

**Midterm Evaluation
FUSE
July 2009**

Overview

The FUSE program is based on the insight that a small group of homeless adults in Hennepin County use a majority of county shelter resources as well as bear a heavy burden on county corrections. These individuals cycle in and out of the shelter and the correction systems, usually for “quality of life” crimes that are directly related to their perpetual status as homeless. Thus, FUSE operates on the assumption that the lack of housing is a primary factor in criminal recidivism among this group and that a direct intervention to transition these individuals quickly into an apartment after incarceration may be an efficacious use of county resources.

As previously discussed in the document “Program Evaluation Design,” FUSE evaluators are charged with providing a midterm evaluation approximately one year into the program’s implementation. In this summary brief we re-visit some of the key questions underpinning the evaluation of FUSE and shed light on the quantitative and qualitative data collected thus far. We first address some of the specific *Implementation* and *Outcome* questions raised in the Program Evaluation Design as they pertain to our ongoing quantitative analyses. Next we summarize the developing analyses and some of the key themes emerging from our qualitative interviews with FUSE clients.

We should note that while the results below suggest promising outcomes, it is important to stress that this is only a preliminary analysis of the data gathered and that the evaluation is ongoing through January 2010.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments about this report and/or our ongoing evaluation.

Thank you

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Preliminary Quantitative Analysis

Implementation Questions:

How successful is FUSE in terms of reaching its target population of chronic system-users?

Are the 50 FUSE participants representative of the whole target population?

Progress:

The FUSE program has made substantial progress toward its objective to house 50 “chronic-users” of community correction and shelter systems by December 2009. To this end, FUSE identified 262 individuals eligible for the program in the beginning of 2008 who met the following criteria:

- 1.) Has 4 admissions into county corrections in the last five years, with at least one in 2007.
- 2.) On the county’s “ frequent flyer list” of adults who had at least 4 shelter stays in the last three years, with at least one 2007 admit.
- 3) Classified as “long-term homeless” by Hennepin County classifying standards

With this client-pool identified, FUSE staff began intercepting eligible adults in March of 2008 as they circuited through the Hennepin County’s Adult Correction Facility (ACF). By December 2008, 25 individuals had been recruited from the client pool and half of this group had been successfully housed. By May 2009, this number had grown to 39 recruitments and 25 housings. Combining data from shelter utilization, community corrections and admission intakes reveals that the recruitment strategy of FUSE has been effective in targeting the intended clientele.

Table 1a: Group Descriptives

	Average # of arrests (2002-2007)	Average Shelter Admits	Age
Eligible Group (N=262)	16.6 (15.1)	79	40.3
FUSE (N=37)	25.5 (22.6)	83	40.6

Parentheses report standard deviation

Source: Booking data by Hennepin County Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee

As highlighted in Tables 1a and 1b the FUSE recruitment has thus far closely matched the broad demographic parameters of the eligible population. Despite our concerns that the voluntary nature of the program might unintentionally “cream” and “select in” the most prospective clients within the eligibility pool the above data suggests that the number of prior arrests and shelter stays are not on average better for those recruited in the program than those not. In fact, criminal recidivism is significantly greater in the FUSE sample than in the overall eligible pool of adults ($p < .001$). Perhaps because of the program’s primary reliance on the ACF to recruit individuals, FUSE has a sampling bias toward individuals who recidivate at a greater rate and thus over-represent such offenders. While this difference raises methodological complications for an evaluation, for the purpose of this preliminary analysis we will assume that such biases leads to conservative estimates of the overall potential of this program. Thus, FUSE has modeled itself successfully as a program that targets and provides services for the most “chronic” offenders.

Despite the difference in criminal backgrounds, the limited demographic data available on the overall eligible pool suggests that the FUSE group may strongly resemble the racial, age and gender composition of the intended population (see Table 1b.). More importantly, the self-reported data provided by clients during recruitment speaks to FUSE’s engagement with a chronically homeless population. Most clients report many years of homelessness (on average 8.1 years) and long struggles to attain and/or maintain housing. Clients also report substantial struggles with chemical dependency and mental health issues (over 50% have received treatment for either severe mental illness or chemical dependency). In short, FUSE is successfully targeting and admitting individuals with a high risk of recidivism and homelessness and who have had extensive contact with county corrections and shelter services.

Table 1b: Group Demographics

Eligible Group (N=262)	92% male	82% black, 16% white, 2% NA
FUSE (N=37)	88% male	84% black, 12% white, 4N%A

Source: Booking data by Hennepin County Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee

What percent of clients are successfully housed in the critical time period following intake and release from the jail or ACF?

Progress

FUSE clients who successfully transitioned into an apartment after their release from ACF in 2008, did so within an approximate two-week average time span (according to the data provided by case managers.) Considering the substantial challenges and complicated logistics involved in coordinating such a transition for this population this two-week average is a significant accomplishment. However, as discussed above approximately half of FUSE clients (48%) had no transitioned into an apartment by December 2008. In May of 2009 this

proportion of FUSE clients not housed declined to 36%. While this is an improvement, it is assumed that many in this group currently remain homeless.

Though we are still gathering information on those not successfully housed, data from Monthly Tracking suggest that the majority of this group lost contact with FUSE staff after their release from ACF or were shortly there after re-arrested. Though we have documented substantial effort by FUSE staff to reach their clients in the community, contact with this some clients appears sporadic. While staff turn-over may have also contributed to a breakdown in communication between some clients and their case managers, in the final analysis of this evaluation we hope to shed light on the particular client characteristics and situations that may hinder successful delivery of services.

Outcome Questions:

After placement, what proportion of FUSE clients experience a reduction in contact with the criminal system?

Does the FUSE intervention cause a reduction in criminal justice contacts for FUSE participants versus non-participants?

Progress

In the “Program Evaluation Design,” we discussed our interest in pursuing a quasi-experimental methodology to evaluate the effectiveness of FUSE to reduce recidivism and shelter use. Specifically, we made mention of a sophisticated Propensity-Score Matching methodology to address the sampling biases inherent of the non-random selection of FUSE participants into the program. While we are still investigating the ability to do such an analysis, data limitations will likely make this type of methodology unfeasible. Specifically, the limited personal data available on the comparison group of eligible individuals hinder our ability to accurately estimate and match the necessary propensities to do such a comparative analysis.

