



## **SECURE JOBS** *for Homeless Families:* EXANDING AN INTEGRATED SERVICE MODEL

*Tatjana Meschede  
Sara Chaganti  
Giselle Routhier*

**W**ith family homelessness on the rise in Massachusetts,<sup>[5; 9]</sup> shelters have been filled to capacity and the state is spending millions to house families in budget motels. In response to this crisis, service providers, advocates and policymakers are looking for new solutions to help families facing homelessness to enter and maintain stable housing, and move toward self-sufficiency.

In 2012, the Paul and Phyllis Fireman Foundation, in partnership with the state's Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), spearheaded a new service model for homeless families that integrates employment and housing services to provide holistic support to families in crisis. This model, called Secure Jobs, piloted in five cities in Massachusetts in the spring of 2013. Met with widespread support since its inception, Secure Jobs has expanded to two more cities in Massachusetts, is launching in Connecticut, and has been showcased nationally.

This brief describes the Secure Jobs model and documents changes to the model in the second phase of the initiative. Subsequent briefs will focus in on specific program elements, offering information on their impacts and recommendations for best practices.

### **Background**

Housing and employment services are traditionally siloed.<sup>[7]</sup> When families with very low incomes in Massachusetts face losing their homes, they have a right to state-sponsored shelter or short-term monetary assistance for diversion, along with case management services. These services intend to help families move to stable housing, apply for public benefits and long-term housing support, and address any immediate crises, such as health-related issues.

Most often, families reach the point of losing their homes because they lack sufficient income to afford rent while still providing for their children's needs.<sup>[4; 8]</sup> As housing prices continue to rise and permanent housing subsidies (e.g., Housing Choice Vouchers) decrease in numbers,<sup>[3; 6]</sup> increasing income through employment is vitally important to families achieving housing stability.

Case management services for homeless families most often attend to their housing needs, and often do not include targeted employment services aimed at moving parents into jobs with incomes that will support their families over the long term. While case managers do often refer families to employment services at local One-Stop Centers or other employment agencies, they do not communicate with employment service providers or follow through to help families address any issues that come up in their job search or when they enter employment. One-Stop Centers and other employment agencies, on

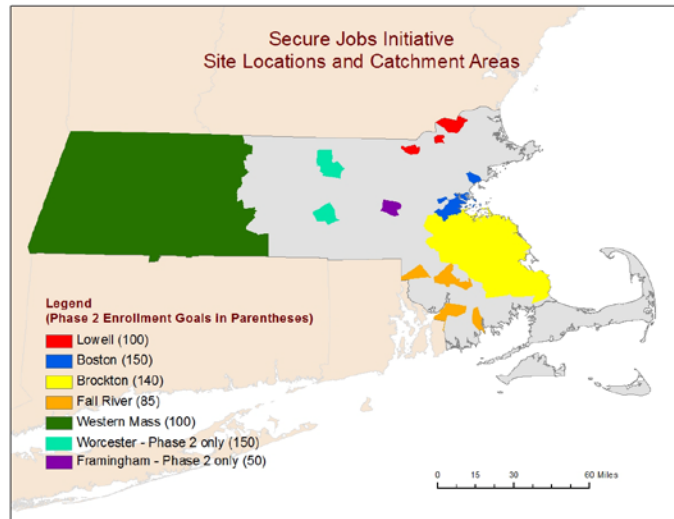
### **SECURE JOBS, SECURE HOMES, SECURE FAMILIES**

This series documents the design, implementation and outcomes of the Secure Jobs Initiative in Massachusetts, highlighting innovative program practices and important issues related to employment for homeless families. Future briefs in this series will focus in more detail on

- Models and strategies for **Job Readiness Training** for homeless job seekers
- Building and strengthening **partnerships** for efficient service provision
- Supporting participants in **job retention** once they are employed
- Employment and housing **outcomes** for Secure Jobs participants

the other hand, often are not equipped to deal with the specific issues that homeless families face in looking for jobs.<sup>[10]</sup>

The Secure Jobs model was developed to provide an alternative service model for homeless families that offers integrated housing and employment services for over a year, to support families through the many transitions they endure on their paths from homeless to housed, and from unemployed (or under-employed) to employed. The model was informed by a planning grant process with seven of the state's Interagency Council on Homelessness and Housing (ICHH) Regional Networks to End Homelessness on how best to move homeless families towards self-sufficiency, which revealed a need for intensive, integrated and personalized employment services to support both entry into and retention in full-time employment in jobs with family-sustaining wages and career ladders. Based on this input, combined with recent literature demonstrating the effectiveness of cross-systems partnership models in service delivery,<sup>[1; 2]</sup> the Fireman Foundation spearheaded the innovative Secure Jobs Initiative in Massachusetts.



