RESEARCH REPORT

Evaluation of the Student and Family Stability Initiative

Final Report

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Executive Summary

The King County Housing Authority (KCHA), in partnership with the Highline School District and the nonprofit social service organization Neighborhood House, launched the Student and Family Stability Initiative (SFSI) pilot program in 2013 to provide housing and employment supports to homeless and unstably housed families with children enrolled in Highline elementary schools. In 2016, KCHA contracted with the Urban Institute (Urban) to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of the program's first three pilot years. The evaluation goals are to document how SFSI works, who it serves, and how well it helps participants achieve housing stability, focusing on 242 clients who enrolled in the program between September 2013 through August 2016.

Interviews, document review, and administrative data analysis reveal that the program model evolved over its early implementation years, with four characteristics providing the backbone of the SFSI program as of 2017.

First, SFSI intends to reach households with at least one member who is willing and able to work. The SFSI program is operating in an increasingly expensive rental market, which housing authority leadership identified as an important consideration for participant screening criteria. Second, the program uses the US Department of Education definition of homelessness in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which is broader than the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's definition and allows the program to reach households who are doubled-up and living in motels as well as households who are unsheltered or in emergency shelter. Third, SFSI uses a progressive engagement model that emphasizes client-directed assistance to set and meet housing and employment goals. Finally, the housing and employment case management is coupled with flexible, short-term financial assistance covering a wide range of housing-related costs, such as search or move expenses, rent arrears, and rent payments. These eligibility criteria and program characteristics have important implications for enrollment and outcome expectations. In addition, one program goal is to house families within the Highline School District and preferably within the catchment area of the household's original school to promote student and classroom stability and minimize the district's McKinney-Vento–mandated transportation costs for homeless students.

Findings

During the first three program years, most of the households who enrolled in SFSI were doubled-up or in motels, with a small proportion unsheltered at the point they enrolled in the program. In keeping with program targets, most SFSI participants also had wage income at the point of enrollment.

Evaluation findings suggest promising outcomes for these participants and some areas of concern. For example, successful participants had income gains while participating in SFSI, and a subset of successful participants maintained their income gains and housing for the first year after exit. But program attrition rates are high, timelines are relatively lengthy—particularly in the early stages of program enrollment—and a large share of successful households changed schools because of their SFSI move. During the first three years, 60 percent of referred households enrolled in the program and 56 percent of the enrolled households were placed into housing. Nearly all the households placed into housing, 93 percent, successfully transitioned off the SFSI subsidy. Follow-up survey data collected from a sample of the successful households show promising preliminary housing stability and income outcomes for the first year after exit. The characteristics of the enrolled and successful households suggest that a possible trade-off of SFSI's eligibility criteria and employment targets is that fewer households experiencing urgent housing crises participate in the program.

Little information is available about the households who opted out, failed to find housing, or failed to complete the program. Two thirds of the referred households who did not enroll in the program either fell out of touch with SFSI staff or opted out, and nearly all the households who left the program without finding housing were "exited" by staff because they fell out of touch with their case managers, left voluntarily, or left the Highline School District. Only a handful was exited for failing to make progress on housing or employment goals.

Interpreting these findings is challenging, due in part to SFSI's unique service model. The program incorporates the core components of a conventional rapid re-housing model, but also deviates from it in several ways, mainly related to the target population and client-directed outcome goals. This is not in itself problematic: rapid re-housing is a relatively new and evolving program model, with wide variations in screening and service delivery approaches that reflect diverse local resources, constraints, and priorities. But SFSI administrative data and outcome measures, which appear more consistent with a conventional rapid re-housing approach, do not account for key aspects of the SFSI program model— including the importance of client-directed goals, or the fact that much of the enrolled population is doubled-up but not necessarily in immediate housing crisis.

These possible disconnects between SFSI's client population and engagement model and the program's milestones and outcome measures makes it difficult to understand how well SFSI is working. Administrative data only partially explain whether SFSI outcomes may reflect the program's target population and service model versus entry points for program improvements.

Cost analyses show that SFSI's short-term assistance model costs KCHA substantially less than providing long-term assistance through a housing choice voucher. But direct cost comparisons are difficult because of the two programs' different natures and goals.

Recommendations

Five sets of recommendations focus on how SFSI partners can use the evaluation findings to improve the program and to explore unanswered questions about SFSI services. Broadly stated, findings point to two courses of action. First, partners should assess SFSI client characteristics to collectively determine whether the program is currently reaching the preferred client population—and if so, whether outcome measures accurately reflect client progress towards housing and financial stability goals. Second, more attention can be paid to contacting, communicating with, and capturing information about SFSI clients to improve program attrition and better understand how families experience housing instability and navigate the program.

With this in mind, we first recommend that program partners revisit and affirm SFSI's population targets in light of the evidence on current participants' housing situations at enrollment, and housing placement rates. Partners should also assess whether current program milestones and outcome measures adequately capture client progress toward self-directed housing and financial stability goals. We then provide recommendations for refining SFSI referral and enrollment procedures, and for improving data collection. We conclude with considerations for ongoing program evaluation efforts, including collecting additional information from SFSI clients.

The five recommendations are as follows:

- Reaffirm SFSI's target population among program partners to assess whether SFSI should be reaching more households with immediate housing needs or to confirm the program's target population.

- Examine SFSI outcome measures by reviewing SFSI family plan or service use information and considering whether additional program milestones or exit indicators are needed to fully capture SFSI participants' progress toward self-directed housing and financial stability goals.

- Streamline SFSI referrals, screening, and enrollment to improve client contact and communication, speed up enrollment process, and minimize attrition.

- Improve data management and quality by transitioning to a robust case management system and incorporating best practices for data management.

- Pursue ongoing evaluation efforts that include qualitative data collection with program participants, improving ongoing contact with SFSI clients, and additional formative evaluation work to lay the foundation for a possible impact study.

Conclusion

KCHA, the Highline School District, and Neighborhood House have developed a strong and innovative collaboration that connects two distinct service systems, that might otherwise be siloed, to reach an unstably housed population that is unlikely to have access homelessness assistance. School counselors in particular value SFSI as a tool to support families they typically have few housing assistance resources to offer. KCHA views long-term stability as the most important measure of the program's success, and housing stability outcomes for the first year after exit are promising for a sample of households who found housing through SFSI. These outcomes can be monitored and confirmed going forward. But evaluation findings also raise questions about program performance measures, such as early attrition rates, enrollment timelines, and completion rates. Fully understanding how well SFSI is working and its potential to stabilize homeless or unstably housed families will require additional attention to these measures as the program matures.

Errata

This report was updated in July 2018 to correct the year that Moving to Work launched as referenced in box 1.

The Student and Family Stability Initiative

In 2016, the King County Housing Authority (KCHA) contracted with the Urban Institute (Urban) to conduct a process and outcome evaluation of the first three pilot years of the Student and Family Stability Initiative (SFSI). The one-year Urban evaluation was launched as SFSI entered its fourth pilot year and builds on early evaluation work by a previous third-party evaluator (Blume and Leon 2015).

The goals of the evaluation are to collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data to document how SFSI was implemented and how much the program model holds promise as a tool to help unstably housed families with children achieve housing stability. In addition, Urban was to provide KCHA technical assistance and recommendations to strengthen SFSI data collection and management processes and to refine the program model. Results from this evaluation intend to inform possible program expansion to other schools or school districts in KCHA's jurisdiction and a possible impact evaluation.

This report synthesizes findings from data collection conducted over approximately 10 months that included document review, interviews with SFSI stakeholders, and analysis of program and other relevant KCHA administrative data. It is the second and final deliverable for the SFSI evaluation and builds on findings from a June 2016 interim report provided to KCHA that focused on data collection and management.

In the sections that follow, we document how the SFSI program works and describe early outcomes for 242 families enrolled in SFSI between September 2013 and August 2016 (the first three program years). We then provide recommendations to KCHA to inform ongoing program improvement and to strengthen the foundation for a future impact evaluation.

Overview of the Student and Family Stability Initiative

The King County Housing Authority's Student and Family Stability Initiative is a pilot program launched in 2013 in partnership with the Highline School District and the nonprofit social service organization Neighborhood House to provide housing and employment supports to homeless and unstably housed families with children enrolled in Highline elementary schools (figure 1).

SFSI intends to help participating families find and maintain safe, stable housing through a combination of short-term financial assistance coupled with self-directed housing and employment services and case management.[1] Financial assistance may cover monthly rental payments and other housing-related costs that may be barriers to housing stability, such as rent arrears, deposits, application fees, transportation costs, or moving costs. Enrolled families also have access to job search help, which helps participants increase or stabilize their wage income. Whereas KCHA is the primary SFSI funder through a contract with Neighborhood House, employment case management and portions of the flexible financial support are funded through additional Neighborhood House funders.

KCHA is among the nation's largest public housing authorities and provides rental assistance to approximately 22,000 households annually in 37 cities and towns that fall within its jurisdiction.[2] The SFSI pilot is related to two KCHA efforts. Since 2012, KCHA has developed an active partnership with the Puget Sound Educational Service District through the region's 2012 Race to the Top proposal, which included the school-based rapid re-housing pilot program (although the award did not fund the program).[3] Since 2010, KCHA has partnered with three school districts in their jurisdiction that serve many KCHA-assisted students. The partnership between the housing authority and the Highline School District, as well as the pilot initiative, is made possible by KCHA's status as a Moving to Work Agency (box 1), which grants it unique policy and fiscal flexibility to launch locally designed programs, partnerships with service providers and stakeholders, and nontraditional forms of housing assistance. Each partner has invested substantial resources into the partnership and ongoing SFSI program coordination and communication.

SFSI is also part of a larger portfolio of housing programs launched by KCHA to test innovative housing assistance models. These include efforts to support King County's homeless population by dedicating tenant- and project-based voucher assistance or funds to homeless households or individuals or to vulnerable populations at risk of homelessness. In early 2017, the housing authority reported that 2,800 Housing Choice Vouchers were dedicated to at-risk groups. Programs include rapid re-housing assistance for survivors of domestic violence, a housing counseling program to help voucher holders access opportunity-rich neighborhoods, and "sponsor-based" supportive housing programs in partnership with service providers who deliver service-enriched housing to homeless or individuals or households.[4]

Housing authority staff describe SFSI as part of ongoing efforts to "right-size" or tailor housing assistance to meet the needs of specific target populations and to identify interventions that are more efficient, flexible, and cost less than traditional long-term subsidies through tenant-based vouchers, public housing, or project-based voucher assistance. SFSI assistance is intended for households who can

achieve financial and housing stability with short-term, more flexible support. Narrowing the target population to families with children in Highline elementary schools created the additional opportunity for KCHA and the Highline School District to explore how the program may support secondary outcome goals, such as stabilizing classrooms and schools with high student mobility rates, reducing costs to the district for transporting homeless students to and from school, and improving attendance or academic performance for unstably housed students. KCHA staff noted that Highline schools—and the schools targeted for the first year of program launch—were selected in part because Highline has the highest number of McKinney-Vento homeless students.

BOX 1

What Is Moving to Work?

Moving to Work (MTW) is a demonstration program launched in 1996 by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to allow a small subset of public housing authorities the policy and fiscal flexibility to design and test innovative, locally driven housing assistance strategies.

Thirty-nine public housing authorities nationwide have MTW designation, which allows exemptions from many public housing and voucher program rules and restrictions and provides flexibility in using federal funds. The program aims to identify new approaches to using federal housing assistance dollars more efficiently, to help residents find employment and become self-sufficient, and to increase housing choice for low-income families. Over the next seven years, HUD will designate 100 additional housing authorities with MTW status to join the current 39 MTW housing authorities nationwide.

Note: More information on MTW can be found on HUD's website. See "Moving to Work," US Department of Housing and Urban Development, accessed March 9, 2017,
https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/ph/mtw.

SFSI was launched against a backdrop of rising housing costs and a shortage of affordable rental housing in the King County region. For example, between 2000 and 2014, the number of extremely low–income families (earning at or below 30 percent of area median income) in King County increased roughly 45 percent, while the number of rental housing units available to these families remained at only 39 units for every 100 extremely low–income households.[5] KCHA leadership noted that the competitive local housing market was a key consideration for the program's emphasis on employment, to ensure that participants could maintain their housing after exiting the program.

FIGURE 1
Student and Family Stability Initiative Partnership
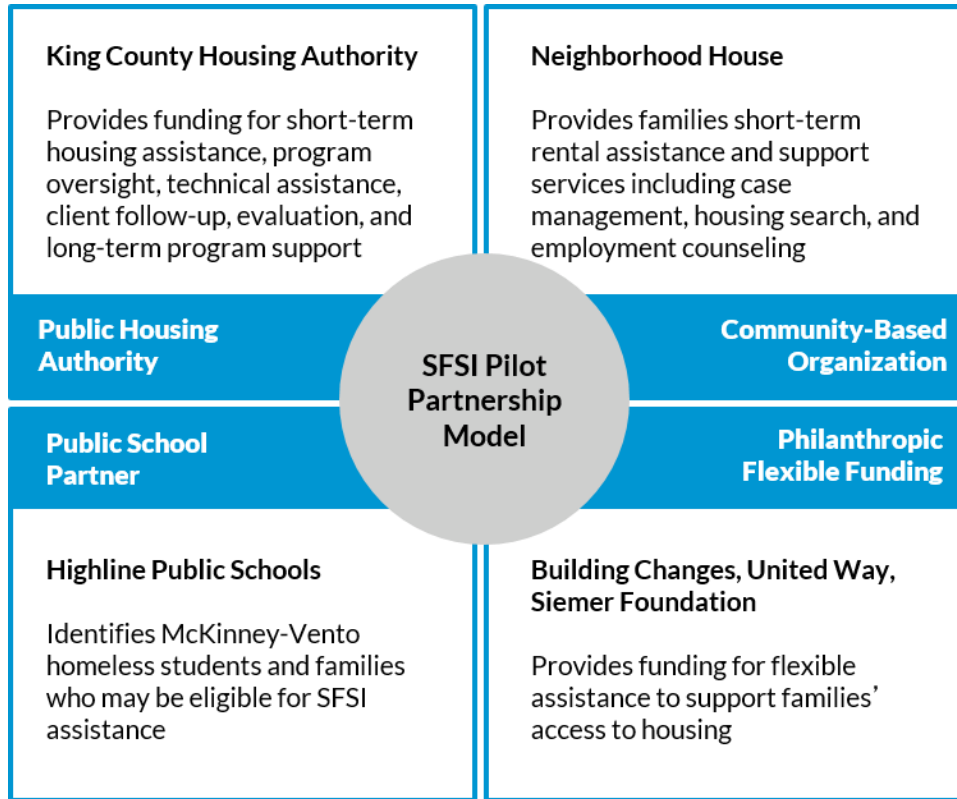
Source: Adapted from June 2016 SFSI Interim Outcomes Assessment.