Given these restraints, we will likely pursue other evaluative methods that nonetheless also incorporate pre and post assessments of FUSE clients and a comparison group of eligible adults. One of these methods¹ will likely be a Difference in Difference Analysis (DiD) of corrections and

¹ Another potential methodology, popular in recidivism research, might be the use of Event History Analysis (EHA) to estimate the survival curve for non-recidivism for all eligible participants before and after the implementation of FUSE (2007 vs. 2008). Though recidivism would need to be clearly defined and appropriately modified to fit the high rate of incarceration for this population, such an analysis might elucidate the impact for FUSE to slow down the rate in which such individuals are re-arrested over time. Currently we are assessing whether the data provided by HCC provides enough accurate information on admissions and releases to make this analysis possible.

shelter admissions for FUSE and non-FUSE groups over the last two and a half years. Specifically, DiD estimators will use data from the eligible client pool, those identified by but not selected into FUSE, to estimate a baseline of exogenous factors that invariably influence the utilization of shelter and correction services. In other words, this analysis will provide a controlled estimate for a “FUSE effect” that is independent of other county-level factors also affecting trends in shelter and corrections admissions (e.g. local economy, labor market, policing policies, county budgets etc). While we will expand upon these methodologies more fully in the final report, it is suffice to say that we are still confident of an end of term empirical analysis that will accurately specify the effectiveness of FUSE.

Despite these complications, at this time we can nonetheless point to some encouraging trends for 2007 and 2008 that reflect the potential of the intervention. For the purpose of highlighting these trends, here we differentiate three groups within the eligibility pool:

- Individuals eligible for FUSE but not selected,
- FUSE participants who have been enrolled for six months in the program,
- FUSE participants who have been housed for at least six months

We differentiate these groups because of the limited time period that has transpired since the start of the program (March 2008) and our interest to investigate how treatment exposure as a function of time might be reducing criminal activity. Though we will include all FUSE participants in our final analysis, here we are only reporting on the subgroups of FUSE participants who we feel have had the opportunity to experience the benefits of the intervention. For instance, in Table2 we present averages for the number of arrests for 2007 and 2008 across the three groups specified above, which suggests that extended treatment exposure may lead to a substantial decrease in criminal recidivism.

Table 2a: Group Averages for Arrests

	Average Arrests 2007	Average Arrests 2008	Mean difference (2007-2008)	95% CI
Comparison (N=225)	4.6 (4)	3.9 (3.7)	.7**	.12 to 1.36
FUSE 1st cohort (N=25)	7 (4.9)	4.2 (3.6)	2.8*	.97 to 4.47
FUSE Housed (N=10)	6.3 (5.3)	3.3 (3.5)	3.0	NA

*= $p < .01$ level of significance for paired t-test, **= $p < .001$ level of significance

Parentheses report standard deviation

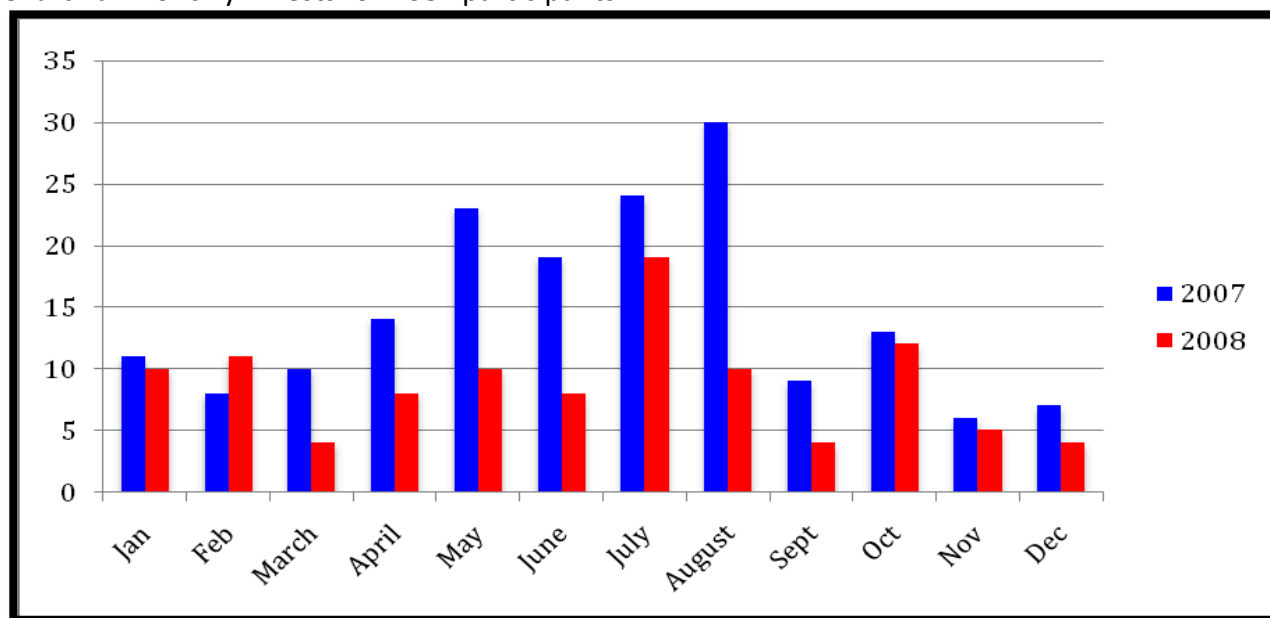
Source: Booking data by Hennepin County Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee

On average FUSE participants had approximately 3 less arrests in 2008 than in 2007 (mean differences of 2.8 & 3.0 for both FUSE groups), while the comparison group had an average reduction of only 1 less arrest between these two years. For the FUSE groups these differences constitute 40% -50% reductions in yearly arrests.

The pattern appears clear that FUSE participants had a greater reduction in arrests than the comparison group, though because of the small number of individuals in FUSE it is difficult to draw substantive conclusions from these trends². The 2007-2008 difference in arrests for the first cohort of FUSE participants is statistically significant ($p < .01$), though the difference for the housed participants is not because of the small sample size of this group ($N=10$)³. Similarly, the 2007-2008 difference for FUSE is *almost* statistically greater than the reduction for non-FUSE participants (beyond the 90% confidence interval of both estimates, but not the 95%) despite the small sample.