### ***Phase One Basic Program Elements***

Secure Jobs initially launched for homeless families in the state's HomeBASE short-term rental assistance program, in five regions in the state. The model consisted of the following program elements:<sup>i</sup>

- Assessment and referral of those families in HomeBASE identified as most *ready, willing and able* to work
- Development of an Individual Employment Plan for each participant, including both short- and long-term plans for achieving employment goals
- Enrollment into one of three program tracks: 1) Job Readiness Training to prepare for job search and interviewing, 2) Skills training program, and 3) Immediate job search for those deemed ready to enter the workforce
- Continued support through the training and job search processes
- Regular communication between employment and housing case managers to ensure that the family is receiving holistic support and barriers are met quickly as they emerge
- One year of job retention support for participants who enter employment

In addition, Secure Jobs sites instituted the following organizational practices:

- Partnership with community service providers, including One-Stop Career Centers, to leverage existing resources
- Development of relationships with regional employers committed to the Secure Jobs mission
- Longitudinal data collection on all Secure Jobs participants, as well as detailed documentation of the implementation process

The Secure Jobs grant set ambitious goals for the five pilot sites: 80% of those enrolled should find new employment in the first year, and 80% of those employed should retain employment for a full year.

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<sup>i</sup> For more on the first phase of Secure Jobs, see the first report in this series, *Secure Jobs, Secure Homes, Secure Families: Process Evaluation of the Massachusetts Secure Jobs Pilot* at <http://iasp.brandeis.edu/pdfs/2013/Fireman.pdf>.

### ***Phase One Lessons Learned***

A process evaluation of the first phase of Secure Jobs yielded a wealth of data about which program elements were most effective and which needed revision, as well as ongoing barriers for families.

#### **Secure Jobs Phase One Lessons Learned**

SUCCESES	CHALLENGES	RECOMMENDATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Regular communication between housing and employment workers improves support for families</li><li>▪ Flexible funds address barriers to employment by meeting small expenses as they arise</li><li>▪ Dedicated job development creates essential personal connections with employers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Starting employment services a year into the short-term housing subsidy limits potential for program success</li><li>▪ Participants in shelters/motels could also benefit from these services</li><li>▪ Practical and affordable child care and transportation options are insufficient to meet the scope of the need</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Align employment and housing services so families begin the path to employment as soon as homelessness occurs</li><li>▪ Provide rental vouchers with length of subsidy varying according to the scope of challenges families face</li><li>▪ Expand eligibility (completed in Phase Two)</li><li>▪ Coordinate with state agencies providing child care and transportation (DTA and EEC) to leverage existing resources more efficiently</li></ul>

### ***New Funding for Phase Two***

The Secure Jobs pilot was met with widespread support. Participants, service providers, advocates and legislators touted the model as unique, innovative, effective and efficient.<sup>ii</sup> Ongoing engagement with local and state legislative officials at all five sites secured commitment from the state to continue the program and expand the population that it would serve. In the summer of 2014, Massachusetts' Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) launched Secure Jobs Phase Two, funded at the significantly higher level of \$2.5 million, comprised of

- A \$500,000 line item in the state budget
- \$1 million from the state's Housing Preservation and Stabilization Trust Fund
- An additional \$1 million from the Fireman Foundation.

The program model was modified in response to the lessons learned in Phase One.

