

# Aligning Housing and Workforce Systems in Multnomah County, Oregon: Economic Opportunity Program Rent Assistance Results

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Building an Equitable Economy



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# **Aligning Housing and Workforce Systems in Multnomah County: Economic Opportunity Program Rent Assistance Results**

## **Executive Summary**

The impact of homelessness is broad, deep, and community-wide. Homelessness increases demands on emergency services and the justice system and can lead to joblessness and other costs for local government. Even so, perhaps the greatest cost of homelessness is immensely personal. The trauma of losing one's home and possessions undermines one's sense of self-worth and subjects the individual to very real physical dangers and emotional trauma. Yet, individuals have enormous capacity to persevere and work hard. They will take steps needed to increase their income and stabilize their lives, especially in order to maintain their housing.

The Economic Opportunity Program (EOP) gives low-income individuals the opportunity and assistance that is often needed to develop career goals that lead to self-sufficiency and subsequent housing stability. EOP participants work with Career Coaches in Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to create career plans and access vocational training to gain living-wage employment. Within the program, they have up to three years to work on their career goals, which may include basic skills gains, soft skills development, occupational skills training, job readiness training and job search assistance.

Worksystems, the local workforce development board, and EOP CBO partners have seen that participants who are homeless or struggling to maintain their housing face many challenges engaging in employment services and often leave the program without accomplishing their career goals. In order to support these community members, organizations involved in A Home for Everyone, a community-wide plan and initiative to respond to the crisis of homelessness in Multnomah County, funded rent assistance for EOP participants who are homeless or at risk of losing their housing.

*"I went from homelessness to hopefulness."  
-Economic Opportunity Program Participant*

This report evaluates the outcomes of the first year and a half of providing rent assistance to EOP participants.<sup>1</sup> Rent assistance recipient results are compared against the results of a group of other participants who needed rent assistance, but were unable to access it due to limited funding. This created a natural comparison group. Rent assistance recipients:

- were 38% more likely to complete training than the comparison group
- were 67% more likely to obtain career track employment than the comparison group

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<sup>1</sup> All data reported, unless otherwise noted, is from October 1, 2015 to March 31, 2017.

- increased their income at a rate of almost double that of the comparison group.

The results also show a valuable return on investment for the local community:

- EOP rent assistance recipients increased their annualized income by triple the total amount of the rent assistance disbursed.
- Since 76% remained housed 12 months after the end of their rent assistance, it is likely that they will not need to return to the public system for housing assistance. This allows continued rent assistance investments to support others in need.

These results highlight how systems alignment can increase participant success and create greater returns on investment for public funds. Low-income residents benefit when public systems work

*EOP rent assistance recipients were able to increase their incomes by triple the amount of the public investment in rent assistance.*

together in a coordinated fashion. Given the current housing crisis in Multnomah County, it is important that the housing and employment systems collaborate in order to prevent homelessness and stretch available housing support dollars. Aligning services with a person-centered approach rather than

organizing them around a single system, allows us to better support housing insecure individuals to become self-reliant through employment. Having housing stability allows participants to focus on career goals that will lead to career track employment with wages sufficient to meet the ever-rising cost of housing within the region.

## **Economic Opportunity Program Rent Assistance Results**

### **Rent Assistance Collaborative Partners**

In order to address the needs of housing insecure EOP participants, Worksystems, Home Forward and Human Solutions came together to create housing assistance for EOP participants, which began in October 2015. In 2016, EOP rent assistance expanded to include funding commitments from the Portland Housing Bureau and A Home for Everyone.

Each of the organizations that came together to implement rent assistance for EOP participants plays a key role in the housing or workforce development systems in Multnomah County.

- *Worksystems is the Workforce Development Board for Multnomah and Washington Counties and the City of Portland and manages the region's WorkSource Portland Metro Centers (which are American Job Centers) in collaboration with the Oregon Employment Department. Worksystems receives funding to design and implement employment programs from the Department of Labor, and other federal, state, and*

*local sources.*

- *Home Forward is the housing authority for Multnomah County and the largest affordable housing provider in the State of Oregon. Home Forward administers short-term rent assistance funds originating from federal and local governments.*
- *Human Solutions, Inc. is a community development corporation providing affordable housing and an anti-poverty organization that provides a variety of supportive housing and employment services.*
- *The Portland Housing Bureau is the City of Portland's bureau charged with ensuring Portlanders have equitable access to affordable housing in healthy neighborhoods with strong schools, access to transportation, good parks and quality food stores.*
- *A Home for Everyone is a community-wide effort to house homeless Multnomah County community members by making smart investments in the areas of housing, income, survival, emergency services, health, access to services and systems coordination. Key partners in the effort include Multnomah County, the City of Portland, the City of Gresham, Home Forward, local nonprofits and members of the public.*

### **Economic Opportunity Program Background**

EOP began with funding from the City of Portland, Prosper Portland (formerly the Portland Development Commission) and Worksystems in order to provide career-track training and employment services to low-income residents of Portland. Prosper Portland and Worksystems have been partnering to provide vocational case management programs to Portland residents since 2003. EOP began in 2012. Over time, EOP has grown to include other funding partners, including Multnomah County's Department of Community Justice; A Home for Everyone; the United States Department of Agriculture through the SNAP 50/50 match program; and the United States Department of Health and Human Services, through the Health Profession Opportunities Grant.

EOP brings together various partners that provide services to low income participants as a team. In total, there are more than thirty EOP Career Coaches at ten CBOs. This network provides participants with a multitude of on-ramps to intensive employment services. Career Coaches connect participants with resources in the WorkSource Portland Metro Centers, including vocational training, workshops and job matching. Worksystems administers this broad network and convenes the CBOS for monthly meetings and trainings to ensure organizations are performing well as a network, sharing resources and implementing the model consistently.

Seven CBOs provide services through EOP programs funded by Prosper Portland and Multnomah County Department of Justice. Members include Central City Concern, Constructing Hope, Human Solutions, Inc, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, SE Works, Self Enhancement, Inc, and Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc. Information about each CBO is included in Appendix A.