Also encouraging is the changing pattern of monthly arrests for the entire first cohort of FUSE participants since the commencement of the program. In the below Chart 1a, one can see this in terms of the clear difference in the number of monthly arrests between 2007 and 2008, particularly in the period after the program began in March 2008. As the chart summarizes, in the months following March though September there is a sharp decline from the previous year, most months FUSE arrests are half the amount of the previous year. Though a slight decline in summer arrests in 2008 is also present for the non-FUSE comparison (chart not show) the contrast is less dramatic than the below FUSE pattern.

Chart 1a: Monthly Arrests for FUSE participants



Source: Minneapolis Police Department

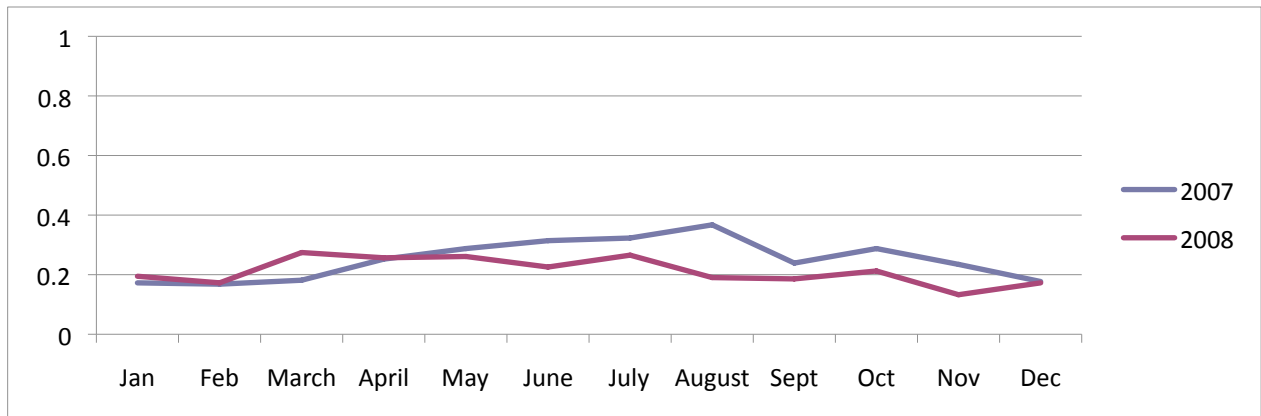
² Such small sample sizes increase the standard errors of the estimates for the mean difference between 2007 and 2008, to give unreliable p-values

³ While this housed group consists of 12 FUSE participants, we could only access data for 10 of these individuals.

Lastly, a more salient pattern emerges when we consider just the group of FUSE participants who were housed for at least six months in 2008. In 2007 90% of these individuals had two or more arrests in the 12month time period prior their participation in the program. By the end of 2008 this percentage of re-arrested participants drops to 40%. In fact 50% of this group had no single arrest in the 12 months following the time when they were housed in 2008 (even beyond March 2009). In contrast, the non-FUSE comparison group had an approximate recidivism rate of 86% in 2007 and a 75% for 2008. In the final analysis it will be interesting to see if a pattern between less arrests and prolonged periods of housing holds over time and with greater number of participants.

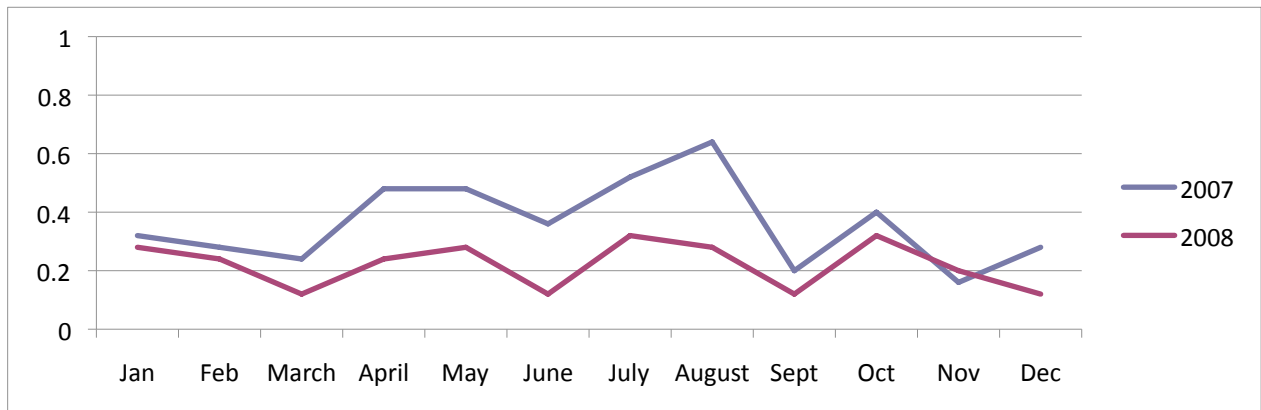
We view these trends as encouraging that the FUSE intervention is having positive effect on clients, particularly for those who were housed and had extended experiences with the program in 2008. We are confident that the DiD analysis referenced above will illustrate these points more clearly with greater number of participants and extended treatment periods at the time of final evaluation. For instance a DiD analysis may illustrate how the relative risk of getting arrested has changed over time as an independent consequence of FUSE; particularly if we consider how the proportions of arrests has already changed in 2008.

Chart 2a: Non-FUSE Group proportions arrested per month for 2007 & 2008



Source: Minneapolis Police Department

Chart 2b: All FUSE Group proportions arrested per month for 2007 & 2008



Source: Minneapolis Police Department

In chart 2a and 2b we can see how the change in “group proportions arrested” has been relatively more stable for the Non-FUSE group as compared to the FUSE group. Using the trend of chart 2a as a baseline to evaluate the trend in 2b, the final analysis may elucidate a clear effect that FUSE has had in reducing recidivism risk.

Similarly, DiD analysis can also be used to evaluate the changing pattern of shelter usage over time for these groups—an issue we have ignored here because we have yet to acquire this data for 2008 and 2009. With such data it will be interesting to see, for example how shelter usage may have, or have not, changed for this group, particularly in this economic climate when shelter resources are being so heavily sought out by new cohorts of individuals.