The SFSI Service Model

SFSI families are identified and prescreened by Highline School District staff and referred to Neighborhood House staff for additional eligibility screens and enrollment. Households who enroll in SFSI are provided access to individualized counseling, flexible financial support for housing costs, and various housing and employment support services. Access to financial assistance and self-directed services is intended to help households remove barriers to stable housing and increase their household earnings, which will allow them to maintain their housing after SFSI assistance ends.

The SFSI partners—including KCHA, Neighborhood House, and the school district counselors—meet monthly for about two hours, which is the main formal structure for communication between the partners. The first hour is open to all program partners, including school counselors, and the last hour is for Neighborhood House and KCHA. Informal communication occurs regularly on an ad-hoc basis as issues arise.

Document review and interviews highlight that the initiative's goals and program model have evolved over the first three years of implementation and continue to develop (figure 2). The program's initial intent was to encourage families to remain within the catchment area of their school of origin to minimize school changes for students. This was changed during the second program year (2014–15 school year) to allow families to remain within the Highline district as a whole—in part because of rising housing costs.[6] In addition, the program expanded from an initial 8 elementary schools to 18 during the second program year and to middle schools in the third program year (2015–16 school year). Finally, whereas discussions about the potential to reduce school district transportation costs—mainly from taxi vouchers provided to homeless families to ensure students attend their schools of origin—were an early motivating factor for SFSI, transportation costs were later de-emphasized as a program priority. This is in part because of the 2014 shift to allowing moves within the Highline school district and in part because of difficulty reliably measuring transportation costs.

More significantly, when the initiative launched, it was modeled as a conventional rapid re-housing program with an emphasis on time limits for assistance. SFSI partners have since revised their approach. Neighborhood House initially provided clients up to 100 percent of housing costs for three to six months, with staff discretion to extend assistance as needed. In the third program year, SFSI shifted away from a fixed housing subsidy period to a maximum subsidy amount. KCHA staff describe the program as based on a progressive engagement model offering flexible, short-term assistance paired with client-directed case management.

SFSI incorporates what are typically considered the key components of a rapid re-housing program model (Cunningham, Gillespie, and Anderson 2015; NAEH 2014)—housing search assistance, time-limited financial assistance for a range of housing-related expenses, and case management—but with significant adaptations (box 2). As of early 2017, four characteristics provide the backbone of the SFSI program model:

- **Targets working families.** The program intends to reach households with at least one member who can work or is motivated to increase wage income. The ideal family is one that is working or has a history of employment and may be experiencing episodic housing instability as opposed to chronic housing, financial, or family instability.

- **Reaches a broad population of families.** Rather than using the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of homelessness, SFSI families must meet the US Department of Education (DoE) definition of homelessness in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which allows participants to be doubled-up or living in motels in addition to

being unsheltered, in an emergency shelter, or in a transitional housing program.[7] This allows the program, jointly developed with the school district, to reach families who might not be eligible for housing assistance under the narrower HUD definition but whose housing status might negatively affect student performance.

- **Provides client-directed services.** Neighborhood House case managers develop individualized service plans with each family and provide access to various housing and employment services, but without a required set of services. Families are expected to be self-directed and willing to take advantage of SFSI services.

- **Provides flexible housing funds.** A unique aspect of SFSI's program model is the availability of limited, flexible funds that households can use for various housing-related costs. These include housing search or move expenses, arrears or other housing-related debt that may limit a household's ability to find new housing, and rent payments. As of 2016, clients have access to up to $6,000 in financial assistance, with some staff discretion to access additional funds.

KCHA leadership noted the decision to target working or work-able families reflects concerns that households without wage income could not secure or maintain housing in Highline's increasingly expensive housing market. Helping families find and sign a lease for rental housing that will be affordable without assistance is an important SFSI milestone, which triggers help with rent payments. Once housed, families should continue making progress toward self-sufficiency through employment services and case management. Throughout the program participation period, participants drive service intensity.

In the short term, program staff consider the ability to maintain housing independently as a successful outcome and "exit" successful households when they can transition off housing subsidies with rent burdens no higher than 60 percent. In the long term, KCHA considers maintaining stable housing for two years after transitioning off SFSI to be a successful outcome. Families are considered stable if they no longer meet the DoE McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness. Ideally, families also avoid moves that require school changes for students. KCHA staff will attempt to collect follow-up survey information from all successful exiters for 24 months after exit.

FIGURE 2
SFSI Program Timeline

2012
- KCHA partners with the Puget Sound Educational Service District through the region's Race to the Top award, including a school-based rapid re-housing pilot.

2013
- KCHA launches SFSI.
- KCHA selects program partners: Highline School District, Neighborhood House, and GeoResearch.
- Program Year 1 begins (September 1, 2013–August 31, 2014) at 8 Highline School District elementary schools.

2014
- Program Year 2 begins (September 1, 2014–August 31, 2015).
- Program expands to 18 Highline School District schools.
- SFSI shifts emphasis from remaining within original school catchment area to remaining within broader Highline School District boundaries.

2015
- Program Year 3 begins (September 1, 2015–August 31, 2016).
- Year 1 Evaluation Report released by Geo Education Research.

2016
- Program Year 4 begins (September 1, 2016– August 31, 2017).
- Per enrolled household subsidy shifts from 3 to 6 months per family to $6,000 cap.
- Program expands to Highline School District middle schools.
- Urban Institute contracted for process evaluation and interim outcomes study.

Source: Adapted from 2013 and 2016 SFSI Program Manuals and interviews with SFSI staff.
Notes: KCHA = King County Housing Authority; SFSI = Student and Family Stability Initiative.

State of the Research on Rapid Re-housing

The literature on rapid re-housing (RRH) remains nascent, offering mixed evidence on program models and outcomes. Considered together, the literature suggests there is no single prevailing RRH model, although programs tend to share some common core components. Broadly stated, RRH programs provide time-limited housing assistance coupled with case management to people facing homelessness or housing instability, with the goal of quickly moving people into permanent housing and reducing spells of homelessness.[a] Programs should include housing search assistance, financial assistance, and case management.[b] Within those parameters, there is variation in how assistance is provided, how much funding is available, how funds are used, and assistance periods. Financial assistance typically includes rent subsidies, application fees, security deposits, utility payments, and moving assistance.[c] Length of assistance may vary from 1 to 24 months, but program guidance suggests rental assistance should be short-term.[d]

Rapid re-housing is often presented as appropriate for most people facing homelessness, and program guidance suggests harder-to-house clients need not be screened out.[e] But the short-term approach may be challenging for families with more barriers to finding and maintaining housing or in expensive housing markets. In practice programs may consider local contexts like housing or employment markets and program resources to set screening criteria and screen out families with a history of substance abuse, mental illness, criminal records, or past evictions.[f] People may also opt out of RRH if they are concerned they will not meet financial self-sufficiency expectations. The experimental Family Options Study found low take-up rates for RRH compared with other assistance models. Qualitative interviews suggested that families worried they could not meet income goals and pay housing costs after the assistance ended,[g] and the uncertainty about when assistance would end was stressful for participants.[h]

The most common outcomes of interest for RRH programs are speed of housing placements and preventing returns homelessness after exit, although housing and neighborhood quality, income, and overall well-being for program participants may also be of interest.[i] Research suggests that RRH programs have relatively high placement rates, participants tend to find permanent housing within about 30 days—particularly those with fewer barriers—and have relatively few returns to the homeless system within 12 months after exit.[j] But they continue to face housing instability after exit, and employment may not sustain stable housing.[k] The Family Options Study showed RRH did not improve housing stability compared with usual care, but evaluations have noted small but positive income gains for RRH participants.[l]

[a] Mary Cunningham, Sarah Gillespie, and Jacqueline Anderson, *Rapid Re-housing: What the Research Says* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2015).

[b] NAEH (National Alliance to End Homelessness, "Rapid Re-housing: A History and Core Components" (Washington, DC: NAEH, 2014).

[c] USICH (US Interagency Council on Homelessness), "Federal Resources That Can Fund Rapid Re-housing" (Washington, DC: USICH, 2015).

[d] Mary Cunningham, Sarah Gillespie, and Jacqueline Anderson, *Rapid Re-housing: What the Research Says* (Washington, DC: Urban

Institute, 2015); HUD (US Department of Housing and Urban Development), "Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP): Year 2 Summary" (Washington, DC: HUD, Office of Community Planning and Development, Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs, 2013); NAEH (National Alliance to End Homelessness, "Rapid Re-housing: A History and Core Components" (Washington, DC: NAEH, 2014).

[e] HUD, "Rapid Re-housing" (Washington, DC: HUD, 2014); NAEH (National Alliance to End Homelessness, "Rapid Re-housing: A History and Core Components" (Washington, DC: NAEH, 2014); USICH, "Federal Resources That Can Fund Rapid Re-housing" (Washington, DC: USICH, 2015).

[f] Martha R. Burt, Carol Wilkins, Brooke Spellman, Tracy D'Alanno, Matt White, Meghan Henry, and Natalie Matthews, *Rapid Re-housing for Homeless Families Demonstration Programs Evaluation Report, Part I: How They Worked—Process Evaluation* (Washington, DC: HUD, Office of Policy Development and Research, 2016).

[g] Daniel Gubits, Brooke Spellman, Lauren Dunton, Scott Brown, and Michelle Wood, *Interim Report: Family Options Study* (Washington, DC: HUD, Office of Policy Development and Research, 2013).

[h] Benjamin W. Fisher, Lindsay S. Mayberry, Marybeth Shinn, and Jill Khadduri, "Leaving Homelessness Behind: Housing Decisions among Families Exiting Shelter," *Housing Policy Debate* 24, no. 2 (2014): 364–86.

[i] Mary Cunningham, Sarah Gillespie, and Jacqueline Anderson, *Rapid Re-housing: What the Research Says* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2015).

[j] Mary Cunningham, Sarah Gillespie, and Jacqueline Anderson, *Rapid Re-housing: What the Research Says* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2015); HUD (US Department of Housing and Urban Development), "Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP): Year 2 Summary" (Washington, DC: HUD, Office of Community Planning and Development, Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs, 2013); Mark Silverbush, Tom Albanese, Molly Civilly, Thuan Huynh, John Kuhn, Linda Southcott, and Tom Byrne, *Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF): FY 2014 Annual Report* (Washington, DC: US Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014).

[k] Ann Marie Oliva, "Ending Family Homelessness: How HUD's Programs Can Help Meet the Goal" (Washington, DC: 2014); Brooke E. Spellman, "Family Options Study–Impact of Housing and Services Interventions for Homeless Families: Findings from the Interim Report" (Bethesda, MD: Abt Associates, 2015); Brooke E. Spellman, "Evaluation of the Rapid Re-housing for Homeless Families Demonstration Program (San Diego: 2015).

[l] Danile Gubits, Marybeth Shinn, Stephen Bell, Michelle Wood, Samuel Dastrup, Claudia D. Solari, Scott R. Brown, et al., *Family Options Study: Short-Term Impacts of Housing and Services Interventions for Homeless Families* (Washington, DC: HUD, Office of Policy Development, 2015).

Evaluation Approach

The evaluation goals are to document how the SFSI program works and how well it helps participants achieve housing stability, focusing on the first three pilot years from program launch in September 2013 through August 2016. The main research questions are as follows:

- How does SFSI identify, enroll, and serve clients?

- Who did SFSI serve during the first three pilot years?

- What services did SFSI clients receive?

- What are housing stability outcomes for SFSI participants?

- Does SFSI offer cost savings compared with voucher assistance?

Between March 2016 and January 2017, the Urban Institute evaluation team, with KCHA support, gathered relevant documents and literature, conducted interviews with key informants, and analyzed administrative and follow-up data collected by Neighborhood House and KCHA staff for SFSI participants. KCHA staff provided ongoing feedback and clarification on SFSI documents, data, and procedures through regular conference calls.

Document Review

KCHA provided Urban various program-related materials and direct access to the SFSI SharePoint site that maintains all program documents and data management tools developed by Neighborhood House and KCHA staff. Key documents include SFSI Procedures and Policy Guides and attachments for 2014 and 2016, the SFSI One Year Evaluation Report produced by Geo Education and Research, and KCHA's Interim Outcomes Assessment. Administrative materials, such as the SFSI program scope of work from Neighborhood House's contract with KCHA and case manager position descriptions, were also made available by KCHA staff. The document review was the foundation for the SFSI evaluation interim report, which provided five recommendations to improve SFSI data collection and management procedures. The document review and report also informed the goals and approach of the qualitative data collection and administrative data analysis conducted for this report.

Administrative Data

To understand program participation and early outcomes for families enrolled in the first three program years, Urban relied on several data sources:

- Household-level SFSI program administrative data compiled by the Highline School District, Neighborhood House, and KCHA for SFSI referred and enrolled households

- Quarterly survey data collected by KCHA following successful exits[8]

- Demographic information for SFSI households, including race, age, country of origin, and language of the head of household and size, member ages, and number of dependents

- Data on SFSI and KCHA Housing Choice Voucher program costs, including KCHA estimates of the costs associated with administering vouchers for families in the Highline School District

- Data on student populations and homeless student counts for Highline elementary schools

Data for households referred to the program through August 2016 are included in this report.[9] The final sample includes 455 households identified as potential candidates for SFSI, 404 referred households, and 242 enrolled households (table 1). At the time of the evaluation, exit information was available for nearly all (235) of the enrolled households.