Through funding from A Home for Everyone, EOP has expanded to include EOP Career Coaches who are dedicated to serving housing insecure individuals with employment supports. This group is referred to as A Home for Everyone Economic Opportunity Program (AHFE EOP). AHFE EOP includes Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center, Central City Concern, and Community Economic Opportunity (CEO). CEO is a group of organizations led by Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization that are working together to help housing insecure communities of color attain career track employment with a focus on serving victims of domestic violence and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients. The group includes Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, El Programa Hispano Católico, Human Solutions, Self-Enhancement Inc., and Urban League. AHFE EOP is the next step in our systems' alignment work, which brings employment services to customers of the housing system.

### **Rent Assistance Funding Amounts and Sources**

In the pilot year (program year 2015-16), Home Forward provided \$125,000 in Moving to Work funding (from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development) for rent assistance and administrative costs. Worksystems engaged Human Solutions to provide rent assistance coordination and to administer rent assistance funds with \$75,000 in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding for personnel. Human Solutions acts as a hub to administer the rent assistance funds on behalf of all ten EOP Career Coaching organizations.

Initial outcomes data showed that EOP Rent Assistance recipients had significantly higher rates of employment and training completion. Based on this and the additional need for rent assistance, in program year 2016-17, Home Forward's funding was joined by A Home for Everyone, which contributed \$350,000 for rent assistance and administrative costs, of which the Portland Housing Bureau funded \$150,000. Worksystems expanded their funding commitment to a total of \$123,220 for rent assistance coordination staff and administrative costs.

### **EOP Referral Process and Comparison Group**

EOP eligibility includes:

- *50% or less of area median income*
- *Current resident of the City of Portland or Multnomah County*
- *WIOA eligible, which requires having legal documented permission to work in the United States*

Career Coaches refer participants who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless to the Rent Assistance Coordinators at Human Solutions. One of the Rent Assistance Coordinators then schedules a joint intake meeting with the Career Coach and participant. Housing and employment goals are aligned with a client's budget during intake meetings. If a participant is already housed, eviction prevention payments usually begin within two weeks after intake. Homeless participants work with Rent Assistance Coordinators to search for housing and to overcome barriers such as criminal history, poor credit, and negative rental history. Though the average length of housing search is 2.5 months, the search can extend beyond that for those participants with high barriers.

The length of rent assistance is set at three months for all participants. Extensions are made on a case-by-case basis so that the most appropriate services are provided while still allowing others to access housing support during their time of need.

The rent assistance process and payments are tracked in Worksystems' database, I-Trac, from point of referral to the end of assistance. Each month, Career Coaches note whether or not participants are engaged in EOP services in I-Trac. If participants disengage, the Rent Assistance Coordinator sends a notice to the participant and landlord that rent assistance will terminate within 30 days. This engagement requirement helps reinforce EOP as an employment program and rent assistance as a limited resource that explicitly supports participants' work toward their career goals.

Since all three rent assistance funds must be spent by June 30 of each year, Rent Assistance Coordinators stop accepting new referrals as soon as it is apparent that spending projections for current recipients and participants searching for housing will use all available funds. In the first year, the Rent Assistance Coordinators stopped taking referrals in February in order to ensure enough funds to assist homeless participants searching for housing. This break in referrals led to the creation of a natural comparison group for the purposes of research, since participants continued to need rent assistance but were not able to access it through the program due to limited funding. In the second year, the rent assistance team took referrals until mid-June. All together, there were 46 EOP participants with unmet housing needs that are treated as a comparison group for this report. See Appendix B for more information about the comparison group.

### **Employment and Housing Goals and Accomplishments**

In program year 2015-16, the goal was to serve 35 EOP participants with rent assistance and due to funding increases in 2016-17, the target increased to serve 140 participants with rent assistance. In both years, goals for number of participants served with rent assistance were met, with 35 served in program year 2015-16 and 158 served in program year 2016-17. Table A illustrates this along with the fund amounts for rent assistance and time available to spend funds for each funding source and program year. The total unduplicated participants served over both years was 169, as some were served in more than one year and some were served with multiple funding sources.

**Table A: Rent Assistance Allocations and Timelines**

<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>Rent Assistance (excludes admin)</b>	<b>Time Available to Spend</b>	<b>Participants Served goal</b>	<b>Participants Served</b>
Home Forward 2015-16	*\$ 110,000	9 months	35	35
Home Forward 2016-17	\$95,000	12 months	30	35
PHB	\$150,000	11 months	30	41
AHFE	\$191,700	4 months	80	82
Unduplicated Total Number Served				169

\* Home Forward's total allocation was the same each year; more administrative costs were applied in PY16-17.

- Over the 18-month period examined in this report, 80 unduplicated participants received rent assistance. Of these, 30 were homeless participants and 50 were at risk of homelessness. On average, they received 4.5 months of assistance with an average monthly rent assistance payment of \$590.
- Approximately 28% (22) of participants either owed back rent to their current landlord or owed money to former landlords, which had to be paid before they could rent a new unit. These arrears and debt payments averaged \$890 per participant.
- Security deposits represent a significant housing barrier for low-income people. In total, 26 participants (24 homeless and two who received eviction prevention services) were assisted with security deposits, which averaged \$1,242.

Table B shows the employment outcomes compared to the goals. All employment goals set were exceeded within the timeframe analyzed. Definitions of goals are included in Appendix C. Since the outcomes include 18 months of data and only a portion of participants exited the program or had enough time after exiting to show retention, the number of participants in the numerator and denominator are included.

**Table B: Employment Goals and Outcomes**

<b>Employment Goals</b>									
<b>Unsubsidized Employment Upon Exit</b>		<b>Career Track Employment Upon Exit</b>		<b>Employment Retention within 12 months</b>		<b>Training Completion</b>		<b>Employment Advancement</b>	
<b>Goal</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Actual</b>	<b>Goal</b>	<b>Actual</b>
70%	92% (33/36)	65%	86% (31/36)	70%	100% (17/17)	70%	89% (31/35)	70%	75% (46/61)



In order to measure housing stability, follow-up contacts are conducted at 6 and 12-month intervals following the end of rent assistance. Every effort is made to ascertain recipients' housing status. If the recipient cannot be reached, the landlord is contacted, and if the landlord cannot be reached, a letter is sent to the participant. Social media and justice system sites are also accessed. Nevertheless, the housing status of a few participants is unknown at this time.