Summary of Preliminary Quantitative Analysis

In sum, this preliminary look at the available data suggests that FUSE program is achieving and making progress toward its main charted objectives. First, the program has identified and recruited a group of individuals in high-need of housing assistance who also have had extensive contact with community corrections. FUSE is successfully targeting its intended clientele and will likely make its goal of housing 50 participants by December 2009.

Secondly, the limited arrest data we have so far analyzed suggests that the program is also making good on its objective to reduce recidivism. Though we cannot at this time specify the extent to which FUSE is having a positive affect in this regard, we believe it is telling that 50% of those housed have avoided being re-arrested in over a year after receiving housing. Similarly we feel it is encouraging that the average number of arrests for all FUSE participants has significantly declined in the past year, above and beyond the decline observed in the comparison group. We are confident that by January 2010 we will have a large enough sample to accurately specify these trends, as well address questions about the nature of specific outcomes observed.

Nonetheless, this preliminary look at the data has also shed light on the challenges that the program has experienced. In particular it will be imperative to examine how and why the program is successful with some clients but not others. Here we will have to investigate whether client characteristics for those not housed are significantly different than those who were “successful,” and how and why this selection process occurs.

Preliminary Qualitative Analysis

“Everybody has a little part to play in making homelessness disappear. I don’t care what program you’re in, what you do, or what part of the government you’re in. We all have a little part to play in helping to get rid of this thing called homelessness. Because it’s not invisible. It’s very visible.” -Charlie

We conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews to gather a range of data on indicators of success, struggle, and experience in supportive housing as clients navigate through the FUSE program.⁴ To date, we’ve completed a total of 23 interviews with 17 different FUSE clients. Three interview guides were designed to capture relevant information from clients at three time-points in the program: pre-release in the Minnesota Adult Correctional Facility, post-release in early housing (when client has been housed less than 3 months), and post-release in long-term housing (when client has been housed longer than 6 months). Of the 12 interviews conducted with clients in the ACF, 6 clients in that group have dropped out of the program, either due to losing contact with the housing specialist, or to re-offending. We interviewed 5 of these initial clients again about their early placement in housing, and 1 remains to be contacted. In order to supplement our interview data for this mid-term report, we also chose to conduct a group of interviews with clients who have been stably housed for at least 6 months. Thus, we have gathered qualitative data across a range of different experiences for the FUSE client: a group who dropped out of the program soon after release from the ACF, a group who are early in their housing careers, and a group who have been stably housed in the program from 6 months to one year. As clients progress through the program, we hope to gather more interview data to explore whether, how, and why clients are able to thrive in a housing first, harm reduction model.

Table 1- Preliminary Qualitative Analysis: Interview Demographics

	FUSE client, N = 37	Interview Sample, N = 17
Age	40	40
Race	84% Black	94% Black
Years Homeless, average	8.1	11.8
% with CD issues	50%	88%
Jail/ACF bookings, 2002-2007	25	16
Shelter admits, 2002-2007	83	120

As of May 2009, FUSE, a supportive housing program designed for chronic offenders with high levels of institutionalization and homelessness, had recruited 39 individuals and housed 25 of them. Table 1, above, shows the demographic comparison of the group of current FUSE

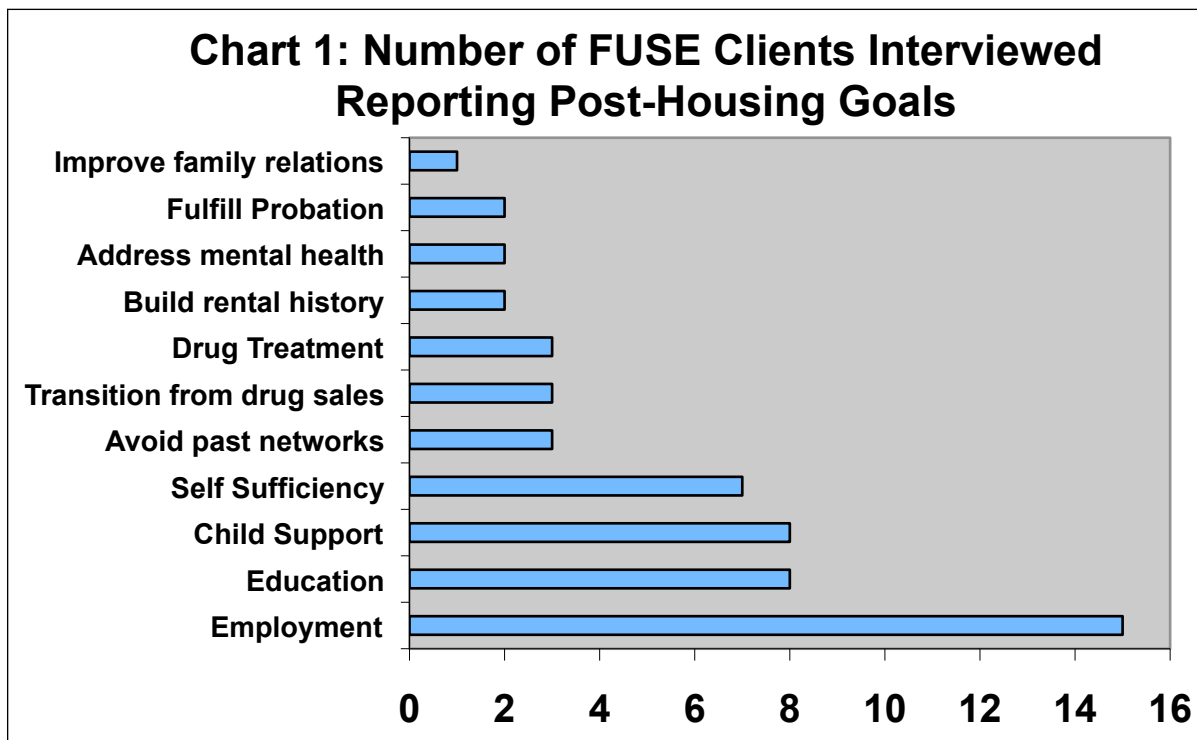
⁴ All names have been disguised to protect subject confidentiality. All interviews (except for ACF interviews) were conducted on-site in the client’s new home. Interviews were tape-recorded and were typically 1-2 hours long.

interviewees with the general FUSE client population. The interview group is similar in age and racial makeup to the FUSE population, although they have higher levels of homelessness and shelter use, and lower levels of jail/ACF bookings.