Qualitative Data

Between June and December 2016, the Urban team conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with SFSI stakeholders in person or by phone. These included two interviews with KCHA staff, five with Neighborhood House staff, three with current or former Highline McKinney-Vento liaisons, and six with school counselors. The Urban team developed an interview guide tailored for various SFSI roles, with questions about local context, SFSI program design and goals, program implementation, data collection procedures, experience with clients, perceptions of client outcomes, and perceptions of challenges and lessons learned through implementation. The research team coded all interview transcripts thematically to analyze interview data across respondents.

In addition to formal interviews with SFSI stakeholders, an Urban team member visited Neighborhood House to observe case managers, documenting how case managers interacted with clients, entered data or maintained case notes, and managed their time. No in-person interactions were captured during that visit, but the Urban research team member observed case managers contacting clients and interacting with clients by phone and text message.

Data Limitations

For the qualitative data collection, we conducted interviews during the fourth year of the pilot. As a result, it is difficult to capture how services and processes may have changed over the earlier pilot years. In addition, we could not interview counselors from the four elementary schools with highest numbers of SFSI referrals or enrollments. These counselors with exposure to larger numbers of SFSI families or unstably housed families may have unique insights about the referral process and families' experiences with SFSI. Finally, because we did not have access to SFSI families, we could not capture the client perspective on SFSI services and outcomes. The client perspective would enrich any future SFSI evaluation.

Administrative data available to Urban for this evaluation also have some limitations, as discussed in the findings and recommendations sections of this report. SFSI administrative data are pulled mainly

from the program's case management system, which does not track all the services that SFSI participants may receive.

Findings

Findings for each research question combine insights from the qualitative and administrative data analysis.

How Does SFSI Identify and Enroll Clients?

Box 3 defines the terms used in this report to refer to SFSI participants. Figure 3 illustrates how SFSI families move through the program and the various touch points with program staff from identification and referral to exit and follow-up. Table 1 provides an overview of program referral, enrollment, and exit activity during the first three pilot years.

Student and Family Stability Initiative Program Evaluation Terminology

In this report, we refer to various program stages and exit outcomes for SFSI participants.

- **Identified.** Households identified by Highline School District staff as eligible for McKinney-Vento homelessness assistance and potentially eligible for SFSI.

- **Referred.** Households referred to SFSI by Highline staff for screening.

- **Enrolled.** Families who pass all screening steps and begin the SFSI program.

- **Housed.** Families who sign a lease and start receiving a short-term rental housing subsidy.

- **Successful exit.** Families who successfully transition off the rental housing subsidy.

- **Incomplete exit.** We refer to participants as "incomplete" exits or exiters if they left SFSI before finding housing or completing other milestones. Incomplete exit reasons include: lack of follow-up with case manager, lack of progress on employment plan, voluntary withdrawal, left program before housed, moved out of district, and subsidy ended (non-positive exit). These exits may occur before or after being housed through SFSI.

- **Missing or Still active.** Families who are missing exit information or are still active in the program as of January 2017.

Recruitment and Referrals

Over the first three program years, 455 families were identified and prescreened by participating schools as potential candidates for SFSI, with 404 ultimately referred to Neighborhood House staff for eligibility screening and enrollment. Close to half of the sample was enrolled in the third program year (August 2015 through September 2016). See appendix table A.1 for cohort sizes.

Referrals have been made from all 18 Highline School District elementary schools, with the largest numbers of referrals (26 percent) coming from two schools: Midway and Hazel Valley (see appendix table A.2 for referral and enrollment activity by school for the 2015–16 school year). Data provided by KCHA show these schools also had the largest McKinney-Vento–eligible populations in the school district as of 2015–16, estimated at approximately 12 percent of the student population at each school (appendix table A.3). Based on each school's homeless student counts, it appears that approximately 70 percent of the district's eligible families were referred to SFSI, and approximately 40 percent were enrolled in the program. Referral rates varied widely by school.

McKinney-Vento liaisons and school counselors at each of the 18 schools handle SFSI recruitment. Homeless or unstably housed families are primarily identified as McKinney-Vento eligible at the start of each school year through the school enrollment process. The liaison provides each school counselor a list of McKinney-Vento–eligible families for outreach and to connect them to services they may be eligible for, including SFSI. School counselors are typically the first to engage with a family about the SFSI program, but the McKinney-Vento liaison may also contact families. Additional McKinney-Vento– and SFSI-eligible families are then identified during the school year, either through referrals to counselors from teachers or other school staff or through counselors' individual relationships with students and families.

Counselors are responsible for telling families about SFSI services, prescreening families, obtaining consent for Neighborhood House contact, and notifying the district's McKinney-Vento liaison when likely SFSI candidates are identified. Prescreening (according to the 2016 SFSI policy and procedures manual) involves asking families questions about housing status, income, and employment potential for at least one adult in the household, as well as gauging families' interest in learning more or participating in SFSI. This prescreening conversation is intended to be broad and is not systematically captured by school district or SFSI staff. Counselors noted that most McKinney-Vento–eligible families who received information about the program were interested in participating.

Counselors noted that when the program was initially launched, the SFSI prescreen form was three pages as opposed to the current single page, and counselors were more involved in determining family

eligibility. Because of initial concerns of overscreening and burden on counselors and families, that process is now simplified, and counselors simply make families aware of the program opportunity and obtain families' consent to be contacted by Neighborhood House staff for a full eligibility screening. School counselors and other SFSI staff called this a positive program development.

Families interested in the SFSI must sign a consent form allowing counselors to provide their contact information to Neighborhood House to start the screening process. In total, 51 households (11 percent of all prescreened households) declined to sign the consent form or were determined by school staff to be ineligible to participate in SFSI.

Signed consent forms are faxed to the district's McKinney-Vento liaison, who formally refers families to Neighborhood House by entering the names of all family members into an Excel workbook housed on the SharePoint site used by Neighborhood House and KCHA staff. Neighborhood House staff log in to the SharePoint site and spreadsheet regularly to monitor new entries and are notified by e-mail when newly referred families are added.

TABLE 1
SFSI Referrals, Enrollments, and Exits

	Obs.	Percent
Identified households	**455**	
Referred to neighborhood house	404	88.8
Found ineligible or decline consent	51	11.2
Referred households	**404**	
Enrolled	242[a]	59.9
Screened or opt out	154	38.1
Enrolled households	**242**	
Housed	136[b]	56.2
Not housed	104	43.0
Exited households	**235**	
Successfully transition off rental subsidy	126	53.6
Incomplete program exit	109	46.4
Still active or missing exit data	7	2.9

Source: SFSI administrative data for households enrolled September 2013 through August 2016 and exited by January 2017.
Notes: SFSI = Student and Family Stability Initiative. A household is assumed referred if they are noted in SFSI administrative data as having provided a release form for Neighborhood House contact. A household is assumed "enrolled" if they clear all four SFSI screening steps.
[a] Eight households have missing enrollment information or enrolled outside the study period.
[b] Two households were still active in the program at the time of the evaluation but had not signed a lease.

FIGURE 3
SFSI Program Flowchart with Participation Counts

Families identified by McKinney-Vento homeless liaisons at HSD or by school counselors at one of 18 HPS schools
455 families

School counselors explain SFSI and identify interested families

Families sign consent and are referred to Neighborhood House
404

Families declined consent or were ineligible
51

Pass phone screening
322

Pass in-person screening
251

Pass KCHA clearance
250

Screen out or opt out
82

Screen out or opt out
71

Screen out or opt out
1

Program enrollment
242[a]

Receive individualized case management:
•Housing search services
•Flexible funding
•Employment search services

Ongoing case management driven by client

Housed
136[b]

Incomplete program exit
104

Successfully transition off rental subsidy
126[c]

Incomplete program exit
5

Follow-up calls regarding housing stability & household income completed quarterly
86[d]

Legend

▮ Highline Public Schools	▮ King County Housing Authority	▮ Neighborhood House
▯ Number of families	→ Program/screening transition	┄→ Program/screening exit

Source: Urban Institute. Developed from SFSI program materials and qualitative data collection.

Notes: HPS = Highline Public Schools; HSD = Highline School District; KCHA = King County Housing Authority; SFSI = Student and Family Stability Initiative.

[a] An additional eight households are missing enrollment information or enrolled outside the study period.

[b] An additional two households were still active as of 2017 but had not signed a lease.

[c] An additional five households were housed as of January 2017 but missing final exit information.

[d] Follow-up data are unavailable for 40 of the 126 successfully exited households.

Neighborhood House Screening and Enrollment

Approximately 60 percent (242) of the 404 families referred to SFSI later enrolled in the program (table 1). Once a family is referred to SFSI, one of five Neighborhood House staff (two case managers, an employment navigator, a program manager, and a supervisor) is assigned to conduct a two-part screening: a phone call asking about income, family composition, and current housing conditions, followed by an in-person meeting at Neighborhood House for households who pass the phone screen and includes additional questions about the candidates' current housing situation and housing history, as well as employment, debt, and credit history.[10] Staff noted that the in-person screen typically doubles as an enrollment process.

Administrative data record seven reasons families may be screened out of SFSI, all related to a client's failure to engage with the program or inability or unwillingness to work. Reasons include (1) failure to schedule or reschedule a screening, (2) lack of contact for 30 days or more, (3) failure to meet program requirements, (4) not employable or capable of paying rent, (5) lack of interest in the program, (6) unwillingness or insufficient capacity to participate in all the program's components, and (7) (for the in-person screen) refusal to sign a HUD release of information form allowing KCHA to establish they did not owe money to a housing authority.[11] Once families fail to respond to two contact attempts, Neighborhood House case managers put them on a "nonresponsive" list, pending further action from the potential client, and drop them from the screening process if they remain unresponsive for 30 days.

Clients who Neighborhood House staff deem eligible for enrollment must be cleared by KCHA before official enrollment to ensure they do not have outstanding debt with the housing authority, to verify they are not already receiving rental assistance, and to complete a criminal background screening. Staff noted this final screening step is handled exclusively by Neighborhood House and KCHA staff and does not require any action by the participant aside from signing a release of information for KCHA's financial check. Only one family otherwise eligible for participation after Neighborhood House screenings was dropped from SFSI because they failed the KCHA screening.

Of the 38 percent of households (154 of 404) who were referred but not enrolled, administrative data show that two-thirds (107) were exited from the program because they failed to maintain contact with Neighborhood House staff or declined to participate. The remaining 47 referred households were deemed ineligible for SFSI by Neighborhood House staff during screening.

One possible explanation for the high rate of client attrition during prescreening and screening is that families may be wary of a short-term assistance program. The Family Options Study found similarly low take-up rates (less than 60 percent) for households randomly assigned to a rapid re-housing

intervention, with interviews suggesting families were concerned they could not pay housing costs after the assistance ended (Gubits et al. 2013).

In addition, both Neighborhood House staff and school counselors described challenges reaching families referred to SFSI. Some counselors shared that families may fall out of contact unintentionally as a reflection of their housing or financial instability. Contact information may change or be inaccurate, or families may not be able to respond to calls or texts because they have limited monthly cell phone minutes. One case manager described a family who seemed motivated to participate, but did not have a functioning phone for part of each month.

Although school counselors do not have a formal role in SFSI after referrals are made, they noted that Neighborhood House case managers may contact them for help reaching families who are nonresponsive or cannot be reached by phone. This can sometimes be effective, but counselors reported experiencing similar challenges communicating with families.

Alternately, counselors noted delays before initial contact from Neighborhood House can be lengthy because of backlogs and staff capacity. In the interim, parents may contact a school counselor for updates or help following up with SFSI program staff. Counselors felt this reflected a capacity issue at Neighborhood House rather than case managers' efficiency or effort. Observing case managers at Neighborhood House also suggested that significant time is devoted to attempting to reach or maintain contact with clients. Nevertheless, some school counselors expressed concern that the timeline for initial contact and enrollment procedures was too long for families in housing crisis.

Length of Program Participation

Table 2 presents average and median days of participation based on major SFSI milestones. Calculating precise program participation periods is difficult given wide variation in program participation span, and lags in entering exit dates, particularly for households who lose contact with staff. In addition, some respondents described successful transitions off SFSI assistance as a "false" exit, because households are encouraged to access ongoing nonfinancial services as needed, even after the subsidy has ended. This suggests that for some successful households, participation extends beyond the subsidy period or the data summarized below, but how many exited families return to Neighborhood House for ongoing services is unclear from interviews. Case manager contact with clients after exit is not captured in SFSI administrative data.

Median time from referral to enrollment was 25 days. Once enrolled, households needed approximately 60 more days to find housing and sign a lease, with housed families remaining in the program for an additional 98 days before exiting. In total, enrolled households remained in SFSI for approximately 141 days/4.6 months, with longer participation for successful households (162 days/5.3 months) and shorter for incomplete exiters (89 days/3 months). Successful clients were enrolled faster than incomplete exiters, and longer participation time reflects their time housed through SFSI.

TABLE 2

Time Spent in Program Stages for Enrolled Families

Program stage	Mean days	Median days	Obs. included in analysis	N
Referral to enrollment	29.8	25.0	237	242
Referral to enrollment (successful exit)	25.2	23.0	126	126
Referral to enrollment (incomplete exit)	35.1	28.0	104	109
Enrollment to housed	86.6	60.0	134	136
Housed to exit (all exits)	97.6	98.0	127	136
Enrollment to exit (all exits)	163.4	141.0	225	242
Enrollment to exit (successful exit)	189.4	162.0	122	126
Enrollment to exit (incomplete exit)	132.5	89.0	103	109

Source: Student and Family Stability Initiative administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.
Note: Families who were referred multiple times, list a negative number of days between enrollment and exit due to data entry errors, or do not list an exit date were not included.

TIME TO HOUSING PLACEMENT

The explicit goal of rapid re-housing programs is to reduce the amount of time spent homeless, and although program participation periods vary widely across programs, an emphasis is placed on housing participants as quickly as possible, ideally within weeks or 30 days (Cunningham, Gillespie, and Anderson 2015). Taken at face value, SFSI's timelines to the housing search or housing placement milestones appear out of step with goals for immediate housing placements. But SFSI's target population of primarily doubled-up households and client-directed service model does not necessarily align with rapid re-housing placements.

