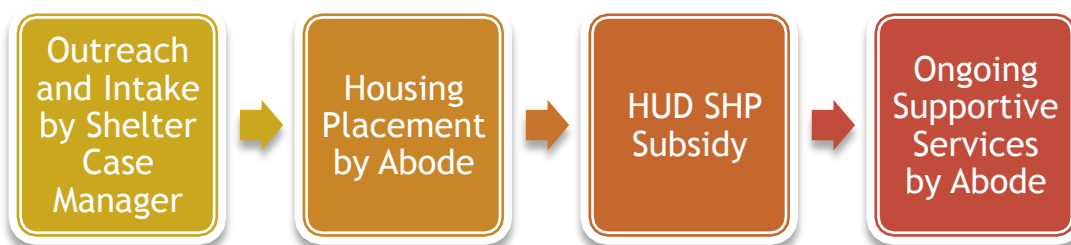


LifeLong works with Abode to identify appropriate permanent housing, while assisting clients in negotiating the screening and placement process. They continue to provide case management as long as the client needs services. LifeLong brings health and social services to the housing sites so that even tenants with multiple barriers to stability and long histories of homelessness can achieve housing stability and improve their quality of lives. In addition to placement and stabilization support, LifeLong provides:

- Comprehensive case management
- Housing stabilization support and eviction prevention
- Benefits advocacy and money management
- Medical care
- Mental health and substance abuse services
- Employment/vocational support

Homeless Shelters

Oakland supports several homeless shelters serving single adults, families with children, and seniors. While each shelter focuses services on housing placement, some households experience more difficulty in making that move than others. Of particular concern are households with limited ability to gain employment due to disability.



OPRI has partnered with Abode Services, Building Futures with Women and Children, East

Oakland Community Project, and St. Mary's Center Senior Shelter in offering housing placement, subsidy assistance, and ongoing support to these "hard to place" households.

Client Profile: Dennis grew up in rural Ohio and served in the Navy during the 1970's before going into general contracting and construction. He has performed manual labor all his life, working as everything from aluminum siding installer to auto machinist. In 2010, Dennis had an operation. After that, he was no longer able to work and Dennis began to lose hope. He lost his job, his apartment, and his storage locker with over \$40,000 worth of equipment. Then his health began deteriorating. In November 2011, he found Crossroads Shelter in Oakland.

Dennis was shocked to end up homeless. He says, "being homeless, it's just not something I grew up with...in rural Ohio, it's something that happens to other people, people who aren't able or aren't willing to work, not me, it's embarrassing."

Dennis says that without Abode Services and the OPRI program, he would still be at the shelter, hoping to collect a little bit of General Assistance and try to find an inexpensive place. Instead, he just moved into his newly remodeled one-bedroom apartment near Lake Merritt, all utilities included! He says that even though his kidneys are still stressed, he really wants to get back to work and start taking care of his health. He has quit smoking (he says lollipops help) and drinking and is focused on regaining both his health and his confidence. He would like to thank Abode Services and the staff at EOCP for their help in getting him back into housing.



Dennis in his new apartment

Transition Aged Youth

First Place for Youth is a leader in providing youth-specific services to aid in the establishment of independence for youth aged 18-24. Through their housing program, an employment and academic enrichment program, individual and group counseling, a youth community center,

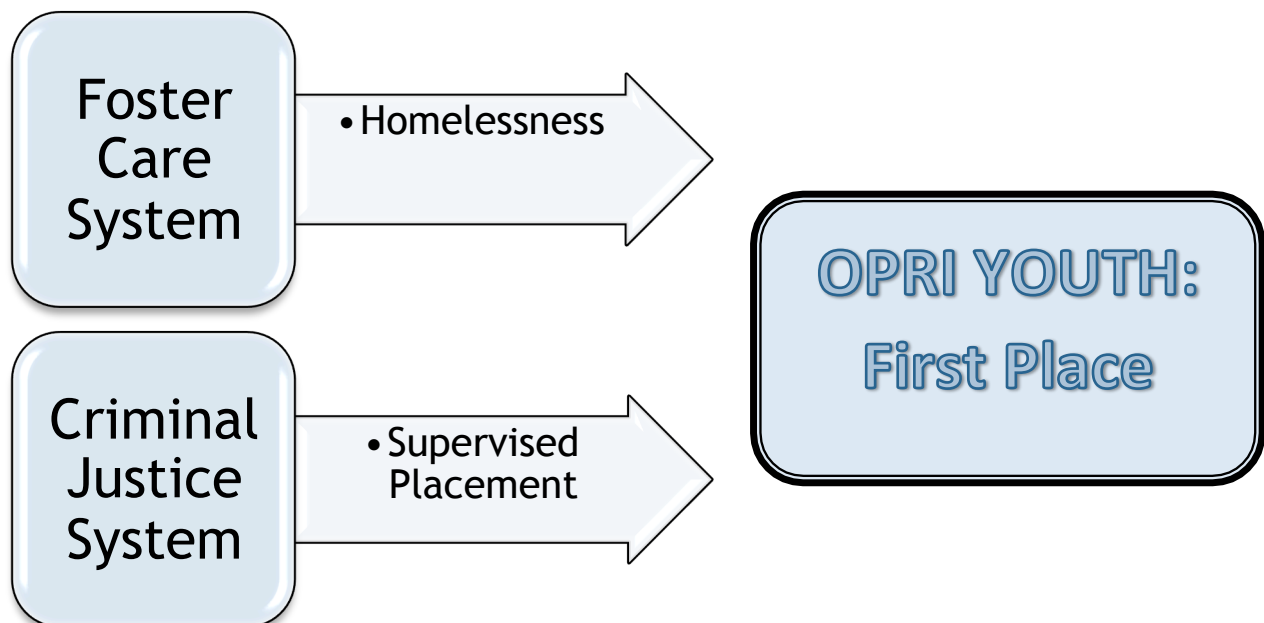
and close collaboration with other community agencies, First Place helps youth to gain the skills they need to succeed on their own.