*At least 75% of rent assistance recipients remained housed at all retention milestones.*

**Table C: Housing Goals and Outcomes**

Housing Goals					
Retain Housing throughout assistance		Retain housing for 6 months		Retain housing for 12 months	
Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual
90%	98% (78/80)	80%	87% (41/47)	70%	76% (13/17)

At least 75% of rent assistance recipients remained housed at all retention milestones verified. The collaborative is exceeding most of the housing goals as shown in Table D.

Of the 80 participants who received rent assistance:

- 98% remained housed throughout the rent assistance period
- 53 have been fully responsible for their rent for three months or more
- Of the 47 who have reached the 6-month follow-up, 87% are confirmed housed.
- Of the 17 who have reached the 12-month follow-up, 76% are confirmed housed.

### **Return on Investment**

EOP rent assistance recipients increased their annualized incomes by a total of \$718,579 after an investment of \$238,179 in rent assistance. This means EOP participants who received rent assistance were able to increase their incomes by triple the amount of the rent assistance disbursed. Through career track employment, at least 75% are predicted to remain housed 12 months from the time their rent assistance ends. It is likely that they will not need to return to the public system for housing assistance and the initial rent assistance investment is creating long-term savings. Their stability also frees up room within the housing system so that others in need can access services.

Based on these income increases, an estimated additional \$54,000 are paid in state taxes annually by the EOP rent assistance recipients. The average annual state tax contribution per recipient increased by 150% (from \$440 per recipient to \$1,120). This can largely be attributed to the average wage at the beginning of the program being just above the 9% income tax bracket, which means most of the earnings increased achieved during the program were also taxed at 9%.

Consequently, the average state contribution went from 4.55% to 6.04% of income.

### **Racial and Ethnic Composition of EOP Rent Assistance Recipients**

People of color are disproportionately represented in both the homeless population and those living in poverty in Multnomah County. Addressing this inequity is a high priority for A Home for Everyone and for all the EOP partners. The following table illustrates who EOP Rent Assistance served by race and ethnicity. Of the 80 participants analyzed, 56% identified as people of color. In Multnomah County, 41% of the homeless population and 42% of those experiencing poverty identify as a person of color.

**Table D: Race and Ethnicity of EOP Rent Assistance Recipients**

<b>Race</b>	<b># Participants</b>	<b>Percent by Race</b>	<b># Hispanic/Latino by Race</b>
American Indian Alaskan Native	5	6%	2
Asian	3	4%	0
Black/African American	19	24%	0
More than one race	2	2.5%	0
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2	2.5%	0
Not Disclosed	11	14%	11
White	38	47%	3
<b>Total</b>	80		16

Every other year, Multnomah County and the City of Portland create a point-in-time count of individuals experiencing homelessness and publish the results in a report. Graph A shows the racial and ethnic composition of EOP rent assistance recipients compared to the race and ethnicity of Multnomah County's total population, the County's population living in poverty, and the County's homeless population. The numbers in the graph are from the 2015 Point-In-Time Count of Homelessness within Multnomah County, Oregon.<sup>2</sup>

Graph A shows that the percent of EOP participants served with rent assistance within each community of color exceeds their representation in the homeless population within Multnomah

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<sup>2</sup> The Point-In-Time Count Report uses over count methodology for reporting racial and ethnic demographics aligning with HUD race categories. Where people indicated more than one race, the report counts them in each category chosen. All those who chose the ethnicity Hispanic are reported as Hispanic and also reported under the race they indicated, if any. Those who chose Hispanic ethnicity, but did not choose a race are reported only under ethnicity. Those who chose neither race nor ethnicity are not graphed. In order to align our data with the data in the report, the over count methodology is applied to the EOP rent assistance recipients as well. Therefore, percentages total more than 100%.

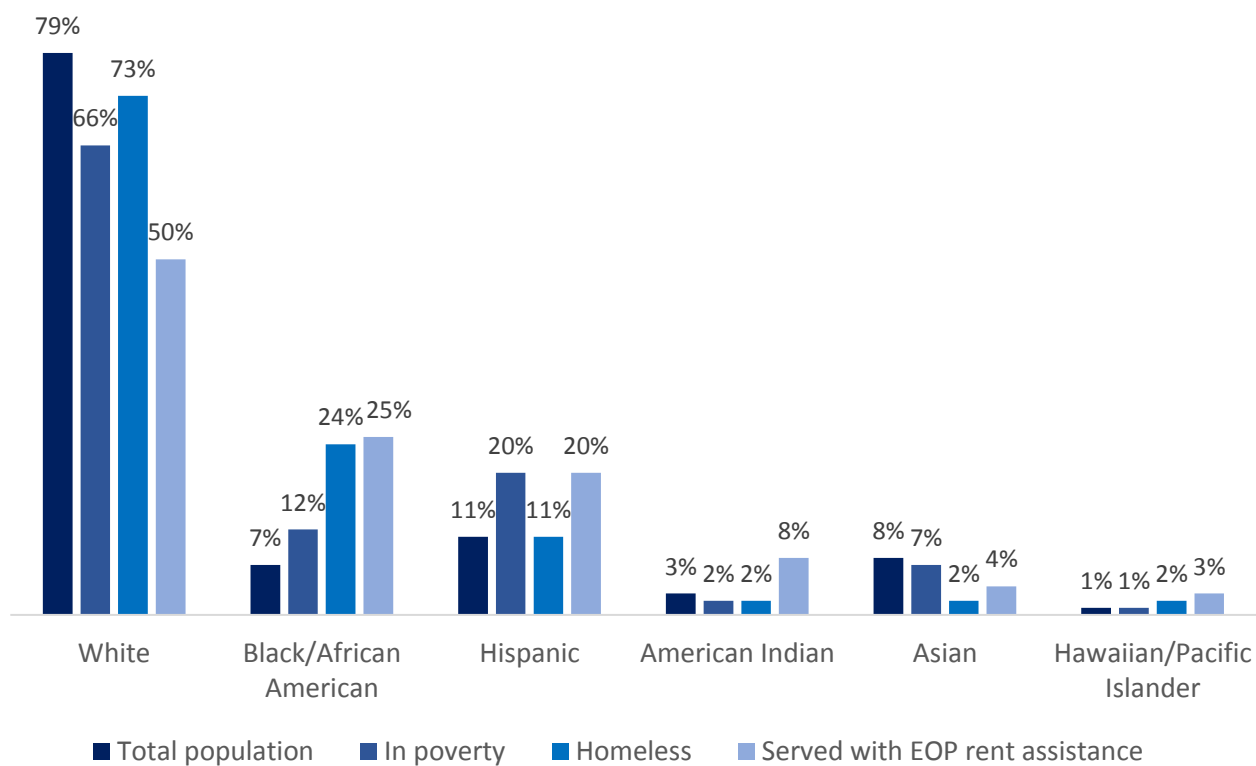
County. By bringing together ten community based organizations that have years of experience serving communities of color, EOP is able to outreach to and successfully serve a diverse group