Interviews reflected that the families can drive the pace of housing searches or moves and whether housing searches start immediately (at enrollment or soon after, for example) or if job searches take immediate priority. One interview respondent noted that if a family was doubled-up but not at risk of losing their housing, they may prioritize employment as a step toward improving their housing prospects, whereas a family in crisis would move directly into a housing search. Others similarly suggested that sometimes it made sense for families to start their employment search first or that they might delay starting a client's housing search to avoid overwhelming them with too much information at

once. Staff noted this as a key difference from rapid re-housing programs that may be dealing mainly with people experiencing more acute housing crisis.

Disaggregating the housing milestone data reflects these different possible scenarios and reveals that households nevertheless tended to start a housing search relatively soon after their enrollment. Forty-four families begin their housing search on the same day they were enrolled in SFSI. And most (150) started their search within a month of enrollment. Only 33 families started a search more than one month after enrollment, and 11 started a search more than three months after enrollment.

Also, the competitive local housing market might require longer housing searches. Information from participants describing their experiences searching for housing could help us understand the impact of the tight housing market on search times or search decisions. As noted in the housing search services discussion below, Neighborhood House said market conditions were a barrier SFSI families face.

Who Did SFSI Serve during the Three Pilot Years?

Table 3 describes the 242 households enrolled in SFSI during the first three pilot years. Approximately 40 percent of SFSI families are black or Hispanic, with 16 percent white and 2 percent Asian. Race information and ethnicity information were "other" or unknown for a nearly a third of all enrollees (20 percent and 12 percent, respectively). Although 16 languages are identified in administrative data, most SFSI enrollees speak English (67 percent) or Spanish (16 percent). About 10 percent of enrolled households accessed an interpreter through Neighborhood House.

The Hispanic population (21 percent) is significantly larger for SFSI than for KCHA-assisted population as a whole (approximately 6 percent).[12] This is consistent with observations by interview respondents who perceived the program to be reaching a larger number of Latinos compared with KCHA's standard tenant-based voucher program. Reasons for the larger share of Latino families in SFSI compared with voucher assistance are not clear and could be related to the composition of SFSI schools, the availability of Spanish-speaking staff, and the direct outreach to eligible families through school staff.

Household Characteristics of Enrolled SFSI Families

Characteristic	Percent
Head of household race or ethnicity	
Hispanic	20.6
Black	20.3
Other	19.8
White	16.1
Missing	11.6
Multiracial	9.1
Asian	2.0
Head of household primary language	
English	66.5
Spanish	15.7
Unknown	10.7
Other	7.1

Other Household Characteristics of Enrolled SFSI Families

Other family characteristics	Mean
Number of dependents	2.5
Age of enrolled parent	34.1

Source: Student and Family Stability Initiative (SFSI) administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.
Notes: Other languages include Amharic, Chuukese, French, Korean, Kosrae, Palauan, Punjabi, Somali, Swahili, Tagolog, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese.

Housing and Income Status

The majority (63 percent) was doubled-up at enrollment, followed by residing in a motel (17 percent). A similar share (60 percent) reported employment income at referral. Tables 4 and 5 show SFSI families' housing and income status at enrollment.

Notably, the share of doubled-up families who enrolled in the program increased from 45 percent at referral to 63 percent at enrollment (appendix table A.4). This echoes interview respondents' comments on the importance of their ability to use the DoE definition of homelessness rather than HUD's. Multiple respondents noted how this opened up the eligible population to include families in need, who may otherwise fall between the cracks of available housing assistance options until they are homeless. Some school counselors also commented on a general shift in the makeup of the homeless populations in their district over the past several years to include more working families, perhaps because of high housing costs in the region.[13] It is also possible that doubled-up households may be easier to maintain contact with during enrollment.

TABLE 4
Housing Status at Enrollment

	Obs.	Percent
Doubled-up	152	62.8
Motel	42	17.4
Unsheltered	30	12.4
Shelter/housing support	16	6.6
Unknown	2	0.8
Total	**242**	**100.0**

Source: Student and Family Stability Initiative administrative data for all households enrolled between September 2013 and August 2016.
Notes: Housing status at enrollment is missing for two households. Housing support includes emergency shelter, transitional or time-limited housing, and other housing assistance.

Income trends are similar. About 45 percent of referred families reported employment income at referral, with the share reporting employment income increasing to 60 percent for enrolled families (appendix table A.4). It is not available from SFSI program data, but some of the 13 percent of enrolled clients without income may have been recently employed or experiencing job loss. This would be consistent with SFSI's targeting people willing and able to work. A common theme among interview respondents was the importance of motivation to participate in SFSI services and a willingness to work and be self-sufficient. This echoes explicit program goals outlined in SFSI policy manuals and exit categories captured in administrative data. The SFSI program manuals describe target clients as (1) having employment history and able to work, (2) interested in employment services, and (3) able to take over 100 percent of rental cost at end of three months.[14] In keeping with these criteria, one of the exit reasons captured in SFSI data for is "not employable or capable of paying rent."

Respondents noted that SFSI is most effective for families who are "ready for housing," suggesting working families who are "down on their luck" more so than families experiencing chronic homelessness or financial instability. Respondents also noted the program works best for families who need help overcoming barriers to housing that are mainly financial (e.g., up-front rental costs, housing debt, or negotiations with landlords regarding eviction histories). Respondents suggested that for families with wage income, the main barriers to accessing housing may be these initial costs of moving or of finding new housing, as well as rent arrears or landlord requirements that monthly income must be two to three times the monthly rent. This was contrasted with the more complex needs many chronically homeless or financially unstable households without work histories face and leave them less equipped to succeed through short-term or self-directed assistance.

TABLE 5
Income at Enrollment

	Obs.	Percent
Employment	145	59.9
Fixed income	60	24.8
No income	32	13.2
Missing	3	1.2
Unemployment income	2	0.8
Total	**242**	**100.0**

Source: Student and Family Stability Initiative administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.

Note: Source of wages or fixed income is not recorded in administrative data.

What Services Do SFSI Clients Receive?

SFSI clients have access to case management services, which include housing search assistance, employment services, family financial planning, and referrals to external services in addition to flexible housing funds up to $6,000. Little administrative data document services that households receive. This is particularly true for employment services, which are not documented in any SFSI database. Neighborhood House case managers noted that they keep detailed information about family service plans and the services clients receive, but the information is maintained separately from the SFSI client tracking data used to measure outcomes and was not available for this evaluation.

Two main housing-related service-use indicators are captured through administrative data. First, the housing search start date is entered, which staff described as reflecting a client having accessed any search-related resources or services through a case manager. We use the start date for housing search services as an indicator that a household used at least one search-related service.

Second, Neighborhood House tracks the amount and use of funds provided to clients for housing-related costs. Table 6 shows the number of households who used housing search or financial supports during the first three program years.

Of the 242 families enrolled, 85 percent (206) received housing search services or financial assistance for housing-related costs. This includes 187 households who received search assistance and 168 households who used financial support. The majority received both housing search assistance and flexible funds.

TABLE 6
Use of Housing Services

Description	Definition	Obs.
Total enrolled		**242**
Housing services (any)		**206**
Housing search	Households with housing search start date	187
Flexible funds	Received financial support for housing-related costs	168

Source: Student and Family Stability Initiative administrative data for households enrolled September 2013 to August 2016.

Seventy-four enrolled households (30 percent) did not receive financial support, and 36 households (15 percent) did not receive any service captured in SFSI data. These households may have received employment-related assistance or referrals to other service providers that are not captured in SFSI data or, more likely, left the program before accessing services. The outcomes analysis results presented below suggest that most households who did not start a housing search or access funding did not find housing through SFSI. These households had incomplete program exits.

Qualitative Data on SFSI Housing Search Services

Qualitative interviews provide additional insights into the types of services households may receive. Staff described a range of services available to SFSI participants, which vary based on the family's interest, needs, and priorities. Both KCHA and Neighborhood House staff emphasized a progressive engagement case management approach that is client centered and does not follow a prescribed curriculum.

ORIENTATION AND FAMILY PLANS

The first stage of SFSI services is a small-group orientation. These are typically held weekly, with three to seven participants. Case managers stated that clients receive a standard overview of SFSI housing and employment search services. The orientation typically includes an introduction to tenant rights, tips for managing an apartment and paying rent, financial empowerment and budgets, and an introduction to housing case manager and housing search tools (e.g., Craigslist search functionality, a transportation search tool to make sure unit is within school boundary) and a standardized landlord letter to explain program and benefits). Each participant is expected to draft an individual housing plan that includes two goals and four action steps that participants will make toward achieving goals. The housing plan is intended to be the blueprint for the client's case management and housing search process going forward. SFSI participants are also introduced to an employment navigator at orientation and provided an overview of employment services, including initial résumé-building or job search paperwork.

Housing search services described by program staff fall broadly into three categories: individualized housing search assistance, support for the lease-up process, and landlord outreach. Search services may start at enrollment or soon after for some clients, based on client needs and preferences.

Individualized housing search assistance reintroduces concepts from orientation, such as housing search tools, and assists families with searches, ideally building on a client's initial housing plan developed during the orientation session. Case managers may also provide participants with a packet of leads on available units. Clients are responsible for leading the search process, but are asked to keep a housing search log and to maintain regular communication with their case manager about their search. In some instances, case managers will refer clients to landlords who have worked with Neighborhood House staff or rented to SFSI participants in the past.

Case managers noted that they may counsel families on how to search for housing and interact with landlords. As one Neighborhood House case manager described it, "We would let them know that when they went to look for housing, they should treat it like a job interview, dressing professionally, and to envision themselves saying 'this would be a great area for my son to work, I love the outside area or the lighting.' Place yourself in that unit."

Families are encouraged to stay within their child's same school boundary, and case managers inform families if a move means their child will need to change schools for the next school year.

Support with the lease-up process comes into play once a family has located housing and the unit meets KCHA rent, occupancy, and quality standards. The case manager then assists with the formal leasing process. For example, case managers will ask landlords to fill out required forms and for explanations of rental costs.

A "habitability" inspection is also required for all SFSI-subsidized units, completed by Neighborhood House. Staff noted that the inspection is not as extensive as standard housing quality inspections required for Housing Choice Voucher program participation, and units rarely failed. Finding units that meet KCHA housing payment standards was noted as slightly more challenging in an increasingly expensive housing market, particularly for large families in need of large (three or more bedroom) units. In these cases, staff must submit requests to KCHA to approve a higher payment standard for more expensive units.

Landlord outreach may include working with landlords on behalf of clients or to resolve conflicts, as well as outreach to develop relationships and trust with local landlords more generally. For landlord

engagement around conflict resolution, case managers may advocate on behalf of families with rent arrears or who are facing eviction. Case managers noted that in some cases this was also an effective way to address stringent tenant screening criteria and help house families with more complex barriers to finding private market housing. This was mentioned as working particularly well with a group of local landlords who now contact Neighborhood House directly when rental units become available. SFSI staff noted that building trust with local landlords and educating them about SFSI was a key Neighborhood House role and they would like to do more outreach and work to identifying housing opportunities, but caseloads limit the time available for this work.

In interviews, Neighborhood House staff noted that despite efforts to support families and work with landlords through the housing search process, the local housing market presents a major barrier for SFSI families.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Using funds from KCHA, Neighborhood House is responsible for allocating financial support to SFSI families with housing application fees, security deposits, move-in costs, rent arrears, rent payments, and some utility payments. For the first two program years, rent payments were available for up to three months, with discretion from program staff to assess progress and extend assistance. As of 2016, the program has moved to the $6,000 flexible funding cap. Respondents described the flexible funding as a unique strength of the program that allows program staff to help families with past problems (e.g., previous housing debt) and immediate moving costs.

Table 7 shows how households used housing funds over the study period. Ten categories of financial support are documented in SFSI data. Direct rental assistance was the most common and the most expensive (123 families accessed nearly $417,000 of assistance over three years). Security deposits were the second-most-expensive form of assistance, followed by rent arrears ($137,964 and $109,006 over the study period, respectively). Notably, few households used flexible funding for rent arrears (50), but the average amount of funds used by those households was second only to monthly rent payments. In total, 168 families received some form of flexible housing funds (totaling approximately $820,919 in assistance).

There were some variations in financial assistance use by successful and incomplete exiters, as noted in the outcomes section and in appendix tables A.5 and A.6. All the successful households and about one-third of incomplete exiters used financial assistance.

TABLE 7
Use of Flexible Housing Funds by Enrolled Households

	SFSI Flexible Financial Assistance		
	Families receiving assistance type	**Average cost per family ($)**	**Total cost ($)**
Monthly rent	123	3,389.71	416,933.67
Security deposit	123	1,121.67	137,964.92
Application fee	90	80.43	7,238.28
First month's rent	68	896.36	60,952.17
Move-in fee	54	480.84	25,965.51
Assistance from other funding sources	56	583.14	32,045.70
Rent arrears	50	2,180.13	109,006.64
Non-leasing client assistance	46	152.18	7,000.34
Utility cost	44	186.94	8,225.53
Utility arrears	26	596.10	16094.65
Total receiving any type of assistance	**168**	**4,893.08**	**820,919.10**

Source: Student and Family Stability Initiative administrative data for households enrolled September 2013 through August 2016.
Note: Families may receive multiple forms of assistance.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND REFERRALS

Employment-related services are available throughout the process, led by an employment case manager. Employment case management identifies barriers to employment, navigates eligibility for public benefits, and provides job search tools, such as résumé development and interview training. The employment case manager works with clients to assess their job needs and prospects, starting with a basic profile that includes prior work experience and education. The case manager keeps a weekly service log of client case notes that includes information about topics covered with clients, whether contact is by phone or in person, client needs, and when clients apply for jobs. The log is primarily a case management tool to track client needs and progress, and data are not tracked systematically. Referrals to training and education programs are available through the employment case manager, although staff interviews suggest referrals are usually offered only if directly requested by client.

Determining When Clients Exit SFSI

One of the questions of interest is how SFSI staff determines when families are not making progress toward housing or employment plans and, alternatively, how staff determine when households are ready to successfully end the housing subsidy period.