- **Juvenile Justice**

First Place works with transition aged youth who are involved with Juvenile Probation. First Place works with Alameda County and the courts to assist youth living independently.

- **Homeless Youth**

Youth who emancipate from foster care often end up homeless if they are not given support in making a transition to adulthood. First Place works with these youth to first stabilize their housing situations and then put in place the skills and supports they will need to maintain that stability.



Youth Profile

Diana (name changed for privacy) is a young Latina who is originally from Southern California. She entered the foster care system at the age of 9 because her mother neglected her and her brother due to drug and alcohol abuse as well her step father being physically abusive towards her brother. Diana was in foster care from the age of 9-15 and then was transferred to a juvenile probation department in Alameda County at the age of 15-18 due to her leaving placement and other misconduct. After emancipating, she was homeless for about two years.

Diana then entered the First Place for Youth Housing program. At first, she consistently violated her lease, and was involved in intimate partner violence. Due to repeated lease violations, the property owner did not want her in the building, so she was referred to Convent House (Shelter), was given a 3-6 months re-entry plan, and was asked to keep in touch with her Youth Advocate. The Youth Advocate, and Education and Employment services were working with Beyond Emancipation (another youth-serving agency) to get her a job at West Coast Children's clinic. She got the job and was motivated to work hard to come back into program. She started to work with a therapist, went to AA meetings, and maintained her job. Having re-entered the First Place housing program, she has since completed two semesters at Laney College, she is off probation, and she has expunged her record. Two goals that she wanted to accomplish when she entered program were to visit her dad who is in prison for murder, and visit her brother who is in Hawaii. She accomplished these goals and brought closure. Diana has been with First Place for 24 months and is moving to the Affordable Housing Association apartments on 14th and Madison where she will continue to work with the Community Housing Youth Advocate. Today, Diana is happy that she was given a second chance and consistently states that without First Place support "I don't think I would be where I am today".

Reentry Housing

- **Oakland Unite**

Oakland Unite, a division of the Department of Human Services, funds multiple agencies in Oakland to assist people exiting the criminal justice system to obtain housing and employment upon release, and to develop strategies to avoid criminogenic behavior patterns. Oakland Unite works with non-profit providers to deliver case management and vocational services in criminal justice facilities and in the community.

- **Project Choice**

Volunteers of America (VOA) creates services plans for people participating in Project Choice, which provides intensive case management both pre- and post-release from San Quentin Prison. If lack of permanent housing is a barrier to a reentry client's stabilization, VOA can refer

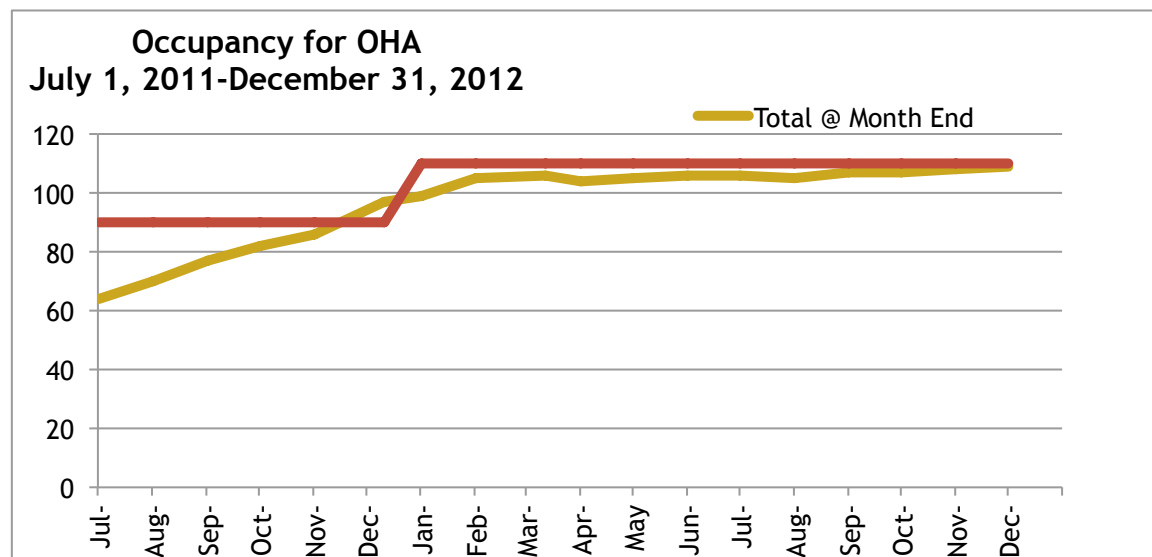
to Abode for housing placement and entry into the OPRI program. OPRI participants are receiving Project Choice case management services and other programming through Oakland Unite at a level where case managers are confident they can successfully take advantage of the OPRI housing opportunity. In order to facilitate housing placement, VOA has dedicated Oakland Unite funds to create a housing coordinator staff position to assist in placement and follow-up activities.