Interview questions were designed to encourage clients' input across a range of experiential dimensions, including biographical and demographic information, FUSE recruitment and enrollment processes, apartment selection, client-staff relations, successes and struggles in stable housing, and the general process of adapting to independent living. All interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using Atlas TI qualitative data analysis software. What follows is a preliminary sketch of some of the major themes emerging from our research.

Housing as a Stepping Stone

The majority of FUSE clients view their housing as a first step forward in the process of changing other areas of their life. In the spirit of the "housing first" movement, clients talked at length about the role of housing as a necessary stepping stone to other major pursuits like employment, education, and improving relationships with their children. When prompted with open-ended questions about their specific post-housing goals for FUSE clients discussed the following: addressing mental health issues, fulfilling probation requirements, seeking substance abuse treatment, transitioning out of the drug sales market, charting employment goals, charting educational goals, improving family relations, increasing levels of child support and involvement, breaking out of old social networks, building rental histories, and establishing economic independence and self-sufficiency.



The clients we interviewed overwhelmingly emphasized the importance of employment opportunities, educational gains, and greater involvement in supporting their children as strategies for economic independence. Obtaining employment, in particular, was seen by many of the FUSE clients as an avenue toward remedying some of the struggles encountered in supportive housing. For the majority of clients, stable employment and stable housing are interlocking elements in their transition out of homelessness. Harry, a 51 year old black male who spent 18 years homeless, expressed his worry that without transitioning to independence through employment, he would be vulnerable to being back on the streets again:

“...For me, I’ve been here one year, and I’ve tried to find some employment on my own and there is no such thing as a jobs program or an opportunity for any of these people. It’s a beautiful thing that this pool of money has shown up that pays people’s rents, their phone bills, and this kind of stuff, but I’m a realist. You can’t tell me that this is an endless pool of money... And what happens to these people when this money runs out?... What happens to this group of folks that you’ve had housed?... And here’s the thing, when the bottom falls out of this, those people are going to be where? Right back out on that street... I think the emphasis needs to be on becoming self-sufficient... We need to be looking at ways in which FUSE clients can become more involved in creating their own opportunities.”

About half of the clients we interviewed directly expressed that self-sufficiency and economic independence were major life goals that housing would enable them to achieve. In turn, they also felt that becoming as economically independent as possible would be vital to keeping their housing and ensuring that they remained stably housed over the long term. Charlie, a 34 year old African male with 8 years homeless, shared the importance of self-sufficiency for his own progress:

“In the long run, I don’t want them to keep paying for my whole life. In the long run, I want to be able to say ‘Ok, this is my house. You can have this half. Let me pay this half.’ I want to be comfortable that way.... And for right now, that’s not happening because of the fact that I haven’t found a job that I really like that will do that for me. So, I’m letting them, I feel ashamed about it but hell, I’m letting them do that... I’ve never been cut out to live off the state. It’s just not something I like to do. I like to be my own person...”

Struggles in Supportive Housing:

Over the course of our interviews, several themes emerged as the most commonly cited obstacles in adapting to supportive housing and remaining stably housed over time. The role of pro-criminal social networks and neighborhoods, a lack of community reintegration and supports, the dynamics of a “homeless identity,” and heavy drug involvement were major areas of struggle for many of the clients we spoke with.

The Role of Social Networks and Neighborhoods

Most of the clients we interviewed spoke at length about their immersion in the “homeless community,” and the threat they believed this posed to their success in stable housing. When asked about the biggest obstacles to their future success, one of the clients’ most common

answers was their inability to avoid the networks and neighborhoods that were a part of their homeless lives. Here, Harry relates a common predicament for the long-term-homeless individual who is newly housed:

“...That’s another thing that I advise people on when they are moving out of the shelter system. Because we have become such a tight-knit group. See, if you’re homeless, you know every other homeless person... Now, if I had a place down on 18th and Park, well, that’s just part of the homeless trail. I had a place right there off of Franklin and Columbus... What happened then, because [Harry] is basically a good guy, what happened then is every homeless person in the world was there. So the house was always full of people... They might not even be that good of a friend, but it’s like a fraternity when you’re homeless. I mean, that’s one of your brothers. So it’s hard to say, ‘You can’t come over here.’ And so anybody who gets housing in that inner city area that’s within the travel zone of the homeless population, you’re just setting yourself up for failure.”

Sammy, a 45 year old black male who was homeless for 20 years, explains the difficulty of welcoming others into his FUSE housing:

“Anybody that’s in this program has to make decisions to take on the responsibility to bring someone homeless in their home. That’s going to be on you, because you’re taking the chance. It can cause problems, anyway. You know, there are a lot of people that come into your home and then they do not want to leave. They’ll be like, ‘Well, can I stay a little longer?’ It’s a responsibility, and I think it could become a problem if a person isn’t careful.

I: How have you been able to deal with that?

Sammy: I try to pick the right friends or people who can come into my home. If they use [drugs] or whatever, they are not coming in here! Or even if they’re not on the same page I’m on... I’ve got goals of trying to stay sober or whatever, so I won’t let them in here. So, it’s not like I don’t love them. I still love them, but we’re not connecting, so yeah... It can get pretty disturbing.”

Because housing other homeless individuals in FUSE housing could potentially violate lease agreements or harm relationships with landlords, clients see it as a major threat to their own stability. At the same time, however, they express a strong allegiance to the homeless community and a desire to help out their friends when they can, which highlights the tensions that many newly housed individuals will face. These tensions reflect a type of identity crisis that many clients experience as they move from a status of homeless to housed. In this passage, Charlie frames this new identity in contrast to his previous association with “street people” who “don’t know how to act in a house,” indicating that he is starting to think of himself—and his former associates—in a different light:

“Most of us, the homeless, when we first get our own, we want to bring everybody over and not everybody can actually come to your house. Some people can come to your house who knows how to act in a house. I’ve watched friends of mine lose their house just because they brought the ‘hood to their house. And once you bring the ‘hood, the house is gone, within a week. Week and a half. Because a lot of places won’t handle all the noise. All this partying outside where the music is as loud as anything... Because there’s a thrill to what street people do. They always want to be outside. I don’t care how many months they have an apartment. They still want to be outside. They still want to live outside...”