As discussed in the outcomes section below, administrative data suggest that in practice, staff record few exits for failing to make progress on an employment or housing plan or for not being able to

sustain the rents of housing identified through SFSI. Instead, most exits are positive (transitions off assistance), voluntary withdrawals, or loss of contact with the program.

For successful exits, interviews suggest that staff rely primarily on program guidelines and rules of thumb to determine when transitions should be made. Currently, reaching the $6,000 funding cap is the point when SFSI assistance should end and case managers make determinations about a family's readiness to assume 100 percent of their housing costs. Staff noted that this was a relatively new policy when interviews were conducted. Previously, after three months of rental assistance, a determination would be made as to whether a household was prepared to assume responsibility for rent payments or if an extension on assistance could be made.

Staff noted that the funding cap may affect the amount of time families spend in the program before exiting. One family may use a larger portion of flexible funds to pay down past rent debt and then less for month-to-month rental support. This family may have a shorter program duration, but a similarly successfully exit. Another family may use the subsidy primarily to pay a portion of rent payments and stretch the funds over a longer period.

In cases where the three months or $6,000 cap are met but case managers and clients have concerns over self-sufficiency and ability to pay rent, case managers can use their discretion to grant a "hardship extension." The extension is designed to support clients to remain in housing while looking for work. Extensions are made on a case by case basis, although the program manual (KCHA 2016) stipulates the following conditions: client is 100 percent active in their job search, client is employable and qualified for the jobs they are applying for, client or family member has a health issue that temporarily postpones their job search and they are willing to work at the earliest point possible.

Staff noted that rent burdens should be no higher than 60 percent at the point of exit, which is typically considered extremely high.[15] Staff stated that they expect families may be rent burdened at the start of the housing placement or at the point they transition off assistance, but the goal was not to have families at an unsustainable level of rent burden for the long term and that families should ideally be on a trajectory to lower their rent burdens through increased income both during and after their time in the program. One case manager mentioned that families will accept even extremely high rent burdens, to get into housing, noting "when you are in a crisis you are willing to pay all of your money for rent. But it's not realistic to maintain given all the other costs you have, like utilities and food. We have to be realistic and help them see the big picture."

KCHA staff interviews reflect the desire to balance the ability to use resources effectively to serve a large group of families in need with ensuring adequate funds allocated per family to achieve housing

stability. One staff member remarked that staff may want to provide an extra month of rental assistance to give a family extra time before assuming full responsibility for the rent, but if the family is unlikely to be able to take over its rent the next month, staff may not do so and exit the family from the program. In practice, during the first three years of SFSI, only two of the 136 households who were housed through SFSI were later exited for "lack of progress" or inability to transition off the housing subsidy (table 8).

What Are SFSI Participant Outcomes?

KCHA and Neighborhood House administrative data offer three opportunities to measure housing stability outcomes for SFSI participants. First, SFSI program data indicate whether a household signed a lease while enrolled in SFSI. Second, program data capture whether the household later exited the program successfully by transitioning from a rent subsidy to unassisted permanent housing. Third, quarterly follow-up survey data capture self-reported measures of housing stability outcomes for a subset of successful exiters for up to 24 months following exit, although few households reached a 24-month follow-up by the evaluation.

Housing Placements and Successful Exits

Table 8 shows exit outcomes for SFSI participants. Fifty-six percent of participants enrolled in the first three program years (136 households) successfully found housing through SFSI. About 93 percent of these households (126) successfully transitioned off rental assistance at the point of the evaluation. Signing a lease through SFSI is a strong indicator of a successful exit. All but 10 of the households who signed a lease later exited the program successfully.

These success rates are lower than the approximately 80 percent performance benchmark for housing placements that is suggested by the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2016) and found in the rapid re-housing evaluation literature (Cunningham, Gillespie, and Anderson 2015). But, given the differences between SFSI's program model and a traditional RRH approach, it is difficult to assess SFSI's success rates against this national standard. As noted, a portion of SFSI clients may not need immediate housing placements because they are sheltered at the time of enrollment, while rapid re-housing typically emphasizes immediate housing placements to minimize spells of homelessness or shelter stays. In total, about 43 percent of all enrolled households left SFSI without being placed in housing.

Neighborhood House records several reasons households may exit SFSI without completing the program (table 8). As with screening procedures, these mainly reflect failure to maintain contact with

the program or failure to make progress on housing or financial stability goals. Over the first three program years, only six enrolled households exited because they "failed to make progress on their housing or employment plans," and only one failed to achieve self-sufficiency after leasing up. In contrast, most exiters who failed to complete the program fell out of touch with their case managers, left voluntarily, or left the Highline school district. Characteristics of the successful and "incomplete" exiters are discussed below.

Exit Reasons

Exit reason	All Enrolled		Housed		Not Housed	
	Obs.	%	Obs.	%	Obs.	%
Successfully transitioned off rental subsidy	126	52.1	126	92.6	0	0.0
Lack of follow up with case manager	66	27.3	1	0.7	65	61.3
Voluntary withdrawal	17	7.0	0	0.0	17	16.0
Left district	13	5.4	1	0.7	12	11.3
Lack of progress	6	2.5	1	0.7	5	4.7
Left program before housed	6	2.5	1	0.7	5	4.7
Subsidy ended, non-positive exit	1	0.4	1	0.7	0	0.0
Missing or still active	7	2.9	5	3.7	2	1.9
Total	**242**	**100.0**	**136**	**100.0**	**106**	**100.0**

Source: Student and Family Stability Initiative administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.
Note: Active households had not exited as of January 2017. One "housed" observation was recorded in SFSI administrative data as leaving before housed.

SCHOOL CHANGES DURING SFSI PARTICIPATION

Among the 136 families who were housed through SFSI, about 54 percent signed a lease for housing in their school of origin's catchment area. The remaining 46 percent moved to housing outside the school catchment area but within the school district, which may have required a school change for the next school year (table 9). An additional 5 percent of enrolled households exited the program because they moved outside the Highline School District jurisdiction and were no longer eligible for SFSI (table 8). School changes are also tracked in the follow-up surveys and discussed below.

Although any school change can be traumatic for students, SFSI school changes should be interpreted with caution. Moves that required a school change—including exits from SFSI to move outside of the Highline district—might have been moves to more stable housing, in higher-quality units or neighborhoods. Nevertheless, minimizing school moves was an initial program goal, yet more than half of moves through the program triggered a school change. Future research should investigate this pattern.

Direct comparisons to student mobility rates for similar non-SFSI households are not possible, but one 2015 study examining school changes for Washington State students by housing status found that homeless students and those in temporary housing situations changed schools at similarly high rates (Shah, Black, and Felver 2015). For example, during the 2011–12 school year, between 36 and 52 percent of Washington State K–12 students who were homeless, doubled-up, or temporarily staying with family or friends changed schools at least one time, with percentages varying based on the student's age and the housing situation (Shah, Black, and Felver 2015). These patterns appear roughly consistent with the frequency of school changes seen among the SFSI population. But interpreting SFSI school changes or understanding how they may compare with the mobility seem among the unstably housed population more broadly would require additional data and longer-term follow-up, including information directly from SFSI families.

TABLE 9

Housing Placement and School Moves

	Obs.	Percent
Moves within school attendance area	74	54.4
Moves outside school attendance area (within district)	62	45.6
Total moves through SFSI participation	136	100.0

Source: Student and Family Stability Initiative (SFSI) administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL HOUSEHOLDS

Statistical tests using administrative data provide some insights about the characteristics and service use of successful SFSI participants, with success defined as having signed a lease through SFSI and transitioned off the housing subsidy. These households are compared with the remaining enrolled participants with "incomplete" exits.

Household characteristics. Statistical tests examining household characteristics by exit outcome did not identify any significant differences by language, household size, or housing status at enrollment for successful versus households who did not complete the program (appendix table A.7). Black households were overrepresented among successful exiters (compared with nonblack households), and white households were overrepresented among the "incomplete" exiters (compared with nonwhite households). But given that over 10 percent of households had missing race information, the small size of each racial and ethnic category, and the weak significance of these results (statistically significant at the 90 percent level), this finding may not be reliable.

Income at enrollment and income gains. Self-reported income—both at enrollment and gains while enrolled—is associated with finding housing and exiting SFSI successfully. Compared with families who did not complete the program, successful families were more likely to have employment income reported at enrollment (65 percent compared with 55 percent of incomplete exiters), had higher self-reported monthly income on average at enrollment ($1,543 versus $1,080), and reported higher monthly income at exit ($1,971 versus $1,112) (appendix table A.6).

Successful families were also significantly more likely to report income gains between enrollment and exit compared with families with incomplete exits. On average, successful families reported an average monthly income increase of about $429 from enrollment to exit, compared with almost no increase ($5 on average) for clients with incomplete exits. Income gain estimates are unlikely to be precise for clients with incomplete program exits because those who fell out of touch with the program may not have updated their information before falling out of contact. Although these gains seen among the successful households are positive, even with the increased income, these households remain extremely low income.

Achieving program milestones. Successful households were more likely to reach key program milestones. Nearly all the successful households started a housing search, received some flexible funding, and signed a lease. In comparison, only half of incomplete exiters started a search, one-third received financial assistance, and only 5 percent signed a lease. Successful households enrolled in SFSI faster but remained in the program longer on average (table 2).

Use of financial assistance. Successful families used more in rental assistance through SFSI ($4,650 versus $624) and more total assistance ($5,809 versus $2,025) compared with households with incomplete exits (table 10), but successful households received *less* in debt assistance ($653 versus $1,119). See appendix table A.6 for detailed funding use. On average, households with incomplete program exits appear to have left SFSI with unused potential resources available. Within each group, however, a few households used substantial housing assistance funds exceeding the cap implemented in 2016. Administrative data show these households were served before the assistance cap, which staff reported was based on the average assistance used by SFSI families.

TABLE 10
Average Flexible Funding Allocation by Exit Type

Exit type	Obs.	Mean ($)	Min ($)	Max ($)
Successful exit	125	5,808.76	244.00	12,314.00
Incomplete exit	36	2,024.81	30.00	12,051.00

Source: Student and Family Stability Initiative administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.
Note: Excludes 74 enrolled households who did not use flexible funding and 7 households who remain active or whose exit outcomes were missing. One successful household did not use funding through SFSI.

Understanding Incomplete Program Exits

Aside from administrative data, no information is available for this evaluation to help understand individual households' circumstances or why households left SFSI without finding housing or taking advantage of financial assistance.

The incomplete exiters had lower monthly income compared with successful households, and used more financial assistance for housing-related debt (approximately $2,488 on average in rent arrears and $740 on average in utility debt) (appendix table A.6). This could suggest that the incomplete exiters had more financial barriers at entry compared with successful exiters, difficulty maintaining employment, or other issues that can complicate a housing search. These households may have fallen out of contact with SFSI because they could not make progress toward finding housing or increasing their wage income. Administrative data—although unlikely to capture all income gains—show incomes remained flat between enrollment and exit for households with incomplete program exits.

Also, some of the doubled-up or sheltered households may not have been in immediate danger of losing their housing and used employment services and help with housing debt, but then left SFSI without pursuing a housing search or move. "Doubled-up" could reflect a range of living situations. Families could be living in unsuitable or overcrowded situations that are unhealthy for children and a precursor to losing shelter entirely. Or doubled-up situations could be relatively safe and stable, allowing low-income families to share resources with other family members, for example. For SFSI families in more stable and sustainable situations, the prospect of maintaining housing independently at a high rent burden after a short period of assistance may have been daunting. SFSI administrative data does not provide information about the specifics of doubled-up families' housing situations.

In either case, however, the financial and housing search assistance accessed through SFSI may have helped some of the incomplete exiters stabilize their employment or housing situations and improve their future housing prospects, even if they did not sign a lease for new housing through SFSI.

Additional service and case management information would be useful to understand participants' housing situations and goals and shed light on how to interpret the voluntary withdrawals, leaving the program before leasing up, or falling out of contact. Exploring employment goals and exit reasons would require family plan or case management information about client goals and services received and qualitative work with SFSI families.

Completion of Post-Exit Follow-Up Surveys

Check in	Eligible for survey	Respondents	Response rate (%)
3 month	102	86	84.3
6 month	98	77	78.6
9 month	86	69	80.2
12 month	69	50	72.5
15 month	60	40	66.7
18 month	55	36	65.5
21 month	47	24	51.1
24 month	25	16	64.0

Source: Student and Family Stability Initiative administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.
Note: Of 126 clients who exited successfully in the study period, 24 had not reached their three-month follow-up point.

Post-SFSI Housing Stability Outcomes for Successful Households

KCHA staff attempt to collect quarterly self-reported housing and income information from all successful families who enrolled before September 2016. The survey has 11 sets of questions related to housing status, school changes, and household income.

Table 11 shows sample sizes for follow-up survey responses and that both response rates and the population eligible for follow-up decline over time.[16] In completed surveys, response rates for specific survey items also diminish over time, particularly for questions about financial hardship or possible precursors to housing instability. For example, over 40 percent of responses were missing for a question about late rent payments at the three-month survey. By the 12-month follow-up, over 60 percent of responses were missing for this item (see appendix tables A.8 and A.9 for detailed response rates).

Given these limitations, we focus on the first 12 months after exit and on housing stability outcome indicators that offer robust response rates, even though these results still represent only a subset of enrolled households and of successful households. For example, only 50 households are included in the 12-month follow-up survey sample, representing about 73 percent of households eligible for a 12-

month survey and 40 percent of all successful households. The results discussed in this section must be considered preliminary, and can be updated as longer-term follow-up survey data are collected.

We focus on three main outcomes:

- Share of households stably housed 12 months after exit

- Share of households continuously stable for the full 12 months

- Share of households who changed schools during the follow-up period

We also examine self-reported income provided by households at each follow-up point, but these findings are tenuous, given small samples sizes and self-reported data.

MOST SUCCESSFUL HOUSEHOLDS WERE STABLY HOUSED ONE YEAR AFTER SFSI

For housing stability measures, we rely on survey responses that capture whether a family has moved since exit (for the three-month survey) or their previous survey, and whether they appear to be eligible for McKinney-Vento services based on their reported housing situation (e.g., doubled-up, in a motel, unsheltered, in emergency shelter, or in a temporary housing situation). We focus in this section on whether SFSI families return to McKinney-Vento eligibility—and SFSI eligibility—after leaving the program and do not include rent burdens in the post-exit stability measure. Rent burdens and income are discussed below.