*The percent of EOP participants served with rent assistance within each community of color exceeds their representation in the Multnomah County homeless population.*

of participants that is representative of those in need in Multnomah County. A Home for Everyone funding also allowed Worksystems to expand EOP to include new culturally specific organizations such as Urban League, El Programa Hispano Católico and Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center in program year 2016/17. These organizations

further EOP's goals to promote equity in Multnomah County.

**Graph A: Proportional Share of Population by Race/Ethnicity Multnomah County 2015**



(Graph A: Percentages of population, poverty, and homeless is drawn from Multnomah County's Point In Time report (based on data from the American Community Survey 2015) and aligns with HUD race categories. Data for EOP rent assistance recipients drawn from participant self-reporting as recorded in I-Trac.)

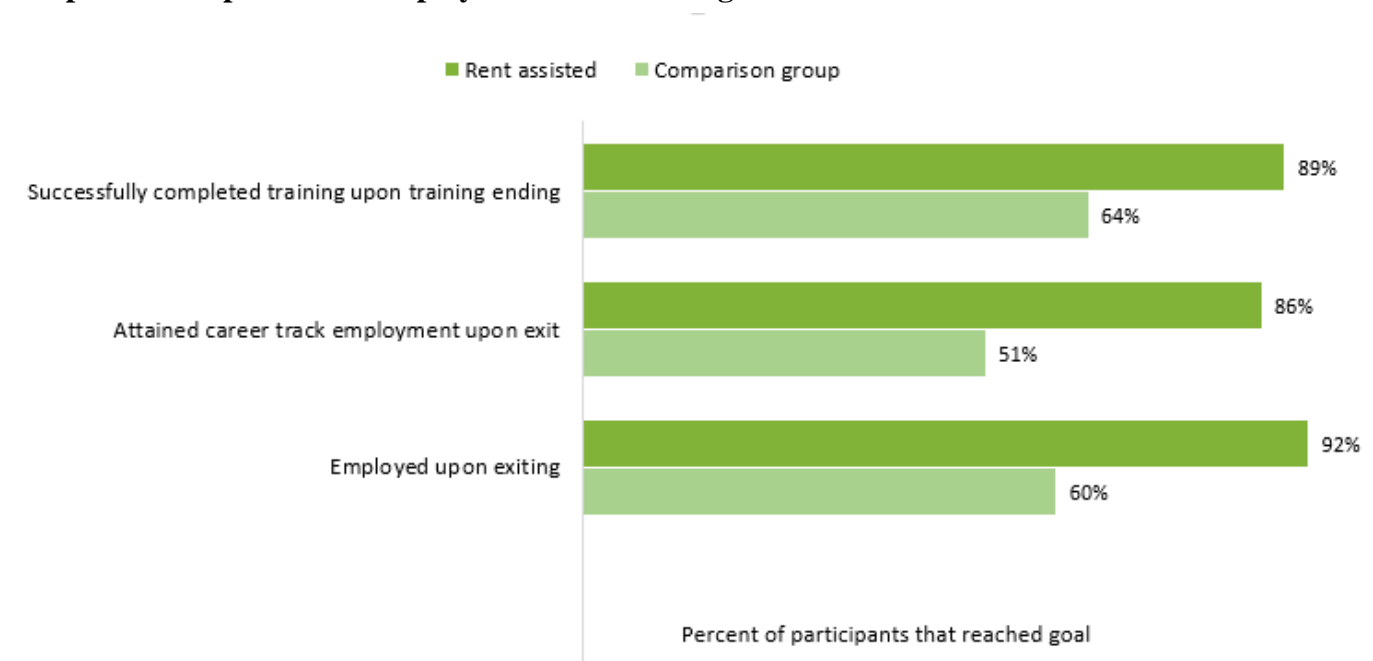
## **Training and Employment Outcomes**

Participants work with their Career Coach to make a career plan and set steps to work towards the goals in the plan. Achieving career track employment is defined as having a position that is on the career ladder for the goals stated in the career plan. For example, if a participant would like to be a nurse, becoming a Certified Nursing Assistant is career track employment because that position would allow them to gain the skills needed to move up the career ladder to become a nurse.

EOP participants may remain in the program up to two years plus one year of retention services, after which full program exit occurs. Since the completion of program goals may not be achieved until the participant exits the program, a complete set of outcomes for participants served during the reporting period may not be available for two to three years.

Graph B compares rates of successful training completion, career track employment and employment for participants who received rent assistance and the comparison group at exit or at 3/31/17 for those who were still engaged in the program.