Lack of Community Reintegration and Supports

It is precisely because of the fact that most FUSE clients perceive their old social networks as dangerous and threatening to their ability to stay housed that they overwhelmingly choose to live in other areas, usually in suburbs surrounding the city of Minneapolis. While some clients were not always able to be housed in the areas of their first choice, almost all clients said they wanted to live outside of the inner city. Others just expressed their desire to avoid certain neighborhoods. However, clients revealed that relocation strategies often imply other struggles, namely the difficulties individuals have in locating support systems and forming community relationships in new neighborhoods. Several clients reported experiencing intense loneliness and isolation in their new apartments, which in some cases, resulted in routine returns to their former networks.

Maxwell, a 52 year old black male who spent over 20 years homeless, said he felt isolated and lonely in his Richfield apartment, which is why he spent more time in his active social networks in South Minneapolis, where opportunities for employment, income, and community relationships exist. He explains how his connections with social networks in another part of town drove him back to the areas he used to inhabit when he was homeless:

“I’m out and about a lot. I can’t do nothing at home. Besides, I’m in a new area. I haven’t had time to sit down and find out about my area. I know there’s a lot of money out there once I get busy... But right now, all my money is over this way [in South Minneapolis]... Like I said, I’ll be working around here, helping out people here at the Somali store. But it’s time for me to get me a real job. Because a little 5, 10, 15 hours, I’m not making too much. Some days you make money, some days you don’t. The bills got to be paid. Because I got to pay my own light bill. I ain’t had to pay that yet.”

Clients who reported comparatively smoother transitions to independent living, particularly in areas of the city that they were unfamiliar with, often discussed the importance of “keeping a routine” or daily schedule of structured activities and social interactions. For example, Randy, a 31 year old black male who spent 15 years homeless, described his dedicated routine of attending AA, NA and other therapeutic meetings mainly because of the support and companionship they provided. Similarly, John, a 35 year old black male with an extensive history at different shelters, discussed a common routine of “running errands downtown” as well visiting a variety of soup kitchens and old shelters throughout the week in order to “check in” with his previous associates. For both John and Randy, scheduling regular contact with others through such activities was an important part of “keeping busy” and effectively dealing with the boredom, isolation and depression they often feel when alone in their apartments.

Dynamics of a Homeless Identity

After transitioning into “stable housing,” long-term homeless individuals must adapt in many ways to a different type of existence where much of their time is spent indoors and alone.

Beyond just being isolated, many obstacles our interviewees faced (with 11 years of homelessness reported on average) resulted from the identities, behaviors, and habits that they likely developed after spending significant periods of time without access to stable housing. For FUSE clients, their experiences transitioning into an apartment, and their occasional difficulty adjusting to the minutia of living in an apartment, are related to the length of time they spent homeless and the types of “street” experiences they had to learn to endure. More specifically, clients discussed that living on the streets results in a particular type of social disposition and personal rhythm that is at times incongruent with the dynamics of apartment-living. For example, Charlie shares how he sometimes struggles to cope with “the quiet” of living mostly indoors and without the constant companionship of others:

“Most people are not addicted to what they were doing when they were on the streets. They are addicted to the chaos that comes with what they were doing. And I was. Every now and then, I still get addicted to the chaos that comes with that. Cause if it’s too quiet, if it’s too quiet for me, I go outdoors. I’m going to visit somebody because I’m so used to being around people, so when I’m in my apartment by myself I feel like the walls are closing in on me. Somebody needs to come visit me. I have a friend, and she’s been helping me with that. She’s says I can live on my own. I’m like, I don’t know. I have to work on that one. I’ve been working on that. It’s still a work in progress.”

At another point in the interview, Charlie relates how being homeless for so long made it difficult for him to comprehend that his apartment actually belonged to him:

“I was living on the street for eight years. It’s difficult to figure out, okay, I finally have my own. Are they actually going to help me get my own? It was kind of like a young guy getting his own first crib. Never had my own. Never knew what it felt like. When I first got this one, I didn’t stay in here for the first week and a half because I still wasn’t sure it was my own. Even though this is my second one. I still wasn’t sure it was my own. It’s just me. It just takes me awhile.”

Everything from dealing with quiet and solitude to establishing regular sleeping hours can be a challenge for an individual who has spend lengthy periods of time homeless, and these things can negatively impact the process of adjustment to stable housing. Harry told us about his problems with sleeping and restlessness:

“A lot of times people don’t understand that, to mainstream America, being homeless is a dysfunctional type of existence... Well, I’m here to tell you that there is a definite functionality to being homeless, but that functionality is not in congruence with mainstream America... And so, a lot of people struggle with moving from being a functional dysfunctional to a functional functional... I have not been able to break the cycle of being able to sleep past 4:30, 5:00 [AM]. I mean, after extended time in the shelter, you are up every morning... And so, that in itself, learning to get the proper sleep and get that sleep cycle, is a real hard thing... There are times when I’ll just get up, and I’m not very far from Lake X. I’ll just walk down there and spend a couple of hours down at the lake or something, because when you’re homeless you’re out and about every day. Every day. At 6 AM in the morning. Wind, sun, or sleet. Whatever. You’re out there on that concrete... And so, I don’t see enough of an effort to find people the employment. But then again, that’s a broader problem.”

Drug Use and Drug Dealing:

Drug use was a major thread running through clients' past biographies and their current struggles as they adjusted to independent living in the FUSE program. Many of the clients we interviewed had been incarcerated for a drug offense, and all of them spoke of drugs as a common feature of their lives on the street. While none of the housed clients we interviewed had been rearrested for any drug-related charge at the time of the interview, five of the six clients interviewed in the ACF who subsequently lost contact with the program reported that they were dealing with severe levels of drug abuse. Of the 17 FUSE participants interviewed to date, all but two of them stated that their past or current drug use had been a problem for them. These two clients admitted to using drugs or alcohol regularly, but did not perceive their use as a problem. For many clients, involvement with drugs was a contributing factor in the chain of events that led to their extended homelessness.