At the three-month follow-up survey, 87 percent of follow-up survey respondents (75 households) were in stable housing. This decreased over time, but at the 12-month check-in, 76 percent of respondents reported they were stably housed (table 12).

A higher bar for housing stability is whether households remained stably housed continuously after exiting SFSI through the 12-month follow-up survey. We measure this by identifying households who consistently indicated at each follow-up survey that they remained in the same unit they rented through SFSI or lived in a new unit (not doubled-up). Because we eliminate households who were missing follow-up surveys from the first 12 months after exit, this presents a higher bar for housing stability and may underestimate stability over time. By the 12-month follow-up, 70 percent of the 50 respondents (35 households) with consistent follow-up surveys had been continuously housed since exit. While promising, these households represent only a small subset of all successful exiters, and the 35 households who consistently responded to follow-up surveys over time may represent the most stable subset of SFSI exiters. Going forward, follow-up survey data may provide more robust results.

These positive stability outcomes during the first year after exit are consistent with the literature on rapid re-housing programs. But, as has been found in other evaluations, households may continue to experience financial hardship even if they remain stably housed. Response rates for the financial hardship questions are too low to include in analyses and should be a priority for follow-up survey work going forward.

TABLE 12

Outcomes for Successfully Exited SFSI Families at 3 and 12 Months
Percent

| | 3 MONTHS | | | 12 MONTHS | | |
| | 86 Completed | | | 50 Completed | | |
	Yes	No	Missing	Yes	No	Missing
Stably housed at check-in	87.2	12.8	0.0	76.0	22.0	2.0
Continuously stable	87.2	12.8	0.0	70.0	28.0	2.0
Change in school at check-in	14.0	76.7	9.3	8.0	74.0	18.0
Change in school since program exit	14.0	76.7	9.3	18.0	56.0	26.0

Source: Student and Family Stability Initiative (SFSI) administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.

ADDITIONAL SCHOOL CHANGES WERE REPORTED AFTER EXIT

To measure school changes, we rely on responses to questions about whether a child has changed schools since exit or the previous follow-up survey, aside from a natural progression to middle school.

Few SFSI households reported a school change during the first 12 months following program exit. At the three-month follow-up, only 14 percent reported a school change. By the 12-month follow-up, 18 percent of SFSI families reported a school change (with one quarter of households not responding to the question). Some of these families would have been required to move at the start of the new school year because of the initial SFSI move, as opposed to a subsequent move and additional school change. Others may be reporting a new school change resulting from a post-SFSI move.

INCOME GAINS AND RENT BURDENS AFTER EXIT

Follow-up data showed modest increases in average household income during the follow-up period. Average monthly income increased $339 between the 3- and 12-month follow-ups. This is consistent with modest income gains seen in other rapid re-housing evaluations. Considered together with income gains during SFSI participation, this suggests that income for some successful families increased as much as $769 a month. These findings are promising, and verified income data would be useful to capture income gains for SFSI participants during and after program participation.

Notably, self-reported average housing costs decreased by $118 over the follow-up period. The combined change in housing costs and income lowers average rent burdens from close to 60 percent at three months to nearly 30 percent. See appendix table A.10 for income, housing expenses, and rent burdens reported at each follow-up period. Findings about rent burdens and housing cost changes are difficult to interpret without additional information about the reason for the decrease, particularly in light of rising regional housing costs reported by SFSI stakeholders. Few households are included in later follow-up periods, and each follow-up period may represent a unique mix of households. With relatively small variations in self-reported income and housing costs across surveys, it is also possible that changes reflect inaccurate or imprecise reporting by respondents.

How Do SFSI Costs Compare with Voucher Assistance?

One question of interest to SFSI administrators is the potential cost effectiveness of a rapid re-housing approach compared with longer-term, deeper subsidies through tenant-based Housing Choice Vouchers.

To calculate SFSI services' potential cost-effectiveness, we estimated average monthly and total costs per enrolled SFSI family for the evaluation period, regardless of exit outcomes, as well as average costs per successful exit. These calculations attempt to provide an overall estimate of the cost of maintaining SFSI's enrolled household caseload during the pilot period and of achieving a successful housing outcome. The estimates are not intended to be comprehensive, but rather to provide a framework for understanding program operating costs. They represent costs incurred through Neighborhood House and funded by KCHA. Available data omit Highline School District costs for time spent on outreach and referrals by school counselors and the McKinney-Vento liaison, employment services funded separately from SFSI, and KCHA administrative costs. Costs associated with any additional Neighborhood House resources available to SFSI clients may also be omitted.

Monthly costs for SFSI are roughly comparable to voucher assistance provided to similar KCHA households, but when participants' average tenures on each program are considered, the per-family costs for SFSI are far lower than for voucher assistance. However, direct cost comparisons are difficult because of the fundamentally different natures and goals of the two programs. Voucher holders experience a significantly longer period of housing and financial stability compared to short-term assistance recipients, during which their rent burdens are capped at roughly 30 to 40 percent of their income, they live in units held to more stringent housing quality standards, and they likely experience fewer moves over time. In contrast, households who receive short-term assistance soon re-enter the

private market where they may experience high rent burdens and live in lower-quality units. More information about SFSI participants' experience during and after program participation, and longer-term costs to the broader homelessness, health, and social service systems would need to be considered when directly comparing rapid re-housing or short-term assistance with a deeper, longer-term subsidy.

Average SFSI Costs

Table 13 shows monthly and total costs per enrolled family by cost category. Average total costs per successful exit over the three-year pilot period are shown in table 14, using the 126 successful exits as the denominator.

We first calculated the average total cost per enrolled SFSI family using cost data for the three-year study period divided by 242 enrolled families. Costs are broken out into two broad categories: staffing and administrative costs, and housing assistance costs. Staffing and administrative costs include total payroll and administrative overhead for the three-year pilot period, as reported on monthly invoices submitted by Neighborhood House to KCHA. Housing assistance costs are the flexible housing funds provided to all enrolled SFSI participants in the same period. We then estimate average per household costs based on successful exits only.

TABLE 13
Average Costs per SFSI-Enrolled Household
(N = 242)

	Average monthly cost per family ($)	Average total cost per family ($)	Total cost first three pilot years ($)
Staffing and administration	257.27	1,631.08	394,721.19
Financial assistance	535.78	3,396.85	822,038.00
Combined costs	793.05	5,027.93	1,216,759.19

Source: Student and Family Stability Initiative (SFSI) administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.

Costs for administering KCHA tenant-based voucher assistance are provided by KCHA staff for families with young children living in the Highline School District. KCHA provided three average Housing Assistance Payment and average administrative cost data points for 889 voucher holder families (average monthly Housing Assistance Payments costs are for December 2014, December 2015, and December 2016). This is not a precise comparison group for SFSI households, but provides a useful approximation for similar families living in the same jurisdiction during roughly the same periods.

On average, enrolling 242 families over three program years cost approximately $5,028 per family. Given the average participation period of approximately 6.3 months, that amounts to an average monthly participation cost of approximately $793 per enrolled family. Financial assistance accounts for most of the costs (approximately $3,397 per enrolled family).

Successful households accounted for the lion's share of total program costs (table 14). Of the roughly $1.2 million in SFSI costs devoted to households enrolled during the first three program years, over $930,000 were spent on the 126 households who exited the program successfully. The average total cost of achieving each successful exit was nearly $7,400 for the 126 enrolled families. This includes roughly $5,800 in flexible housing assistance. The average is close to the current spending cap, and staff noted in interviews that the cap was chosen primarily based on average spending for the first two program years. Average monthly costs for each successful SFSI exit was approximately $1,165 over the three years, based on a 6.3-month period from referral to exit.

TABLE 14
Average Costs per SFSI Successful Household
(N = 126)

	Average monthly cost per family ($)	Average total cost per family ($)	Total cost first three pilot years ($)
Staffing and administration	257.27	1,631.08	205,516.08
Financial assistance	907.51	5,762.66	726,095.00
Combined costs	1,164.77	7,393.74	931,611.08

Source: Student and Family Stability Initiative (SFSI) administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.
Note: One family who exited successfully did not receive any financial assistance. Staffing costs were calculated based on the average program participation length of 6.3 months.

Table 15 shows average monthly costs for all SFSI-enrolled families and for the successful families compared with KCHA voucher recipient families living in the Highline school district. Average monthly costs for SFSI are lower than average monthly KCHA voucher program costs when all SFSI-enrolled households are considered, but higher when only the successful households are included in the calculations.

Taking the full length of participation in each program into account, total costs are significantly lower for SFSI families (with an average enrollment time of only 6.3 months) compared with voucher recipients. KCHA staff provided average length of voucher program participation for Highline families. On average, Highline households with children who exited KCHA voucher assistance in 2016 remained in the program for 6.04 years, which suggests an approximate total cost to KCHA of nearly $73,000 for

their tenure. This is significantly more expensive than short-term assistance under SFSI. But, as noted above, direct comparisons between SFSI's short-term model and longer-term voucher assistance are problematic. Compared with SFSI participants, voucher-assisted households experience lower rent burdens and an extended period of housing and financial security because of voucher assistance. Successful SFSI participants may avoid new spells of homelessness, but may not achieve the same level of housing or financial stability that voucher participants experience. A more rigorous analysis of the relative values of each investment would take into account each group's relative stability and experience while receiving housing assistance, as well as how households fare after exiting each program.

TABLE 15
Average Monthly Costs per SFSI and Housing Choice Voucher Family

	SFSI average monthly cost/enrolled family	SFSI average monthly cost/successful family	KCHA HCV average monthly cost per family
Staffing and administration	$257.27	$257.27	$76.00
Financial assistance	$535.78	$907.51	$931.00
Combined costs	$793.05	$1,164.77	$1,007.00

Source: SFSI administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016. KCHA staff provided average HCV costs.
Notes: HCV = Housing Choice Voucher; KCHA = King County Housing Authority; SFSI = Student and Family Stability Initiative. Staffing costs were calculated based on average program participation length of 6.3 months. "Financial assistance" for the HCV program includes monthly housing assistance payments.

Discussion and Recommendations

The findings discussed above suggest some promising outcomes for SFSI participants while also highlighting areas of concern. For example, although successful participants had income gains while participating in the program and appear to maintain their housing after exit, SFSI attrition rates are high and timelines are relatively lengthy. About 60 percent of referred households enroll in the program, about 56 percent of the enrolled households successfully found housing, and just over half of enrolled households successfully exited the program into permanent housing they could maintain without SFSI assistance.

Little is known about the households who fail to enroll in or complete the program. Over the first three program years, two thirds of the referred household who failed to enroll in SFSI either fell out of touch with the program or opted out, and nearly all the enrolled households who left the program without finding housing were "exited" by staff because they fell out of touch with their case managers, left voluntarily, or left the Highline school district. Only a handful was exited for failing to make progress on their housing or employment goals.

Interpreting these findings is challenging due to SFSI's unique service model and data limitations. SFSI incorporates the core components of rapid re-housing but deviates from a conventional rapid re-housing model in several important ways, mainly related to the target population and client-directed outcome goals. This is not in itself problematic: rapid re-housing is a relatively new and evolving program model, with wide variations in screening and service delivery approaches that reflect diverse local resources, constraints, and priorities. But SFSI administrative data and outcome measures, which appear more consistent with a conventional rapid re-housing approach, do not account for these key aspects of the SFSI program model, including the importance of client-directed goals and a target population that may be doubled-up but not necessarily in immediate housing crisis.

These possible disconnects between SFSI's client population and engagement model and the program's milestones and outcome measures makes it difficult to understand how well SFSI is working. Administrative data only partially explain whether SFSI outcomes may reflect the program's target population and service model versus entry points for program improvements. It may be that households that fall out of touch with the program or leave without finding housing do so because they are unable to make progress on their housing or employment goals. But it also seems plausible that current outcome measures may be missing some aspects of clients' progress towards their goals.

The five sets of recommendations below focus on how SFSI partners can explore some of the questions raised through the course of the evaluation, and improve the current program model. Broadly stated, findings point to two courses of action. First, partners should assess SFSI client characteristics to collectively determine whether the program is currently reaching the preferred client population—and if so, whether outcome measures accurately reflect client progress towards housing and financial stability goals. Second, more attention can be paid to contacting, communicating with, and capturing information about SFSI clients, to improve program attrition and better understand how families experience housing instability and navigate the program.

With this in mind, we first recommend that program partners revisit and affirm SFSI's population targets. Partners should also assess whether current program milestones and outcome measures adequately capture client progress toward self-directed housing and financial stability goals. We then provide recommendations for refining SFSI referral and enrollment procedures, and for improving data management. We conclude with considerations for ongoing program evaluation efforts, including collecting additional information from SFSI clients.

Reaffirm SFSI's Target Population

One of SFSI's strengths, articulated by program staff, is that it offers a housing assistance option to families who might otherwise be ineligible for homelessness assistance. And, SFSI's policy guidance clearly states that clients should be employed or willing to work. Staff interviews confirmed the importance of employment and client motivation to the program model, and KCHA leadership emphasized the importance of the program's screening criteria to ensure participants are equipped to be successful with short-term assistance in the local housing market.

Administrative data suggest that SFSI is reaching households who meet these eligibility criteria and targets. During the first three pilot years, most SFSI clients were doubled-up (63 percent), with a smaller share sheltered in motels (17 percent). They would presumably be ineligible for homelessness assistance under the HUD definition of homelessness. Only about 12 percent of SFSI participants were unsheltered at enrollment. Most enrolled participants had some wage income, and income at enrollment and exit was strongly associated with a successful exit.

A trade-off of these eligibility criteria and employment targets is that fewer households experiencing urgent housing crisis participate in the program. Being doubled-up is not an explicit program criterion, but these households may have been more likely to be employed or to be willing and

able to work. Doubled-up or sheltered households may also have been the most prepared to engage in SFSI's enrollment process or case management services. Interviews and discussions with SFSI stakeholders suggested some concern about the program mainly reaching households who are easier to house instead of households who may be in more immediate need of housing assistance, and were unaware of how much participants tended to be doubled-up as opposed to unsheltered or in emergency shelter.