**Graph B: Comparison of Employment and Training Outcomes**



These outcomes are a strong indicator that providing rent assistance and housing services to people working on career track employment greatly increases their ability to succeed. Participants who received rent assistance were:

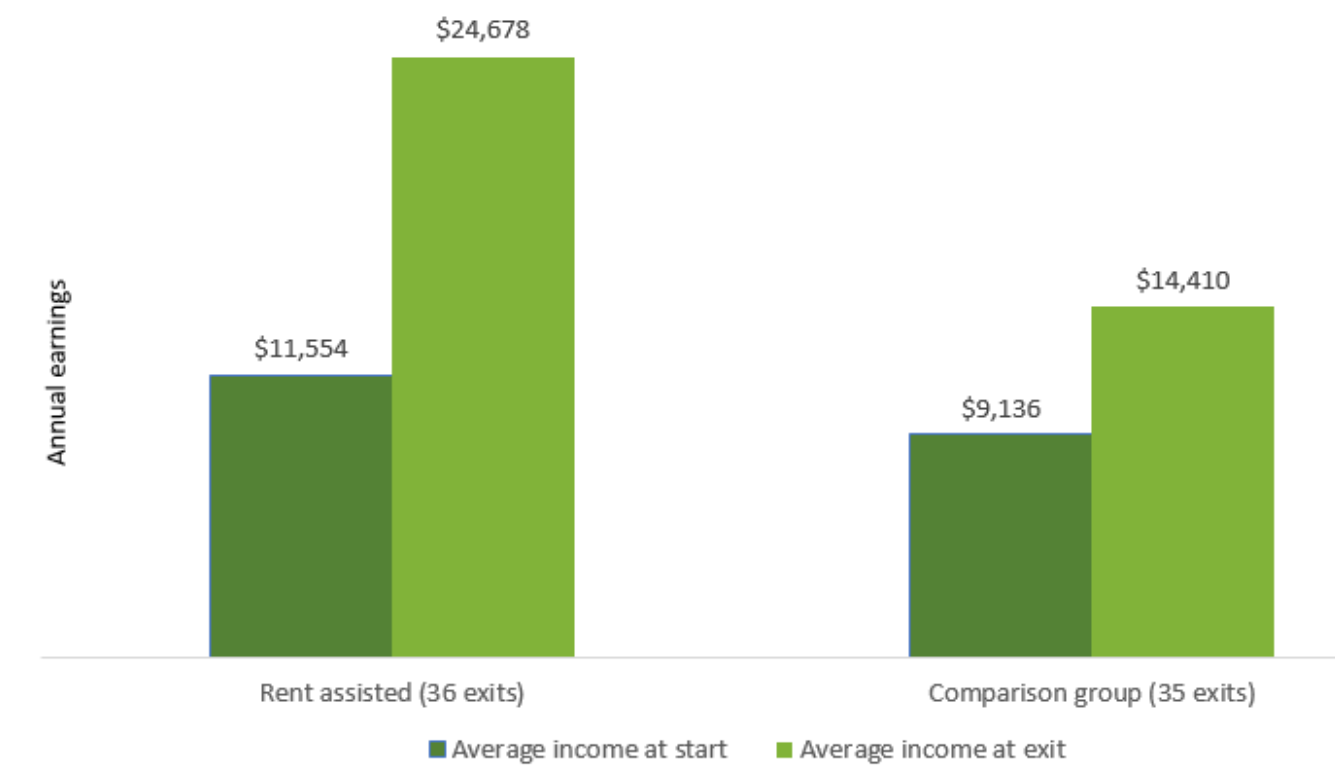
- 38% more likely to complete training than the comparison group
- 67% more likely to attain career track employment than the comparison group
- 53% more likely to be employed than the comparison group

Graph C shows a comparison of average income increases between the participants who received rent assistance and those who had unmet housing needs. The data compares rent assistance recipients' income when rent assistance started and their income at EOP exit. The comparison group's income at the point of referral to rent assistance is compared to income at exit.

The income of EOP participants who had unmet housing needs increased by 57%, whereas those who received rent assistance saw their incomes more than double, with a 113% increase in income. Housing supports give participants the stability they need to be more committed to their career goals, leading to higher income at program exit. EOP rent assistance recipients increased their income at almost double the rate of the comparison group.

*EOP rent assistance recipients increased their income at almost double the rate of the comparison group.*

**Graph C: Comparison of Earned Income**



## **Participant Experience**

Interviews were conducted with 21 EOP participants at the time of their 3-month follow-up. During the interviews, participants answered survey questions with the following results:

- 89% said rent assistance helped them remain engaged in employment services
- 71% said that the assistance was enough for them to become stable in their housing
- 62% said they needed other resources such as utility assistance and food
- 50% lost Oregon Health Plan benefits through increases in income, but one now has health benefits through their employer
- 67% (2/3) who had Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) lost TANF benefits, but still have SNAP.

Participants made the following comments while reflecting on the EOP rent assistance:

- “Housing is a priority. I was able to filter my attention and stay focused.”
- “I was able to enroll in my training program earlier and complete it earlier.”
- “The goal setting and budgeting helped me be responsible for my own future. I went from homelessness to hopefulness.”

## **Participant Stories**

### ***Juanita***

Prior to enrolling in EOP, Juanita was struggling to parent two children on her own and care for her ailing father. She was at the point of giving up when a friend gave her information about EOP, where she could get training for a career in the healthcare field. *“I honestly did not think that going to this program was going to help me in the situation I was in. I had no interest of trying to pursue my goals at that time in my life. All I was worried about was a roof over my family’s head and a job to care for my family.”*

She stated that her life began to change when she was accepted into the program. Juanita had always wanted to become a nurse, but could never afford the tuition, *“...so I never opened that door in my life.”* EOP changed all that. She received a scholarship for tuition, books and supplies. When her Career Coach learned that Juanita was at risk of homelessness, she referred her to the EOP Rent Assistance team at Human Solutions. *“Not only did my coach help me with education and a better job, she guided me to the right people to help with rent assistance!”* She said that both her Career Coach and Rent Assistance Coordinator *“went above and beyond.”*



Without this program she doesn't know where she would be. She was going through one of the toughest periods of her life. *"Life has now changed and now I have a bright future with hope."* Juanita is earning \$18 an hour at her new job, working part time as a CNA while she continues to pursue her dream of becoming a nurse.

### ***Khalid***

Khalid, who is in the refugee program at Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, said about coming to the United States, *"The first step was to learn the culture."* Khalid already has a master's degree in electrical engineering and eight years of experience. His Career Coach helped him with his resume and with letters requesting the recommendations he needed in order to get approval to take the engineer-licensing exam to be recognized as a professional engineer in this country. He also had to take an English exam to qualify for the test.



At first, Khalid stayed with friends, but it was very crowded and noisy. He had difficulty studying for the English exam and his friends clearly wanted him to move out. Khalid's income was only \$300 a month in refugee assistance, with an additional \$194 in SNAP benefits. Even with a degree in engineering, Khalid was having difficulty finding work. With such limited income, landlords would not approve him for a unit. His Career Coach referred him for EOP Rent Assistance.

