



# COMMUNITY PROFILE

## Western Massachusetts

COMMUNITY CONTEXT	
Community population	Hampden 467,319; Hampshire 159,596; Franklin 71,221; Berkshire 129,585; Combined: 827,721
2014 PIT (overall homeless)	Hampden County 2,655; Three County CoC 753;
2013 CoC award	Combined: 3,408
2013 WIA formula grant allocation*	Hampden County \$2,109,95; Three County CoC \$1,599,964; Combined: \$3,709,916
Current unemployment rate**	Hampden \$3,512,146; Franklin/Hampshire \$1,518,105; Berkshire \$926,042; Combined: 4,589,983

\*This includes Title 1 Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth WIA Formula Grant Allocations by county  
 \*\*Most recent month; not seasonally adjusted.

### DESCRIPTION

Western Massachusetts is a large, geographically diverse region of Massachusetts, consisting of Berkshire, Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden Counties. The region is the most rural in the state while having two of its poorest cities: Springfield and Holyoke. Like the rest of the state, Western Massachusetts has experienced an increase in homelessness in recent years even while the nation overall is experiencing a decline. Homelessness in Western MA has increased 10% since last year and 13% over the past 5 years.

Several factors disproportionately impact the region. These factors include a higher rate of families in poverty than the state overall, with our major metropolitan area of Springfield, MA having one of the highest rates in the country (44%); high rates of teen pregnancies, with Holyoke, MA having the highest teen pregnancy rate in the state; the highest rate in the state of homeless families living in overflow hotels and motels, where lengths of stay are longer than in shelter settings while services are fewer; and higher rates of chronic homelessness than the rest of the state (16% vs. 11%).

Target populations for our Secure Jobs program are homeless and formerly homeless families, including those living in shelter or motels and those recently housed with short-term rental subsidies, families at risk of eviction and homeless individuals.



Our employment approach is based on three core concepts: (1) integration among non-profit and public programs in employment, housing, child care and education sectors; (2) individualized employment plans that address the specific needs of each homeless job seeker and (3) flexible funds to resolve specific employment barriers such as childcare, transportation and training certificates. Our program identifies and reaches homeless individuals and families through referrals from organizational partners, including housing and shelter providers, state agencies and human service and health care agencies. Participants also contact the program directly based on word of mouth among peers. Prior to enrollment, clients complete a series of appointments for intake, assessment and career planning, confirming that they are ready, willing, and able to participate in program services and employment.

## **COLLABORATION**

Western Massachusetts' employment efforts on behalf of homeless individuals and families span dozens of providers through private, public and quasi-public funding, all working collaboratively under the coordinating umbrella of the Secure Jobs Advisory Council, facilitated by the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness. The region's employment efforts for homeless families and individuals include participation of all four county career centers, early education and child care organizations, shelter and housing providers, community colleges, Regional Employment Boards and multiple state agencies that intersect with the job seeking homeless population.

This initiative began with the vision of the Paul and Phyllis Fireman Foundation, a long-time state partner in the effort to end family homelessness. The Foundation initially funded a Western Massachusetts planning grant to respond to employment needs for homeless families and individuals in spring 2012. Based on that plan's recommendations, The Fireman Foundation launched the Secure Jobs pilot project, with Western Massachusetts being one of five awards state-wide. This initiative's success inspired the complementary publicly funded efforts that are now underway.

Funded partners include the following non-profit organizations: Berkshire Works Career Center, CareerPoint Career Center, Construct, Inc., Corporation for Public Management, FutureWorks Career Center, Franklin Hampshire Career Center, HAPHousing, and ServiceNet, all of which provide case management, job readiness, training, and job retention services. Playful Minds LC and Square One provide childcare and partner in developing career pathways to the early education and care career field. Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness provides extensive coordination and oversees the Secure Jobs Advisory Council and maintains the online presence for the Western Massachusetts Secure Jobs collaborations. See: <http://westernmasshousingfirst.org/blog/secure-jobs-connect/>



Corporation for Public Management provides data coordination, hosts the Secure Jobs database and coordinates child care resources with partner and state agencies. MA Department of Housing and Community Development, MA Labor and Workforce Development, MA Department of Transitional Assistance and MA Department of Early Education and Care are all critical partners in the effort. The Continuum of Care of Hampden County and Three County (Hampshire, Franklin, Berkshire) provide their collaborative support in the effort as well.