Results

OPRI measures success in its program through housing stability, but also incorporates measures crafted by EveryOne Home and Oakland Unite. While the program is still in its early days, remarkable results have already been achieved.

Numbers Served

For each contract period, OHA and DHS have set goals for numbers served. As of the end of 2012, numbers served were at or near maximum at all times other than during periods where unit goals were increased. This chart illustrates the occupancy numbers for OHA allocated slots:



Similarly, when OPRI brought on 25 new slots for shelter residents, all were placed by Abode Services within a few months and all 25 people enrolled initially were still housed six months later and are set to complete 12 months in stable housing early in 2013.

Permanency

A primary goal of housing placement with services attached is to ensure that people placed will not go back to homelessness. For OPRI participants coming from shelters, this has been a tremendous success, with 100% maintaining permanency for at least six months. Of the 67 people placed into housing from homeless encampments more than six months before the end of 2012, 64 or 95% were still in housing.

Abode Homeless Placements	Shelters	Encampments (S+C, OHA, and BHCS)
Enrolled at least 6 months	25	67
Housed 6 months or more	25	64
% Housed 6 months or more	100%	95%

- Reentry

For reentry placements, two critical measures are permanency and criminal recidivism. Volunteers of America was featured in a story by Oakland Local:

An independent evaluation by Hathuel, Tabernik, and Associates found that Project Choice significantly reduced recidivism. Over a 30-month period, the overall recidivism rate for adults enrolled in Project Choice was 52.2 percent compared to 69 percent for the state...The program served 60 clients per year at a per client cost of \$3,700. But since only 25 Project Choice clients were returned to prison, Project Choice saved approximately \$1.1 million in court costs, incarceration and other expenses.

Project Choice participants receiving housing placement and subsidies have fared even better. More than 90% of Project Choice housing placements have achieved at least six months housing stability, and 82% have maintained housing for a full year. According to VOA statistics, recidivism rates for OPRI Reentry clients are approximately 25%, which is even lower than the general Project Choice population.

More than 90% of Project Choice Reentry clients housed through OPRI remained in housing for at least six months.

- Youth Reentry

First Place for Youth has provided both housing and services for transition-aged youth exiting the criminal justice system. (Adding homeless youth in 2013.) Youth housing stays have been shorter overall; with youth often choosing less structured housing situations within a year after enrollment. Even so, outcomes are encouraging. Thus far, more than 87% of youth exiting juvenile probation have maintained housing for at least six months.

Income: Youth leaving the criminal justice system frequently start out with no income. Since the program's inception, First Place for Youth has housed 14 youth with no income at all. Of the 10 who have stayed in the program for at least 12 months, all ten have obtained some form of income, many from employment thanks to the First Place emphasis in job skills and job placement.

Building on Success

The OPRI collaborative has spent the past three years building on what works and expanding whenever possible to try to meet the needs of homeless households in Oakland. Through this experience, the partners have identified several important areas for further development.

Expansion

As the program becomes well known, more and more prospective tenants seek out the providers to request housing. With hundreds of people still living in encampments and shelters, there will be an ongoing demand for years to come.

Step Down Retention: Many tenants who have been in housing for a year or more have made significant progress in improving their quality of life and sustaining their independence. Those who are able will often work with case managers to move into employment and, in time, will no longer need OPRI's subsidy or services. For those with permanent disabilities, however, the ability to increase income is far more limited. As such, many will require ongoing financial assistance even when they no longer need intensive services. OPRI collaborators hope to work with funders and with tenants to design a retention program with sustainable subsidies and more limited services.

Supported Employment

Many OPRI tenants have little or no experience in the workforce. They may have mental illnesses, or may have been away from employment for many years. OPRI program staff has noted a need for employment placement options with more ongoing support than typical

entry-level job provide. OPRI will seek partners and funding to pursue supported employment options over the next two years.

Evaluation

As a new program that has grown quickly to serve more than 200 tenants a month, there are many people interested in looking at OPRI's successes. While anecdotal evidence and early statistics are impressive, OPRI funders and providers hope to engage in a fuller evaluation process over the next twelve months.

OPRI is administered by the Department of Human Services, Community Housing Services Division. Susan Shelton is the Division Manager and can be reached at SShelton@oaklandnet.com.

This document was prepared by Kerry Abbott, of [Abbott Consulting](#).

ⁱ Oakland Local, June 27, 2012 <http://oaklandlocal.com/article/reducing-recidivism-revolving-prison-door>.