With the support of the rent assistance services, he was able to secure a unit quickly. His new home provides a safe and quiet space to study in order to pass the English exams and the professional engineering exam that he will be required to take in order to regain his certifications. Once he had his own place, Khalid said, *"I was able to focus on getting a job."* He found work as an electrical engineer at a construction firm and is working full-time.

Khalid has been approved to take the professional engineering exam in October and continues to study for it. His Career Coach will use EOP support service funds to pay the costs and fees associated with taking the exam. At the same time, Khalid is already giving back to the community by helping others learn English and translating for them.



## **Giovanni**

*“Situations are temporary. Do what I did; go to Central City Concern and Transition Projects. Do what you have to do to help yourself,”* is Giovanni’s advice to other people who find themselves in the circumstances he was in when he arrived in Portland. He was homeless and stayed at the rescue mission for a few weeks before going to Transition Projects and staying at the Clark Center. He attended employment groups there and then staff at Transition Projects referred him to Central City Concern’s AHFE EOP. His Career Coach saw immediately how organized and determined he was to succeed. His Career Coach said, *“He didn’t waste time seeking out employment opportunities.”*

Giovanni quickly landed a full-time job at DePaul industries as a security guard. He was able to save money, eventually moving into a studio apartment in July. In the meantime, he continued to look for a chance to increase his income and applied at Rinella Produce. Giovanni started his new full-time job there in August, making \$15 an hour fulltime. Giovanni plans to return to school and he already applied to attend Portland Community College in Spring 2018. He is interested in economics and graphic design. He will have access to receive training funds to help pay for tuition and books and he plans to continue to work while going to school. He is grateful for the services that EOP provided him. He said, *“It feels good to have someone help out like that. I was able to work hard and do what I had to do.”*



## **Challenges**

Significant challenges to serving the needs of those referred in both years were:

- Truncated service periods due to the timing of contract implementation.
- Extremely low vacancy rates resulting in steeply increasing rents accompanied by a rise in no-cause evictions.
- Some participants’ personal challenges led to dropping out of EOP services before receiving rent assistance or otherwise negatively affected their housing stability.

Since this report examines the rent assistance during pilot years, the funding contracts did not arrive in the beginning of the program year. For both program years, there was less than a full year to accomplish a year’s worth of program outcomes. One way this affected rent assistance implementation is that more participants were served with eviction prevention support than with homeless placements since helping someone find housing can be a lengthy process.



Extremely low vacancy rates, mass no-cause evictions, and rents rising 20 times faster than wages contributed to an estimated 10% increase in the number of homeless individuals in Multnomah County over the previous count in 2015, according to Multnomah County's 2017 Point-In-Time Count.<sup>3</sup>

A variety of factors contribute to the personal challenges many low-income people must overcome in the process of obtaining and retaining rental housing. They may have a bad rental history, poor credit and/or criminal histories. Substance abuse relapse and re-incarceration caused three participants to lose housing while they received rent assistance. About a quarter (19 of 80) of all EOP participants served with rent assistance were engaged in EOP projects funded by Multnomah County's Department of Community Justice. Of these, 82% were employed when they exited EOP. However, their housing stability has been less certain. Out of the 14 who have reached the six-month housing retention follow-up, we can confirm housing for only eight.

The conditions which accompany poverty, such as those listed below, may further complicate and impede participant progress.

- *Poverty is often accompanied by trauma, either as cause or result. Homelessness can lead to depression, other mental health concerns, and/or substance abuse.*
- *Survival on the street is often due to the generosity of peers, and once housed it is hard to refuse a homeless friend a place to sleep.*
- *Systemic oppression of people of color results in higher rates of incarceration and involvement in the criminal justice system has far worse outcomes for people who can't afford legal help.*
- *Discrimination persists in housing based on race and/or ethnicity.*

### **Systems Alignment**

The public workforce system and the housing system are distinct, though they serve similar populations. Although each system has a different focus, they share a common goal--to create economic stability. In their work towards this goal, each system has long understood the importance of both housing stability and employment for low-income people. Low-income people achieve better outcomes when we recognize the interdependence between career track employment

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<sup>3</sup> The 2017 Point In Time Count results may be viewed on Multnomah County's website at <https://multco.us/multnomah-county/news/2017-point-time-count-more-neighbors-counted-homeless-2015-more-sleeping>

and housing stability for able members of the population. Sufficient income is necessary in order to foster housing stability, and housing is necessary for maintaining living-wage employment.

Work on aligning these systems has been ongoing for many years and has occurred at all levels. Leadership's commitment to systems alignment is key. For example, Home Forward's Executive Director sits on Worksystems' Board of Directors and Worksystems' Executive Director sits on A Home for Everyone's Coordinating Board and co-chairs the Workforce and Economic Opportunity Workgroup. The other co-chair of the workgroup is the Public Policy Director at Central City Concern, a CBO dedicated to employment services and housing for homeless individuals.

A Home for Everyone's Workforce and Economic Opportunity Workgroup's systems alignment work is guided by four principles.

1. Increased income improves housing outcomes through:
  - Placement into housing
  - Housing stability/retention
  - Homelessness prevention
2. Families and individuals who are working on employment need housing stability.
3. Intensive relationship-based support and culturally-responsive approaches are required to effectively serve diverse groups who experience a wide range of barriers to employment.
4. Systems-level alignment produces better outcomes for people involved and is a more cost-effective use of community-wide funding resources.

The implementation of EOP and rent assistance also follows these principles. The results of the first two years of rent assistance implementation show how these guiding principles lead to better outcomes.

Worksystems creates a coordinated approach that enables EOP to make positive impacts through serving over 800 low-income community members a year. Without the supports of the housing system, these efforts can only bring housing insecure individuals so far. By setting aside funding for housing and training, A Home for Everyone and Worksystems are able to compound funding from different federal, state, and local sources in order to create one program that holistically serves individuals wishing to achieve self-sufficiency.