### ***Phase Two Program Elements***

In Phase Two, Secure Jobs has expanded significantly and changed slightly in response to the Phase One evaluation. The key changes in Phase Two are:

- DHCD expanded eligibility to homeless families living in shelters, motels and scattered site units, diverted from shelter through services at the front door,<sup>iii</sup> and to families who receive Massachusetts' Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT), because current programming for these families offers little employment support

<sup>ii</sup> For more on results of the first phase, see the second report in this series, *Secure Jobs, Secure Homes, Secure Families: Summary Report of Massachusetts' Secure Jobs Initiative Phase One* at <http://iasp.brandeis.edu/pdfs/2014/Fireman1214.pdf>

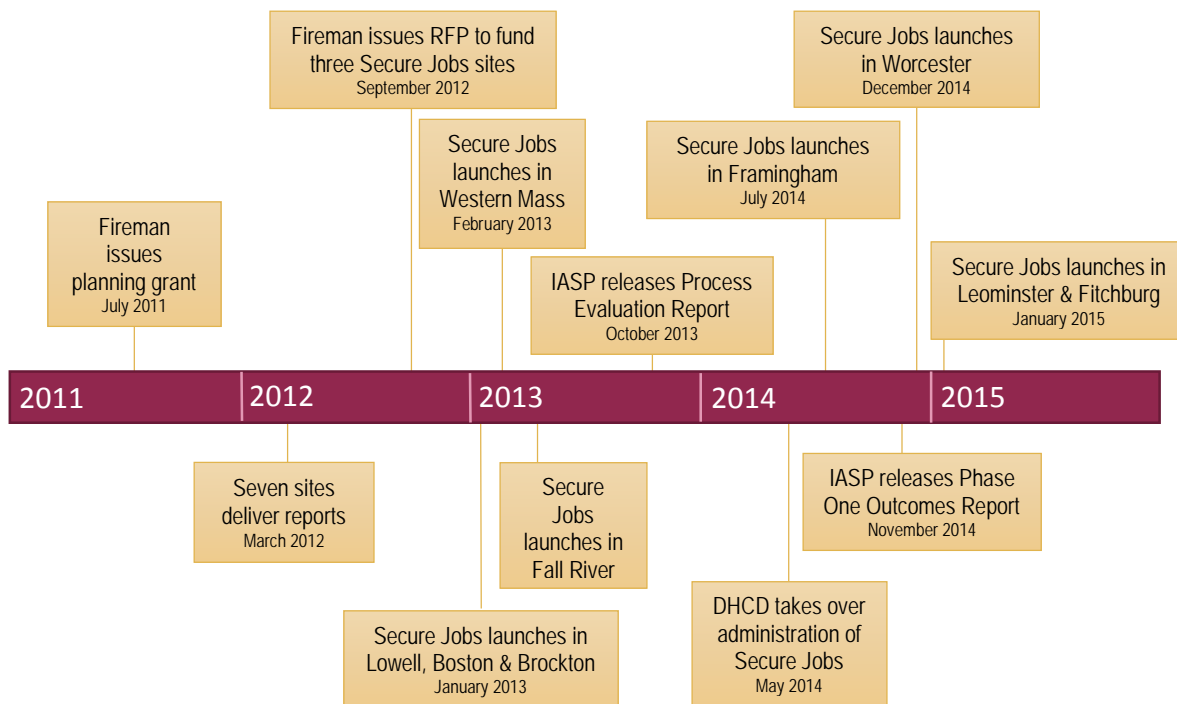
<sup>iii</sup> For more information on front door diversion, see National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2011). Closing the Front Door: Creating a Successful Diversion Program for Homeless Families. Retrieved from National Alliance to End Homelessness Center for Capacity Building website: <http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/closing-the-front-door-creating-a-successful-diversion-program-for-homeless>.

- Two additional Secure Jobs sites are added (one of which operates in two locations)
- Families are no longer enrolled into one of the three tracks

In addition, the sites have implemented internal changes to improve their program models. Examples of these program innovations include:

- Bringing employment services to shelters (or “vocalizing” shelter), so families can begin the process of planning for their futures while they are still in transitional housing
- Delivering Job Readiness Training in-house with cohorts of participants, using a curriculum developed specifically for this population, and including classes at the local One-Stop Career Center
- Partnering with a local university and a child care provider to create a certificate program in early childcare that provides on-site childcare for students
- Working more closely with local and state legislators to raise awareness of the program in order to ensure continued funding
- Expanding services to nearby towns and communities

### Timeline of the Evolution of Secure Jobs



### *Phase Two Challenge: Recruitment and Referral*

Secure Jobs was designed to provide employment support to those families identified as most “ready, willing and able” to work. Identifying the families that meet this description is, therefore, critical to successful implementation. In the first year of Secure Jobs, employment service workers developed close relationships with HomeBASE housing stabilization workers. Housing workers understood how to assess families to decide whom to refer, and because they had ongoing relationships with families, they were able to work with families in making the decision about entering Secure Jobs.