In light of this, an initial step for SFSI partners should be to **clarify or confirm their target population priorities** to reassess program goals and determine whether SFSI staff should revisit targeting, recruitment, or screening efforts to ensure that households who need immediate help with housing searches and placements can access SFSI and be successful. At minimum, learning more about doubled-up clients' housing situations would shed light on how much they are living in shared but relatively stable housing situations, or in unsustainable housing. If partners determine that reaching more households in immediate crisis is a program priority, explicitly adopting more of a housing-first approach for these families could help with their retention and success. But this would likely require additional resources and services not currently available through SFSI.

Examine SFSI Outcomes and Outcome Measures

About 56 percent of SFSI clients are placed into housing, and just over half transition off SFSI assistance into permanent housing. These success rates are relatively low compared with the 80 percent benchmark set for rapid re-housing programs and seen in other program evaluations (NAEH 2016). It is difficult to fully understand SFSI success rates, however, because so many households lose contact with SFSI or leave voluntarily, and just a handful are exited by staff for failing to make progress on their housing or employment goals. Similarly, SFSI timelines for enrolling and housing participants are relatively lengthy but difficult to interpret because they vary widely within the small sample of households, and because some portion of SFSI's population may benefit from a longer housing search process if it allows them to find sustainable housing that meets their needs or reflects their preferences.

Clients are expected to create employment or housing plans that outline achievable goals, and staff noted that some households might emphasize a job search before a housing search, delaying housing searches. It also seems plausible that some clients may opt not to move and that help finding a job or eliminating housing debt could support future housing stability, even if a move is not the client's main goal upon entering SFSI or does not happen quickly. Or, given that successful SFSI clients exited into 60

percent rent burdens, remaining doubled-up but without severe rent burdens may be the more attractive option for some SFSI clients.

Considered together, these factors suggest that SFSI administrators should *consider additional program milestones or exit indicators.* SFSI currently captures one exit outcome as a success indicator—transitions into permanent housing—with placement into housing an important milestone toward that outcome. Client goals are not explicitly incorporated into program milestones, exit measures, or outcomes tracking. A question for SFSI administrators to explore is whether clients who do not lease up through SFSI or who lease up relatively slowly may be prioritizing other housing or financial stability goals, and if so, whether progress toward these goals should be measured as an additional SFSI performance indicator.

One step toward understanding these possible scenarios would be to *review SFSI family plan and service use information* that is maintained separately from SFSI administrative data to understand whether clients prioritized employment or other goals over housing searches or placements. The goal of the review should be to understand possible differences between client goals and the measures currently used to gauge success through SFSI. For example, can goals be gleaned from family plans and compared with program outcomes to shed light on whether clients who exited SFSI voluntarily or by falling out of touch with the program appeared to have made progress toward housing or financial stability before exiting? If so, program partners should identify ways to refine exit measures or milestones to capture this progress in addition to housing placements and transitions off assistance.

An option to consider is *capturing a target housing placement date* in program data for each family. Documenting target move dates could shed light on to what degree longer times to starting a housing search or signing a lease through SFSI are the result of client preferences versus program or housing search challenges.

Streamline SFSI Referrals, Screening, and Enrollment

Administrative data and interviews with SFSI staff highlight opportunities to reduce the amount of time spent in the program, particularly in the early stages. Challenges to more rapid screening and enrollment appear to be a combination of Neighborhood House staff capacity, difficulty communicating with households, and possibly the multistep screening process itself. A simplified referral and screening process could engage more households and free up staff time for housing search assistance or landlord outreach.

An initial step is for school and Neighborhood House staff to ***collaboratively identify opportunities to streamline the referral and screening process*** and ***improve communication with households referred to SFSI***. For example, school counselors noted that SFSI would benefit from more direct connections with schools and families and "meeting families where they are." The National Alliance to End Homelessness (2016) guidelines similarly suggest making participation easier on participants by meeting in their homes or places of their choosing. One option is for SFSI case managers to periodically go to schools—particularly schools that make the most referrals—or other accessible locations to screen and enroll participants in person, ideally in a single step. This might be most useful at the points in the school year when McKinney-Vento determinations are made, but could also be done periodically and in coordination with school events or programming. Case managers might also coordinate with school counselors to schedule phone calls or in-person meetings with families when they are at schools. Or, for families who counselors know lack working cell phones or cars, the program could consider providing prepaid calling cards, correspond by e-mail, or provide transportation assistance. School-based staff might identify additional opportunities to improve communication and contact with SFSI-eligible families.

It may also be possible to develop a screening questionnaire for families to fill out and return to Neighborhood House staff or to complete with school counselors when counselors initially present the SFSI opportunity. The form can capture information typically collected during phone or in-person screenings and provide clear guidelines for families about participation expectations and timelines. These materials can be provided to Neighborhood House with the client consent for contact, to give SFSI staff baseline information for families interested in participating.

In interviews, school counselors noted they previously used a more extensive pre-screening questionnaire and the current version is easier to administer. Any new approach should consider the potential impact on school staff. It will be necessary to work with school counselors and McKinney-Vento liaisons, as well as possibly school principals or other district staff, to identify efficient options for bringing Neighborhood House or KCHA staff into schools and involving school staff in SFSI processes that avoid overburdening school staff.

Improve Data Management and Quality

Improving the type and quality of data collected about SFSI clients and services will be important for performance management, can inform the service model's potential expansion, and help establish the

data capacity for a more rigorous outcome or impact evaluation. Recommendations for improved data collection, also addressed in the interim report provided to KCHA in 2016, include the following:

Transition to a robust case management system. Excel is SFSI's main data collection tool and has several limitations. Even with drop-down fields, data entry errors can easily go unnoticed (e.g., through overwriting, inadvertent entries into incorrect cells, or inappropriately formatted cells). This possibility increases with time and new users. Excel data should be periodically reviewed for accuracy, and staff should be trained on how to use and maintain the database. Data managers should periodically conduct basic analytics—checking for mean, minimum, and maximum values for specific fields of interest—to identify problematic data entry, consistently missing data, or impossible values. Also, entries for such fields as dates, age, or income can be restricted to acceptable formats or ranges, and coded responses can be created (e.g., codes for individual case management services or for missing or refused data).

Program administrators are exploring options for a new data management platform. A robust relational database or case management system could decrease human error, improve workflow, reduce staff time spent on data entry, and improve data organization and quality by managing all SFSI participant records in a single database. The ideal case management system would include a single point of data entry for new households that relates to separate data entry screens for different service providers or relevant touch points with the program and display only information relevant to the person interacting with the family. The system may allow staff to see information relevant to their work with families (e.g., student attendance, school of origin, or family income history), but not allow them to change information. Or staff can design summary-level reports for individuals or groups of clients, such as families entering from individual schools or during a specific period, clients who identify as doubled-up versus living in a shelter, households working with individual case managers, or households who have been housed.

Improve data quality. Case management databases should use a *unique client or household identifier* that can be assigned at referral or enrollment and be attached to all records for families and household members. An SFSI identifier would make tracking outcomes more efficient and could provide an additional layer of security for sensitive personal data. Similarly, if the transition off SFSI rent subsidies is not a final exit from the program and families may return for additional services, the program should *track returns to SFSI* and the specific services families receive.

Finally, more attention can be paid to *how program metrics are collected and specified*. This includes creating mutually exclusive categorical variables and documenting ways empty data cells can be interpreted or auto-populated to avoid ambiguous missing values (e.g., zero numeric values, "don't

know," "refused," "not applicable"). Assessing how data are collected over time or across collection tools can also help avoid inconsistent data and unnecessary staff burden of collecting duplicates of measures unlikely to change, such as head of household characteristics.

Pursue Ongoing Evaluation Efforts

Partners should pursue qualitative work with SFSI clients and additional formative evaluation to inform ongoing program improvements and lay the foundation for a possible impact study.

Collect Qualitative Data from SFSI Participants

Administrative data can only tell part of the story of how well SFSI meets its goals. SFSI clients hold valuable information about how well the program is working and opportunities to improve program services. This evaluation raises several questions about SFSI clients, their housing and financial circumstances, and how they experience the program that would benefit from qualitative investigation.

SFSI partners should enlist an independent evaluator to conduct focus groups or individual interviews with a diverse mix of SFSI families to understand how households experience and navigate the program, from referral through exit. Qualitative insights can also shed light on secondary SFSI goals, such as student attendance or achievement and minimizing school mobility. Sample questions of interest include the following:

- What are clients' housing histories and current needs at SFSI referral?

- How much are households in housing crisis and in need of immediate housing placement?

- What are challenges with maintaining contact with SFSI through screening and enrollment? Why do clients fall out of contact with SFSI?

- What immediate supports may be useful for families during the initial engagement period to ensure they can take advantage of the program?

- How do clients perceive SFSI services and the short-term assistance model?

- How do families interact with SFSI staff?

- What are participants' immediate and long-term housing and financial goals? And how much are employment or income goals more pressing than immediate housing goals?

- Which SFSI services are perceived the most valuable?

- What challenges do SFSI clients face searching for housing? How do landlords respond to SFSI assistance, and how do clients experience and navigate the local housing market?

- What are the causes and implications of the 60 days spent searching for housing?

- How do families balance employment and housing searches and goals?

- How much are housing quality and neighborhood quality priorities for SFSI participants?

- How do families and students experience school changes through SFSI?

- How do clients maintain housing stability after exit and high rent burdens?

- What are the long-term impacts of SFSI on clients' housing or financial stability?

Feedback from clients would be useful to understand program options. For example, the approximately 60 days from housing search start to signing a lease could be because of housing market obstacles, staff capacity, or more deliberate housing searches. If clients report that longer searches are mainly attributable to King County's competitive housing market, one response could be to dedicate more staff time to landlord recruitment.

School staff can be useful for outreach and recruitment for qualitative work, for example, by offering households who decline participation in SFSI the opportunity to participate in a survey, interview, or focus group. KCHA follow-up surveys may also offer an opportunity to reach successful clients, by either including a brief, semistructured phone interview at the end of a survey wave or by offering respondents the opportunity to participate in a separate interview or focus group. For all interactions, clients should be compensated for their time as an incentive to participate.

A related step is to *encourage clients to maintain contact with SFSI.* An ongoing challenge for programs that work with vulnerable families is maintaining contact with people who are in crisis, have limited resources, and may be unresponsive. For SFSI, this affects the level of effort needed for enrollment and case managers' ability to capture program exits. At all program touch points, staff should encourage clients to maintain contact with case managers—even if they leave or are facing instability—so that case managers can capture more accurate reasons for opting out of SFSI services, track outcomes for households with incomplete program exits, improve response rates for quarterly follow-up surveys for successful households, and recruit clients for qualitative work.

For example, participants can be reminded at each case manager contact that they will be provided an exit incentive in exchange for completing a brief exit interview or questionnaire if they think they will no longer participate in SFSI. A gift card or other financial incentive—offered for a pilot period to test its value to improve data quality and contact with clients before and after they leave the program—may reduce exits from failure to maintain contact and provide insights into why clients leave SFSI without taking full advantage of program services. At enrollment, clients can also be asked to provide contact information for a family member or friend who can reach them for follow-up if they fall out of contact with the program.

Alternatively, school staff could contact unresponsive clients, determine if families who fall out of touch with SFSI have left their original school, or determine if they remain eligible for SFSI as homeless under McKinney-Vento. At referral or enrollment in SFSI, school counselors or Neighborhood House staff should obtain consent for ongoing tracking and contact.

Considerations for an Impact Study

In addition to the current evaluation and previous interim evaluations conducted by KCHA and an external evaluator (Blume and Leon 2015), KCHA is considering ongoing evaluation work, including a retrospective impact evaluation for the cohort of SFSI clients described in this evaluation.

There are three main issues to consider before pursuing an impact evaluation. First, program partners continue to refine the program model and may adapt it based on this evaluation. If so, results from an impact evaluation based on the first three pilot years may not be directly relevant to future iterations of the program. Similarly, if replication or expansion decisions have already been made, the results from an impact evaluation based on early implementation years may have limited value.

Second, results from this evaluation suggest that SFSI outcome expectations are not fully articulated. Program partners will need to work with evaluators to articulate a clear analytical framework for the evaluation, including where to look for outcomes and how to measure them. For example, a traditional rapid re-housing program evaluation might measure outcomes as returns to homelessness or use of homelessness assistance as captured in Homelessness Assistance Management System data. But SFSI clients may be unlikely to have used homelessness assistance such as emergency shelter in the past, and may remain unlikely to use it after exit, regardless of their housing outcome through SFSI. Instead, indicators of housing instability captured in other social service and education system data would be more useful to identify comparison group households and capture outcomes.

Finally, impact evaluations can be constrained by relatively small sample sizes for treatment or subgroups, as would be the case with SFSI. Evaluators will need to establish which analyses will be possible with SFSI data.

An interim step before pursuing an impact evaluation—and ideally done concurrently with qualitative or ongoing formative evaluation work—would be to develop detailed descriptive profiles of SFSI clients using Washington State's integrated data system, including characteristics such as housing and homelessness histories documented in various service system data, employment and income, social service use, and key health characteristics before SFSI referral and after. This information could inform SFSI program design and future impact study design. A comprehensive assessment of SFSI client characteristics could help SFSI partners understand who SFSI serves and the eligible population, including variations in household characteristics by successful and incomplete exits, referred households who declined participation, or all McKinney-Vento–eligible families at participating schools.

In addition to creating opportunities to refine the target population and recruitment approaches, a more nuanced understanding of SFSI clients could help identify new program stakeholders. For example, if SFSI tends to serve families with children involved with the child welfare system, partners could engage additional service providers and assess child welfare system outcomes for SFSI families.

Conclusion

The goal of this evaluation was to document how the SFSI pilot program was implemented, and whether it holds promise as a tool to help unstably housed families with children achieve housing stability. Ideally, results from this evaluation will help inform ongoing program improvements and the possible expansion of the program to other schools or school districts in KCHA's jurisdiction.