Through lessons learned during our systems alignment work, we recommend that:

- *Housing and workforce reinforce and increase programmatic alignment.*
- *The hub model be used, whereby organizations are contracted to provide services within their areas of expertise.*
- *When housing supports are implemented within employment programs, they are*

*implemented as a support to enable participants to succeed in training and employment goals, rather than as an incentive for participation.*

- *Partners jointly agree on common values and standards so there is buy-in and consistency across the entire program.*
- *Strong relationships and communication processes are developed and maintained between staff counterparts at all levels of the participating agencies.*
- *Strategies for assuring diversity of staff and program participants are developed and implemented and all services are delivered in a fair and equitable manner.*

Of utmost importance to the success of the collaboration is trust between the organizations. Worksystems, Home Forward, and Human Solutions all had longstanding and successful working relationships. This has formed a solid foundation for the collaboration.

The process of aligning these two systems relies on consistent communication and transparency. The Collaborative takes advantage of Worksystems' monthly EOP meeting structure to bring together the Rent Assistance team, Career Coaches and Managers. Everyone is able to contribute to shaping the rent assistance process, and this allows EOP Career Coaches and Managers to collaborate on how best to serve participants in the most comprehensive and supportive manner.

Monthly meetings between Worksystems' Project Manager and the Rent Assistance staff at Human Solutions (Rent Assistance Coordinators and Manager) were critical in developing a coordinated approach to address issues during the course of the program. The Program Evaluator was employed by Human Solutions through a grant from Meyer Memorial Trust, and attends these meetings to provide guidance to ensure that the hub model accomplished the mutual goal of helping participants become self-sufficient and gain stable, long-term housing.

### **Service Delivery Integration**

The Program Evaluator met individually with Career Coaches and Managers to hear feedback about the rent assistance process. Information gathered during these interviews, combined with follow-up interviews with rent assistance recipients, helped in the formation of best practices for service delivery. In addition, two focus groups consisting of ten Career Coaches and two Rent Assistance Coordinators met in May 2017 to discuss best practices. People of color were especially encouraged to participate in these groups in order to get a diversity of perspectives.

Primary service delivery best practices include:

- Strengths-based, participant-centered approach incorporating Assertive Engagement skills and Trauma Informed Care.
- Direct services staff collaborate across systems to work as a team throughout the rent assistance process and period of assistance.

- Relationships are at the core of the work. Take time to build them and accept that this takes time.
- Participant challenges and barriers to obtaining and retaining housing should be identified at the earliest point possible.
- Employ cultural sensitivity around the meaning of money in assisting with budgeting, financial literacy and goal planning.
- Share information, knowledge, expertise and success stories.

### **Recommendations for Next Steps**

We must develop more comprehensive and collaborative efforts, bringing together public and private partnerships across diverse systems in order to fully support low-income members of our community in their efforts to increase their incomes, have stable housing and to thrive. Local, state, and federal government partners and foundations contribute to the success of collaborative efforts by providing funds as well as political and technical support. Next steps for EOP include bringing more employment services to the housing system, developing partnerships with other public systems, and continuing to expand EOP housing supports.

Through AHFE, Worksystems and EOP providers created AHFE EOP, which specifically serves homeless and housing insecure individuals. Further systems alignment may include creating a more direct process for referrals to employment services from the housing system. For example, in Seattle, when a person is assessed for rapid re-housing assistance, they are also assessed for employment readiness and referred to the public workforce development system if it is determined that they are ready and willing to engage in employment services. Locating employment services in homeless shelters is another model implemented by several collaborations nationwide.<sup>4</sup>

EOP partners can build closer partnerships with the healthcare systems (including mental health and substance abuse treatment) and human services systems. Further in-depth services could also be provided within EOP by collaborating with mental health and substance abuse service providers. Member agencies and leadership of Community Economic Opportunity, which is part of AHFE EOP, also deliver TANF JOBS program services through a contract with the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) District 2. Although Community Economic Opportunity only had a few months of activity during the time examined in this report, it is expected that their knowledge and experience administering the TANF JOBS program will create further systems alignment between DHS and the housing and workforce development systems. This alignment is happening, as CEO Career Coaches work with DHS Family Coaches to translate EOP activities into activities required for customers of DHS. Also, a DHS representative is attending A Home

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<sup>4</sup> Schnur, C., Warland, C., Young, M., & Maguire, T. (2017). *Integrating rapid re-housing & employment: Program & policy recommendations for enhancing rapid re-housing*. Chicago, IL: Heartland Alliance's National Initiatives on Poverty & Economic Opportunity.

for Everyone Workforce and Economic Opportunity Workgroup meetings. Another example of collaboration with DHS is that Family Coaches work with EOP Career Coaches through Worksystems' Health Careers NW grant, which is funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services, to help participants obtain training and employment in healthcare. DHS Family Coaches and EOP Career Coaches who work with Health Careers NW participants hold monthly meetings to discuss their shared customers.

EOP partners will also look for new partners and creative ways to increase rent assistance funding. Despite the increase in rent assistance funding in the second year of the project, the need far exceeds the current level of funding. Because A Home for Everyone rent assistance funds came late in the program year, the collaboration was able to serve everyone referred for assistance until early June, when it was necessary to stop referrals. However, between June 6 and July 26, 2017 Career Coaches identified 42 EOP participants in need of housing assistance.

## **Conclusion**

The hard work and success of the people served by EOP would be best honored by our community's continued commitment to housing and workforce development alignment and by expanding alignment efforts to include other systems. Whether low-income people are in need of homeless prevention services, rapid re-housing or employment services, the need far outstrips current resources and often a need for one service brings light to a need for additional services. This should not be a deterrent to serve, but rather an incentive to expand and truly align.

In the first two program years, EOP Rent Assistance supported a total of 169 actively engaged EOP participants, ensuring that they were able to maintain their current housing, or obtain housing and focus on their career track goals. The collaborative's systems alignment work began with the four guiding principles described above. Through the strong results of the first 18 months of EOP rent assistance, we have seen the value of systems alignment. Compounding funding to create a more holistic program led to participants tripling the investment in rent assistance through increases in their incomes. More importantly, the long term and multi-generational effects of preventing homelessness and having career track employment will lead to strong future economic stability.

Systems alignment work depends on partners to pool their collective resources, knowledge, best practices and capacities in order to advance the wide range of solutions sought by our communities. While each partner may have different approaches for addressing these challenges, it is critical that they work together in order to better meet the needs of low-income community members.