Five clients stated that they were heavily involved in selling drugs prior to their enrollment in FUSE, and that it constituted their main source of income. These clients were especially concerned with building alternative employment options in the legal labor market as post-housing goals, and stressed the importance of avoiding their old neighborhoods and networks, for fear of getting pulled back into the drug trade. When asked if he was worried about running into old friends he used to use with and sell drugs to, Daron, a 37 year old black male who spent 8 years homeless, said:

"I do all the time, pretty much every day... It has been hard so far. You know how easy it is for me to start back up doing that again? It's just not that hard. If I wanted to go back to that, I could've been back there right now. So, my family has been helping me, you know. Eventually, I'll get everything in order. A job. You know, get my place together and hopefully get a stable relationship with a woman. You know, stuff like that. That's what I say when I say normal. Just, what normal people do... By me being with [my daughter] every day, it keeps me off the street all day and from doing negative stuff. Yeah, there is a lot of other stuff that I could be doing.... I'm used to getting quick money and you know... Now that I'm not doing that anymore I see what it's like to struggle. That's why I'm trying to get GA and all this and you know whatever. But yea, I'm just trying to straighten up the mess that I made so far."

As Daron's example illustrates, some clients who sold drugs when they were homeless now face difficulties entering the legal labor market to establish economic independence, and thus have incentives to return to drug sales, putting them at risk for re-offense and loss of housing. Pro-criminal social networks and high levels of drug sales and consumption are often present in the same areas where many FUSE clients spent most of their time when they were homeless, and consequently feel most comfortable. These factors may compound the difficulty of avoiding a return to using or dealing drugs.

Success in Supportive Housing:

The individuals we interviewed primarily addressed three aspects of the FUSE housing program as being very beneficial to them: its potential to end the cycle of homelessness and

incarceration, its profound effect on their ability to make important life changes, and the vital support provided by close staff-client relationships and dedicated advocacy work.

Decreased Involvement in the Criminal Justice System

Although they did not define it as a common post-housing goal, the clients we interviewed almost unanimously reported that they believed being in the FUSE program either would or had reduced their contact with law enforcement, and hence, their likelihood of re-offense or re-arrest. Consistent with the preliminary quantitative results, many clients interviewed felt that stable housing was the key to their own criminal desistance.

Sammy describes the predicament of being homeless and vulnerable to run-ins with law enforcement, which can often result in arrest and incarceration:

“Then I thought, I got to get away from down there [downtown Minneapolis], because that’s where I always get in trouble is down there...They got signs all around that say no trespassing, you can’t sand nowhere, and then you walk around down Hennepin and stuff like that and they’ve got police and sheriffs walking along down there, just messing with people for nothing. And they know all the homeless people because, well, they just know them. They’ve been down there year after year. So they know everybody that’s homeless, so they see you. They already know you’re not able to dress like the rest of the people, you know. So they know what’s going on, all the cops. And you walk, because you can’t stand down around there where you live, you’re walking around and then it’s even worse, so it’s a mess. You’re like, man, what can I do? You know, so I’m like I’m getting tired of this, coming to jail for trespassing and all these little bitty charges. Then nowadays, you get so many trespassing charges that they turn into a felony.”

Charlie elaborates the problematic cycle of homelessness and incarceration with this description:

“I mean there are some places that won’t even allow a shelter to be open. Why wouldn’t you allow a shelter to be open? It beats having thousands of people locked up for stuff that they didn’t have to do. If they had houses, they would be living in the houses. I have friends that actually have skills that can’t find houses because they’ve entwined themselves in the system so much. In order for them to find places, they’ve got to go to slum landlords to get a place... If a person had somewhere to go and keep them out of trouble, they wouldn’t be having three, four, five felonies. It would stop a lot of this madness... That’s where most of us end up with the headaches we end up with, because we ain’t got nothing better to do. So we say, ‘It’s cold outside, damn it.’ We’ll break into this house and we’ve got somewhere warm to sleep for the night, or for the next week, or for the next two weeks. If we get arrested, we go find another one. We just do the same shit. I’ve done it.”

Keith, a 40 year old black male who spent 6 years homeless, explains how he believes FUSE housing will keep him from re-offending:

“I don’t think I’ll be rearrested if I’m doing something positive and staying away from the negative. I won’t even have to be around that, so I think I can go without being rearrested... Basically, it [housing] will keep me off the street and help me to have a place I can go, where I can turn the key and go in myself. And I don’t have to run from place to place to place, neighborhood to neighborhood, constantly running

into the police and getting involved in police contact. That's tiresome to me. So that's why I really think it'll help me do what I gotta do.

I: Do you think most of your offenses when you were homeless happened because you were on the streets?

Keith: Yeah, mostly yes. Most of the trespassing and the loitering. That's where most of them came from. Just bumping into the police. Being in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Larry, a 44 year old black male, who was homeless for a decade and had over 25 jail and ACF admits from 2002-2007, explains how he has been able to avoid re-arrest and remain stably housed for nearly 6 months:

"I: Do you feel like having housing through FUSE helps you stay out of jail?

Larry: Yeah, it does. It keeps me off the streets. Being homeless, not having a house or somewhere stable to go or something like that, you're going to be out there on the streets. You're going to hang out with the wrong people, doing drugs or trying to sell drugs or something like that because you ain't got nothing to do all day. And if you ain't got a job, it's rough out there, especially being homeless... You're going to run the streets and then it's easy to get in trouble and hard to get out.

I: So do you think housing is the key for you that can help you avoid going back to jail?

R: One hundred percent to me it is. I mean, yes. Yeah, I know it changed my life. I know it probably could change a lot of others too, you know. They wouldn't be in the predicament they happen to be in. Being homeless makes you do a lot of, you know, bad things in life."

Because it has the potential to remove them from zones of police visibility and exposure to the "quality of life" crimes that many homeless individuals are targeted for, FUSE clients believe that their stable housing is a necessary component in breaking their cycles of homelessness and incarceration.

The Role of Supportive Housing in Life Change

These interviews were a window into the role supportive housing has to play in major life change. Many clients expressed that they believe access to housing is the key to transforming their life trajectory. Generally, the housed clients we interviewed report being very satisfied with their new housing, and they see stable housing as the first step in working toward other life goals. Daron shares how access to stable housing is absolutely necessary for him to establish a stable employment pattern:

"I thought about going and taking some classes for carpentry, but you know it's hard to do things like that if you're homeless. There are a lot of things that I really didn't value when I did have housing. When I became homeless, there were just little things that I couldn't do, like going to school, you know what I mean, because I never knew where I was going to be from one night to the next. Even working, you know, I never know if I'm going to be on this side of town or St. Paul so how can I keep a job if I don't know where I'm gonna be from one night to the next?"