Findings suggest that KCHA, the Highline School District, and Neighborhood House have developed a strong and innovative collaboration that connects two distinct service systems, that might otherwise be siloed, to reach an unstably housed population that is unlikely to have access homelessness assistance. School counselors in particular value SFSI as a tool to support households they typically have few housing assistance resources to offer. KCHA views long-term stability as the most important measure of the program's success, and housing stability outcomes for the first year after exit are promising for a sample of households who successfully found housing through SFSI. These outcomes can be monitored and confirmed going forward. But evaluation findings also raise questions about program performance measures, such as early attrition rates, enrollment timelines, and completion rates. Fully understanding how well SFSI is working and its potential to stabilize homeless or unstably housed families will require additional attention to these open questions as the program matures.

Appendix

SFSI Enrollment by Program Year

	Obs.	Percent
September 2013–August 2014	52	21.5
September 2014–August 2015	78	32.2
August 2015–September 2016	112	46.3
Total	242	100.0

Source: SFSI administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.

TABLE A.2

Referral and Enrollment in SFSI by Elementary School

2015–16 academic year

School	Referred	Share of referrals (%)	Enrolled	Share of enrollment (%)
Midway	63	13.9	35	14.5
Hazel Valley	56	12.3	28	11.6
Shorewood	34	7.5	12	5.0
Parkside	32	7.0	2	8.3
White Center Heights	27	5.9	16	6.6
Seahurst	26	5.7	13	5.4
Beverly Park	25	5.5	11	4.6
Bow Lake	25	5.5	15	6.2
McMicken Heights	25	5.5	12	5.0
Mount View	21	4.6	7	2.9
Des Moines	20	4.4	14	5.8
North Hill	19	4.2	9	3.7
Madrona	17	3.7	10	4.1
Cedarhurst	16	3.5	10	4.1
Gregory Heights	16	3.5	10	4.1
Southern Heights	15	3.3	9	3.7
Marvista	11	2.4	6	2.5
Hilltop	7	1.5	5	2.1
Total	**455**	**100.0**	**242**	**100.0**

Source: SFSI administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.
Note: SFSI = Student and Family Stability Initiative.

School Characteristics and Participation in SFSI Program

2015–16 academic year

School	Enrollment	Percent homeless	Identified SFSI families	SFSI enrollment	Percent of MV homeless referred to SFSI	Percent of MV homeless enrolled in SFSI
Beverly Park	464	8.2	25	11	65.8	28.9
Bow Lake	700	5.9	25	15	61.0	36.6
Cedarhurst	689	4.2	16	10	55.2	34.5
Des Moines	408	4.4	20	14	111.1	77.8
Gregory Heights	666	5.4	16	10	44.4	27.8
Hazel Valley	665	12.5	56	28	67.5	33.7
Hilltop	634	2.7	7	5	41.2	29.4
Madrona	666	5.3	17	10	48.6	28.6
Marvista	628	2.2	11	6	78.6	42.9
McMicken Heights	546	5.3	25	12	86.2	41.4
Midway	645	11.8	63	35	82.9	46.1
Mount View	684	5.0	21	7	61.8	20.6
North Hill	597	4.9	19	9	65.5	31.0
Parkside	595	5.7	32	20	94.1	58.8
Seahurst	589	7.1	26	13	61.9	31.0
Shorewood	491	7.1	34	12	97.1	34.3
Southern Heights	322	5.9	15	9	78.9	47.4
White Center Heights	626	6.2	27	16	69.2	41.0
Total	**10,614**		**455**	**242**		
Mean	**590**	**6.1**	**25**	**13**	**70.6**	**38.4**

Source: SFSI administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016. Count of homeless students in Washington State by school district from the 2015–16 data is file from "Education of Homeless Children and Youth Data Collection and Reports," State of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, accessed March 9, 2017, http://www.k12.wa.us/HOMELESSED/DATA.ASPX. Total school enrollment is from 2015–16 "Washington State Report Card," Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, accessed March 9, 2017, http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/summary.aspx?groupLevel=District&schoolId=104&reportLevel=District&yrs=2015-16&year=2015-16.

Notes: MV = McKinney-Vento. In some instances, as in Des Moines, the number of referrals exceeds the number of homeless counts by school. This is likely because families were homeless and identified by school counselors during SFSI outreach, but were not captured by the county data. It is also possible that families were being referred who were not homeless and were later screened out.

Income and Housing Characteristics of Referred and Enrolled Households

		Referred, Not Enrolled		Enrolled		Statistical Significance
		Obs.	Mean (%)	Obs.	Mean (%)	
Income source	No income	123	17.1	239	13.4	
	Employment income	123	45.5	239	60.7	***
	Fixed income	123	35.8	239	25.1	**
Housing situation	Doubled-up	213	44.6	242	62.8	***
	Unsheltered or motel	213	20.2	242	29.8	**
	Receiving some housing support (e.g., shelter) or unknown	213	35.2	242	7.4	***

Source: SFSI administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.

Note: *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$. Sources of employment or fixed income are not included in SFSI administrative data.

Use of Flexible Funds by Exit Type

	EXIT REASON					
	Successful		Incomplete		Missing	
	Obs.	Mean	Obs.	Mean	Obs.	Mean
Housing assistance	125	$4,650.36	36	$624.25	7	$2,760.26
Debt assistance	125	$652.60	36	$1,119.22	7	$462.00
Other assistance	125	$505.79	36	$281.38	7	$70.57
Total		**$5,809.76**		**$2,024.81**		**$3,293.86**

Source: SFSI administrative data for households enrolled September 2013 through August 2016.

Notes: Housing assistance includes monthly rental assistance, security deposit assistance, application fee assistance, and assistance with first month's rent. Debt includes rent arrears and utility arrears. Other assistance includes move-in fees, utility assistance, non-leasing assistance (e.g., bus vouchers), and any other assistance.

TABLE A.6
Flexible Housing Funds for Enrolled Households by Exit Type

	Families with Successful Exit			Families with Incomplete Exit		
	Families receiving assistance	Average cost per family ($)	Total cost ($)	Families receiving assistance	Average cost per family ($)	Total cost ($)
Program service categories						
Monthly rent	113	3,415.77	385,982.21	5	3,292.11	16,460.53
Security deposit	113	1,150.22	129,974.92	6	752.33	4,514.00
Application fee	77	79.93	6,154.28	11	86.36	949.99
Sum of first month's rent	66	896.71	59,182.94	1	548.33	548.33
Move-in fee	52	463.18	24,085.51	2	940.00	1,880.00
Assistance from other funding sources	40	623.23	24,929.27	15	497.16	7,457.43
Rent arrears	33	2,073.97	68,441.06	15	2,488.77	37,331.58
Non-leasing client assistance	39	161.80	6,310.34	5	93.00	465.00
Utility cost	43	183.68	7,898.28	1	327.25	327.25
Utility arrears	23	571.06	13,134.33	4	740.08	2,960.32
Total costs of the SFSI program:	**125**	**5,808.76**	**726,095.00**	**36**	**2,024.81**	**72,894.43**
Staffing/administrative cost	**126**	**256.86**	**32,364.74**	**109**	**256.86**	**27,998.07**

Source: SFSI administrative data for households enrolled September 2013 through August 2016.
Note: Families may receive multiple forms of assistance. One family exited successfully, but did not receive any flexible funding, leading to costs for 125 successful families but staffing and administrative costs for 126 successful families.

TABLE A.7
Households Characteristics of Successful and Incomplete Exiters

	Incomplete Exiters		Successful Exiters		Statistical Significance
	Obs.	Percent	Obs.	Percent	
English	91	75.8%	119	74.8%	
Spanish	91	16.5%	119	17.7%	
Other language	91	7.7%	119	7.6%	
White	90	24.4%	118	14.4%	*
Black	90	16.7%	118	27.1%	*
Hispanic	90	22.2%	118	23.7%	
Other race	90	36.7%	118	34.8%	
		Mean		**Mean**	
Age	92	33.9	120	34.2	
Dependents	109	2.4	126	2.5	

Source: SFSI administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.
* $p < 0.1$.

TABLE A.8
Follow-Up Survey Self-Reported Housing and School Stability for 24 Months after Exit

Survey month (N completed)	HOUSING STABILITY				SCHOOL STABILITY			
	Housing Stable at Check-In		Continuously Stable		School Stable at Check-In		Continuously School Stable	
	Stable (%)	Missing (%)	Stable (%)	Missing (%)	Stable (%)	Missing (%)	Stable (%)	Missing (%)
3 month (86)	87.2	0.0	87.2	0.0	76.7	9.3	76.7	9.3
6 months (77)	83.1	1.3	81.8	1.3	75.3	11.7	70.1	13.0
9 months (69)	72.4	1.5	71.0	1.5	73.9	15.9	60.9	20.3
12 months (50)	76.0	2.0	70.0	2.0	74.0	18.0	56.0	26.0
15 months (40)	72.5	2.5	60.0	5.0	77.5	2.5	50.0	25.0
18 months (36)	77.8	0.0	63.9	5.6	91.7	2.8	47.2	27.8
21 months (24)	66.7	0.0	58.3	0.0	83.3	8.3	41.7	29.2
24 months (16)	68.8	6.3	50.0	6.3	93.8	6.3	31.3	37.5

Source: SFSI administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.

Note: School stable at check-in indicates whether a family has changed schools since the previous check-in. Continuously school stable indicates whether a family has changed schools since exiting the program.

Follow-Up Survey Self-Reported Financial Stability Response Rates for 24 Months after Exit

Survey month (N completed)	Receiving Housing Assistance		Late Paying Rent		Concerns That Your Housing May Be at Risk		Unable to Pay Full Amount of Utility Bills		Utility Shut Off		Received Vacate Notice	
	%	Missing	%	Missing	%	Missing	%	Missing	%	Missing	%	Missing
3 months (86)	3.5	60.5	15.1	40.7	18.6	15.1	16.3	40.7	1.2	41.9	8.1	41.9
6 months (77)	0.0	61.0	20.8	45.5	24.7	15.6	14.3	48.1	5.2	46.8	15.6	45.5
9 months (69)	1.5	65.2	20.3	40.6	26.1	18.8	20.3	43.5	2.9	40.6	14.5	40.6
12 months (50)	2.0	78.0	4.0	62.0	8.0	40.0	10.0	64.0	8.0	60.0	2.0	62.0
15 months (40)	2.5	80.0	17.5	62.5	27.5	60.6	15.0	70.0	5.0	65.0	5.0	65.0
18 months (36)	2.8	47.2	25.0	38.9	36.1	36.1	25.0	41.7	5.6	44.4	11.1	41.7
21 months (24)	4.2	45.8	37.5	41.7	37.5	33.3	29.2	41.7	20.8	37.8	16.7	41.7
24 months (16)	12.5	12.5	37.5	12.5	31.3	6.3	31.3	31.3	12.5	18.8	6.3	12.5

Source: SFSI administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.

Self-Reported Housing Costs, Income, and Rent Burden for 24 Months after Exit

Check-in	Monthly Rent and Utility Costs		Monthly Household Income		Rent Burden: Ratio of Monthly Housing Costs to Household Income	
	Obs.	Mean ($)	Obs.	Mean ($)	Obs.	Mean (%)
3 month	83	995.06	86	1,977.71	79	57.6
6 month	74	976.79	77	2,060.72	66	52.3
9 month	63	939.52	69	2,374.35	61	41.5
12 month	47	877.10	50	2,317.07	46	35.9
15 month	36	777.49	40	2,082.30	33	32.9
18 month	32	932.56	36	2,174.11	30	47.2
21 month	21	978.43	24	2,526.13	20	45.7
24 month	15	888.93	16	2,196.88	14	44.2

Source: SFSI administrative data for households enrolled from September 2013 through August 2016.

Notes

[1] Because Student and Family Stability Initiative households all contain at least one school-aged child, household and family are used interchangeably to refer to SFSI clients.

[2] See https://www.kcha.org/ for more information about the King County Housing Authority.

[3] For more information on the Race to the Top award, see "Race to the Top," The Road Map Project, accessed May 25, 2017, http://www.roadmapproject.org/collective-action/race-to-the-top/.

[4] See Escudero (2017), the King County Housing Authority's 2017 Moving to Work plan, for more information about KCHA activities.

[5] For information about affordable rental housing in King Count and nationally, see "Mapping America's Rental Housing Crisis," Urban Institute, last updated April 27, 2017, http://apps.urban.org/features/rental-housing-crisis-map/.

[6] This policy change was noted by KHCA staff and in a Year 1 Evaluation report produced for KCHA by Geo Education and Research (Blume and Leon 2015).

[7] As defined in section 752(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, *homeless children and youths* refer to people who "lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence" and those are either doubled-up with family or friends; living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds; living in emergency or transitional shelters; living in cars, parks, public spaces, or similar settings; or those who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for accommodation.

[8] Neighborhood House staff initially administered the survey. King County Housing Authority began administering the follow-up survey in 2016.

[9] Because SFSI did not expand to middle schools until the 2016 school year, the data included in this report do not include families of Highline middle school students.

[10] When referencing statements made in interviews by Neighborhood House staff, we refer to all interview respondents as "case managers" to avoid attributing comments to individual staff members.

[11] Urban Institute analysis of family exit reasons in data from the SFSI Family Tracking Sheet, provided to Urban in January 2017.

[12] Student and Family Stability Initiative Hispanic households may be of any race. See "Picture of Subsidized Households" data for characteristics of households served by public housing authorities, US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, accessed March 8, 2017, https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/assthsg.html#2009-2016.

[13] See, for example, "Out of Reach 2016: Washington," National Low Income Housing Coalition, accessed May 25, 2017, http://nlihc.org/oor/washington. In King County, a worker would need to earn $29.29 an hour and over $60,000 a year to afford a two-bedroom apartment.

[14] 2014 and 2016 SFSI program manuals note target population and program goals.

[15] For example, KCHA policy encourages rent burdens no higher than 30 to 40 percent for the Housing Choice Voucher program.

[16] King County Housing Authority staff will collect follow-up data for the successful exiters included in this report for 24 months after exit. Housing authority staff noted that survey items and collection methods were revised during the study period, which may account for some of the nonresponse issues. In addition, as of January 2017, 24 households had not yet reached their three-month follow-up or been identified by program staff as having successfully exited the program.

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