## **Appendix A: Economic Opportunity Program Partners**

- Central City Concern serves single adults and families in the Portland metro area who are impacted by homelessness, poverty and addictions. Founded in 1979, the agency has a comprehensive continuum of affordable housing options integrated with direct social services including healthcare, recovery and employment.
- Constructing Hope is part of Irvington Covenant Community Development Corporation (ICCDC) which was founded in 1995 and provides young men and women with the skills to begin a career in a trade apprenticeship. The program focuses on empowering ex-offenders.
- Human Solutions is a community development corporation and anti-poverty organization founded in 1988. Human Solutions provides a continuum of services including shelter off the streets, housing stabilization and employment services and provides over 700 units of affordable housing.
- Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) was founded in 1976 by refugees for refugees and assists Portland's refugee and immigrant communities, helping newly arrived families adjust to American society and find jobs. IRCO is the sole service provider of employment services and job training for all newly arrived refugees in Multnomah County.
- Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc. was founded in 1989 and promotes success for women in the trades through education, leadership, and mentorship in the belief that women deserve and can attain economic self-sufficiency through pursuing careers in the building, mechanical, electrical, and utility trades.
- Self Enhancement Inc. (SEI) was founded in 1981 and provides academic support and comprehensive wrap-around services for African-American students and their families. Self Enhancement Inc. is Oregon's largest African American-led nonprofit organization and provides students and families with a continuum of cradle-to-career services.
- SE Works, founded in 1997, successfully engages multi-barriered, low income, underserved populations, including: at-risk youth involved in the justice system; unemployed adults; immigrants; people experiencing disabilities; and people returning from incarceration.

### **A Home for Everyone Economic Opportunity Program Partners**

- Central City Concern, described above, has an AHFE EOP project.
- Portland Opportunities Industrialization Center (POIC) is an education management organization that serves over students and trainees through three programs including a high school and employment opportunity training. Their programs reconnect alienated at-risk youth affected by poverty, family instability and homelessness with high school education and career training.
- IRCO, Human Solutions and SEI are Community Economic Opportunity partners. CEO also includes El Programa Hispano Católico and Urban League of Portland.
- El Program Hispano Católico began in 1982 to support and empower Latino farm-workers. EPHC is a fully community generated and run organization providing the Latino community with a broad range family supportive services including housing, educational and employment services.
- Urban League of Portland, established in 1945, is one of the leading voices for African Americans and other people of color in the region. Urban League offers workforce services, community health services, summer youth programming, senior services, meaningful civic engagement opportunities, and powerful advocacy.

## **Appendix B: Comparison Group Explanation**

The collaborative was able to establish a comparison group for observing the impact of EOP Rent Assistance by tracking the progress of participants who were either homeless or at-risk of homelessness, but who did not receive rent assistance due to limited funding. In February 2015, when a majority of that year's rent assistance funding was fully obligated, the Program Evaluator began tracking people who would have been referred if more funding was available. This created a natural comparison group for the purpose of this research. In order to reserve the remaining funds for homeless participants still searching for housing, Human Solutions notified the Career Coaches that rent assistance referrals would no longer be accepted for the program year. From February 22 - June 30 2016, Career Coaches sent information for participants who they would have referred if the funding had been available to the Program Evaluator. There were 38 EOP participants with unmet housing needs on June 30, 2016.

The participants with unmet housing needs were prioritized for services at the start of the next program year, July 1, 2016. Of the 38, 18 were still engaged in EOP services and eligible for assistance and ten were ultimately served. Of the eight who were not served, seven were homeless and were unable to overcome their barriers to housing as of their last contact with the Program Evaluator. One needed rent assistance, but was not on the rental agreement.<sup>5</sup>

From the beginning of the second program year through the end of the data collection period, 3/31/17, there was sufficient funding to assist all referrals. However, there were 18 EOP participants referred for assistance who did not receive assistance as of 3/31/17. These 18 participants are considered to have unmet housing needs for the purposes of this report. All together, there were 46 EOP participants with unmet housing needs that are treated as a comparison group for this report.

As of 01/31/17, 18 referrals for rent assistance were made who were not served with rent assistance. Two are eviction prevention and 16 are homeless placement.

- 4 of the homeless placement referrals were able to find alternative resources.
- 3 Eviction Prevention referrals were ineligible at the time of intake.
- 4 Eviction Prevention referrals entered addiction treatment.
- 2 Eviction Prevention referrals became incarcerated.
- 4 Homeless Placement referrals could not be reached when rent assistance became available, but were still engaged in EOP and employed.
- 1 Eviction Prevention referral had no lease for the unit they were in. A lease is required for rent assistance.

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<sup>5</sup> As an authorized occupant, the participant would have remained at risk of homelessness and rental assistance would not have resolved his status.

## **Appendix C: Definitions of Employment Goals**

Phases of Service: Service delivery and the subsequent performance happen during two distinct program phases: Intensive Services and Retention and Advancement Services. Each participant can receive up to two years of intensive program services and will receive one year of Retention and Advancement service, unless there is an approved extension. Intensive services begin at the point of enrollment and last until either the participant is assessed as ready to transition to Retention and Advancement services (using progress indicators and additional job readiness factors), *or* a participant has gone 90 days without receiving a grant-funded service.

Unsubsidized Employment Upon Exit: Of participants who exit, those who enter or retain employment prior to transitioning to Retention and Advancement services.

Career Track Employment Upon Exit: Of participants who exit, those who attain the employment goal identified in the Career and Resource Plan by full program exit.

Employment Retention within 12 months: Of participants who enter any type of employment during the Intensive Phase, those who are employed in any two quarters of Retention and Advancement services.

Training Completion: Of participants who ended training, the number of participants who successfully completed.

Employment Advancement: Of all participants who attained unsubsidized or career track employment prior to transition into Retention and Advancement services, those who have shown a gain in wage, average hours worked per week, or employer supported benefits by the time of full program exit.

## **Appendix D: Acronyms and Abbreviations**

AHFE EOP	A Home for Everyone Economic Opportunity Program
AMI	Area Median Income
CBO	Community Based Organization
CEO	Community Economic Opportunity
DHS	Oregon Department of Human Services
EOP	Economic Opportunity Program
SNAP	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act