When asked how his new apartment is helping him, Charlie expressed the convenience and peace of mind he experiences now that he can avoid negative situations by retreating to his own home:

“It’s keeping me at bay. It’s making me happy. Even though it’s far out. It’s practically in the suburbs. But I chose to come way the hell out here so I would really see who my friends were... At least, I’ll put it this way. I can get into an argument with a friend or an associate. I can leave their house. I can go home. I can wave my keys and go, ‘See, you can kick me out all day long, I can still go home.’ I look forward to that, every time I go out. When they get stupid I say, ‘Oh ok, I’ll see you later.’ I go jump on the bus. Or ride that old convenient bike.”

Harry related how homelessness is a tiring process, and that stable housing provides much needed relief from exhausting daily life on the streets:

“Homelessness keeps you dead tired all the time. So, you are really working on a whole lot of adrenaline. I mean, there are times when you really just don’t want to move, but being homeless you really have no choice. This city is designed so that no matter where you go, you can’t even go into a public park and have a seat because I guarantee you if you’re homeless that the police will come and tell you you’ve got to move around. There’s no place in this city that a person can go. And that’s another thing that keeps you homeless. People don’t understand that you must keep some type of money being homeless. You have to. Because everywhere you go, you are required to spend money. Even if you want to sit down, you have to go to Starbucks and get a cup of coffee. That’s how you’re going to get your seat. I mean there is absolutely nothing that you can do for you to have an hour to sit down and just relax.”

Staff-Client Relationships

Clients were generally very satisfied with their interactions with the FUSE staff, in particular their housing specialists. Many clients admitted that while they were initially suspicious or untrusting of the promises made by the FUSE program to provide stable housing, they were “won over” in the early stages of contact with their housing specialist. Many were impressed by the dedication of the staff and their willingness to work closely with clients and be attentive to their individual needs. The dedicated advocacy work done by staff to assist clients in their transition to stable housing is an important element of FUSE clients’ success stories.

Getting started in FUSE is a crucial phase of the program, as is demonstrated by the fact that 6 of the 12 clients we interviewed in the ACF dropped out of the program in the recruitment phase, after release from the ACF. While the preliminary quantitative results indicate that the program is so far successful in penetrating the target population and in meeting the goal for successful housing placements, the qualitative interviews can provide some evidence to bear on the role of program implementation and staff-client relations in these issues. Interviews indicate that the strength of relationships between staff and clients may be an important predictor of clients’ commitment to the program. When they hear about FUSE initially, clients often regard the program with a mixture of excitement, distrust, and disbelief. They are often highly excited at the prospect of finally getting some “real help” with their housing situation,

but have usually also fostered a deep distrust of service programs, as their past interactions with state institutions have often left much to be desired. Randy expressed his initial distrust of service professionals, but indicates that his relationship with a FUSE housing specialist earned his respect and commitment to the program:

“I just thought they were just going through the motions or trying to do things so they could get their little funding and they didn’t really care about people and their situations. But it’s obvious they do, because while I was in the workhouse, my case worker Kenneth came to see me a couple times and he always kept in contact with me, and we always came up with a game plan and he followed through. Everything he said, he did. You know, so I respect that.”

Daron stated he thought FUSE stood out from other housing support programs because it “delivered on its promise” of providing housing:

I: So what did you think when they first told you about the program?

Daron: I thought it was cool, but I thought they were going to sign me up and then I’d never see them again... I’d been to a couple places like that, a couple programs like that. I found out two, three months later that I could have had a crib and missed my chances because there wasn’t no follow up.

I: Do you ever feel like these programs offer more than they can deliver?

Daron: Yeah, but not FUSE. I mean, they delivered on the housing. They promised the housing and they delivered on that. But most of these places, yeah. According to what I just stated.”

Finally, Charlie talks about how the dedication of the FUSE staff impressed him:

“It [FUSE] made me a happy human... What works is the simple fact that they actually cared. They give a shit. They give a shit about their clients. Whether the client is locked up again for being dumb, they still care about him. They want to know how they’re doing. They want to know how their health is doing, all that stuff... So, it’s been wonderful in those aspects. Because, the group of people that work the FUSE program are a bunch of special folks. Most of them have worked in the homeless population so they know how homeless folks react to a lot of things. So they’re able to deal with it a lot better than somebody coming from Minnetonka, coming from a mansion to deal with a guy who sleeps on a six by four mat. The feeling is not there. And that’s one thing-- I don’t know if it’s social work or human services-- but if you don’t have the heart for people, it don’t, it just, you don’t enjoy it as much. You want to leave the job quick. I mean I have friends in other programs and they tell me, they say, ‘Dang, your case worker comes to see you every other weekend!’ and I say, ‘Yeah, when does yours come?’ He says, ‘I’m lucky if I can get him to come over once a month.’ Or they just barge in and figure ‘Oh, he’s our client, we can go over there whenever we want. We don’t even have to call him.’ My case worker calls me and he says he’s coming over here... But a lot of people don’t do that.”

Summary of Preliminary Qualitative Data

These interviews have illuminated some of the core aspects of experience, struggle, and success for FUSE clients. Clients see their housing progress as fundamentally connected to their growth in other domains of life—employment, education, child support, and self sufficiency rank among the top concerns that these individuals address once they are placed into housing. Interestingly, all of the individuals we spoke with were extremely goal-oriented and saw

housing as an avenue to other pursuits, not just an end in itself. Moreover, many of the common obstacles encountered in the transition to housing—old networks and neighborhoods, a lack of community support systems, the remnants of a homeless identity, and involvement with drugs—could be countered through the development of viable employment opportunities or meaningful community relationships. Despite these enduring issues, FUSE clients had many successes to report. They attributed their ability to avoid the criminal justice system to their placement in stable housing. They were able to pursue stable employment and desired educational goals with the necessary housing supports. They experienced relief from the chaotic, tiresome, and often dehumanizing aspects of living on the streets for extended periods of time. These successes were made possible in part through the dedicated advocacy work of staff and the close relationships fostered between housing specialist and client. In the coming months, we hope to document more fully these trends and other key aspects of the transition to stable housing.