Along with private and leveraged resources, the Paul and Phyllis Fireman Foundation, Commonwealth Corporation through the MA Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLW), and the MA Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) provide funding. These resources include in-kind contributions from all funded partners, ranging from office space and supplies to database management and career center activities. Additionally, HAP Housing leveraged significant state housing stabilization funds to support a collaborative workforce development initiative for homeless families. This collaboration is detailed below in the “Innovation” section.

The keys to sustaining this partnership are communication and collaboration. Secure Jobs programs optimize coordination of services throughout a client’s journey to full employment. The Secure Jobs Advisory Council meets monthly to review and evaluate outcomes and ensure that all Secure Jobs programs are maximizing resources, building on successful strategies, and troubleshooting challenges. On an operational level, in-person, telephone, and email communications between all workforce development sub-contractors, and shelter and housing stabilization staff are continuous in order to monitor clients’ progress and overcome barriers.

## **INNOVATION**

The Secure Jobs model, based on an unprecedented level of collaboration and flexibility in meeting clients’ needs, is a successful innovation. Each program brings new partners to the table in unique partnerships. With the most recent state funding, every Career Center in our four-county region is now invested in the effort. Each of these four career centers offer unique features that contribute to program success, including a cohort model in which clients attend a three work job readiness and self-esteem building program prior to job placement, as well as the co-location of career center staff and Secure Jobs staff at each others’ sites. These models allow homeless clients greater access to career center services, reducing the barriers to employment that homeless job seekers frequently face.



The collaboration between HAP Housing and Corporation for Public Management in its implementation of the Secure Jobs program offers a powerful example of what resource allocation and service coordination can produce. First, HAP Housing elected to allocate MA Stabilization Funds to employment efforts for homeless families, building on the Fireman

Foundation's private investment and CPM's program model. Secondly, HAP Housing and CPM devised a comprehensive referral system with the local career centers that directs clients to the appropriate program and career center depending on their job readiness. Finally, through ongoing communication and coordinated case management, they supported 191 homeless parents into employment over a one-year period.

Please go to: <http://westernmasshousingfirst.org/blog/secure-jobs-connect/sjc-progress-report/> for the final progress report of this initiative.

Additional innovations pertain to childcare, a critical need for employment success. Working in collaboration with child care partners, the Secure Jobs model allocates funding for "bridge childcare" to provide immediate child care services while working to obtain long-term child care vouchers and/or income-eligible slots provided by the Commonwealth. Finally, a recent innovation includes the development of an early education career track for job seekers. Working with childcare agencies, Secure Jobs is sponsoring two courses and internships that will qualify an individual for child care teacher certification. While building career ladders, the region is increasing its capacity to serve the children of future job seekers.

## **FUNDING FOR INITIATIVE/PROJECTS**

Public, private, and foundation funding as well as extensive leverages combine to fund Secure Jobs: HAP Housing (MA DHCD) \$212,000; Fireman Foundation \$523,000; MA DHCD \$250,000; Commonwealth Corporation through EOLWD \$207,000; Partner agency leverages \$475,000.

When permissible, Career Center partners make every attempt to co-enroll clients in various programs to leverage available dollars. Clients can access Workforce Investment Act funds and services if they are enrolled in WIA and are available for approved training and educational programs. Two homeless clients have accessed WIA funds thus far to support job training and childcare services.



## **CONNECTION TO EMPLOYERS**

The Secure Jobs design includes incentives for businesses to hire, which have proven effective in helping employers to “take the risk” in hiring clients who may not have the skills, education or work history they typically seek. Additionally, businesses engaged in our program frequently exceed the strict role of providing employment to include a more expansive approach with assistance such as: gift cards for successful completion of job training or readiness programs; provision of interview or job clothing; and the establishment of a car ownership program.