In Phase Two, the new eligibility guidelines have expanded both the number of families who can be served and the scope of services available to them. These

*We are still having a hard time with recruitment. Our housing provider doesn't have a relationship with the RAFT recipients. They just come in once, fill out paperwork and leave, so there is no time to do outreach.*

-Secure Jobs Site Coordinator

changes have presented three new challenges in the first few months of implementation. First, employment workers have to develop relationships with a new set of housing workers, who work in shelters and motels and who provide diversion services at the front door. This is a much larger pool of case workers, all of whom have to be introduced to the Secure Jobs model and taught how to assess families for Secure Jobs.

*For Phase 2, we have integrated into our family shelter system. So case managers in shelters make referral a part of their service point... Looking for housing and work at the same time can be overwhelming, so coordinated housing and employment case management is crucial there.*

-Secure Jobs Site Coordinator

Second, RAFT is a financial resource that does not include stabilization services, so either housing providers have to create a stabilization and recruitment program for RAFT recipients or employment workers have to go directly to RAFT families to recruit them. In the latter case, the housing providers do not have an ongoing relationship with families, so families do not receive support in making the decision about whether or not they are interested in Secure Jobs.

Third, families in shelter, motels and RAFT, and who are diverted from shelter, are in very different circumstances from those in HomeBASE. Families in shelter and motels are often placed in locations far from where they used to live. They do not know how long they will be in that location, and are subject to being moved at any time. And they are balancing the crisis of homelessness with a multitude of unfamiliar shelter rules and regulations. This situation can make it difficult to make a long-term commitment to full engagement in an employment program. Families receiving RAFT, on the other hand, often have some form of employment, because they were sustaining their own homes for some time. They fell behind on bills due to some unexpected event or to chronic under-employment, and had to apply for RAFT to bridge a rough patch. For them, entering an employment program would require leaving any current work, which could increase their vulnerability.

### ***Phase Two Challenge: Continued Housing Instability***

Most families enrolled in Phase One were receiving two-year housing assistance vouchers, many of which expired in 2014. These families often had not yet reached a level of employment that would allow them to pay market rent, and faced having to move to a less expensive apartment or find some other arrangement, e.g., move in with family or friends (very few had to go to shelter.) This disruption in their families' lives has made it difficult to stay focused on the employment search.

In addition, some families have increased their incomes to the point that they are no longer eligible for this housing subsidy, and yet they are not making enough money to maintain housing without housing support. These challenges point to the importance of continued support as families face additional hurdles on their journeys toward stable employment and housing.

### ***Conclusion***

With well over 60% of Phase One families connected to employment, preliminary results from the Secure Jobs evaluation are encouraging. However, it is also apparent that families need longer-term support and more opportunities to gain the skills they need to enter jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage. IASP's continued tracking of Secure Jobs families' employment and housing outcomes will provide insights into the potential of this new approach. Massachusetts is at the forefront of informing the conversation about integrated service provision and of providing guidance on bridging housing and employment services for homeless families.

*There are increasing numbers of families whose rental assistance benefits are due to expire at the end this month. The EA eligibility regulations have changed and it has become increasingly difficult for people to get additional housing assistance. We are concerned that there will be a number of families that will end up in shelter. Their income alone is not enough to sustain rent and other monthly obligations for their families, even with employment.*

-Secure Jobs Site Coordinator

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## About IASP

The Institute on Assets and Social Policy (IASP), a research institute at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, is dedicated to the economic well-being and social mobility of individuals and families, particularly to those traditionally left out of the economic mainstream. Working in close partnership with constituencies, state and federal policy makers, grassroots advocates, private philanthropies, and the media, IASP bridges the worlds of academic research, organizational practice, and government policy-making. IASP works to strengthen the leadership of lawmakers, practitioners, researchers and others by linking the intellectual and program components of asset-building policies.

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Institute on Assets and Social Policy ▪ The Heller School for Social Policy and Management  
Brandeis University ▪ 415 South Street, MS035 ▪ Waltham, MA 02454-9110  
Phone (781)736-8685 ▪ Fax (781)736-3925  
<http://iasp.brandeis.edu> ▪  @IASP\_Heller