Secure Jobs also engages employers through recognition. At a “first year” program celebration event in February 2014, the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness, with support from all the program partners, hosted a large public event to honor 13 businesses that participated in the Secure Jobs program. The event included approximately 20 state legislators, mayors, and state officials who attended to applaud the business participants and success of the program’s clients. Businesses also received positive media coverage from every major media outlet in the region. Businesses were eager to continue and to do more in support of this project as a result of this event (which also was key in fueling political support for the public funding that was allocated by the state legislature in June later that year).

Secure Jobs clients have secured employment in private, public and nonprofit sectors. Industry sectors where employment has been secured include healthcare, childcare, hotel and food Service, construction and manufacturing, retail and wholesale, transportation and administration.

## **DATA AND RESULTS**

Data protocols for Fireman Foundation and DHCD funded grants are extensive and tracked by Brandeis University, which is collecting and analyzing all data for program evaluation. We follow the same protocols for all three programs. Data is collected via a customized database. Extensive demographic and programmatic data is gathered including changes in employment, housing and child care situations.

Overall, the collaborations have employed over 200 clients between February 2013 and August 2104. Of the 23 clients that entered employment prior to August 2013 (able to achieve 1 year job retention), 17 remain employed for a 74% one-year job retention rate. Of the 47 clients that entered employment prior to February 2014 (able to achieve 6 month job retention), 41 remain employed for an 88% - six-month job retention.

For more information on the *Secure Jobs Fund & Vocational Training* initiative, go to: <http://www.ppffound.org/pdfs/SecureJobsReport.pdf>



## **SUGGESTIONS FOR REPLICATION**

Keys to our program's success include:

- Design a program where each client works toward their individual goal vs. a design of one training program that must fit all.
- Allow for flexible dollars in order to allocate funds precisely towards each client's needs, including training fees, certifications, driver's license and identifications, child care costs, transportation expenses.
- Work within career ladders in order to provide homeless clients with the immediate income they need while working towards advanced credentials and experience that will allow them to increase their income and housing stability.
- Establish child care prior to employment to increase the chances of a successful transition for both parent and child.
- Develop partnership agreements with all stakeholders to foster collaboration and coordination.
- Meet often and be prepared to discuss the challenges and successes.
- Celebrate! Include clients, businesses, elected officials and community partners in at least an annual celebration of the program's impact on reducing homelessness and building healthier communities.

We are pleased to have been invited to share our successful model with Connecticut partners, including the Melville Charitable Trust, and look forward to supporting its replication in our neighboring state and beyond.

## **SUCCESS STORY**

*A homeless, single parent in Western Massachusetts*

Stephanie, a 24-year-old single parent of a toddler, lived in a homeless shelter with her daughter, receiving strong case management from the Center for Human Development staff. Unable to secure a stable job, Stephanie enrolled in Secure Jobs, which established childcare for her daughter and paid for Stephanie to receive her Phlebotomy and Blood Borne Pathogens Certifications. CareerPoint staff worked with Stephanie on job search, and she was offered a full time position in a medical office. Stephanie's job required her to work from 8 am to 5 pm Monday through Friday and offered a sustainable wage and full benefits package.

Secure Jobs, through a partnership with the childcare agency Square One, set up a daycare plan that would accommodate Stephanie's work schedule, and additionally, in working with housing partners, helped Stephanie re-locate to a new shelter to cut down on travel time to both work and the daycare. Stephanie had settled into a new shelter and her daughter was enrolled in a new daycare just four days after Stephanie began her new job.



In February 2013, Stephanie and her daughter moved into their first apartment. Stephanie currently earns \$13.79 per hour and has perfect job attendance. In October 2014, Square One is honoring Stephanie for her dedication and commitment to her child. Stephanie is planning on starting college courses in January 2015 to work toward her LPN Certification, which is paid for by her employer.

### **COMMUNITY CONTACT**

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