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New report: State program keeps Worcester county families housed, saves commonwealth millions every year

RCAP Solutions praises the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition program

Nov. 22, 2016 (Worcester) – This past year, the state’s largest family homelessness prevention program kept 300 families out of emergency shelter, and in doing so saved Massachusetts \$10.3 million.

A report released this week, called “RAFT 2015-2016: Residential Assistance for Families in Transition in Worcester County,” takes a look at RAFT and how it helped families in Worcester County in fiscal 2015 and 2016. The report – from the Regional Housing Network of Massachusetts and RCAP Solutions – shows the value of the program, not only in how many families are diverted from emergency shelter every year but also in the economic savings for the commonwealth.

The Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program helps families with very low and extremely low incomes who are on the verge of becoming homeless. The majority of these clients are women in their 30s with two children, the report shows.

“My life was collapsing slowly, I had no hope,” said Tracy, an RCAP Solutions RAFT client. “I couldn’t imagine doing it on my own. [Now] my children and I are in a happy place. We are thankful for RCAP Solutions - they have helped my family and me tremendously. With everything, they gave me hope; they gave me the strength to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Thanks to the RAFT program my family is complete and we were given a second chance of being happy, reunited. We are complete.”

RAFT clients – who apply for help at RCAP Solutions or one of 10 other housing agencies statewide – can receive up to \$4,000 annually to help stave off homelessness. Although they can use the aid from year to year, most do not: less than one percent of RAFT users (only two out of 300 clients), in 2016 had received aid the year prior, demonstrating how effective RAFT is at keeping people housed.

After deemed eligible, families use the flexible RAFT benefits to stay stably housed, by helping to pay for housing needs such as back rent, utility bills, child care, start-up rental expenses, moving costs and more.

“RAFT is vitally important in helping families in danger of losing their homes,” stated Karen A. Koller, President & CEO of RCAP Solutions. “This report shows that it is dramatically less expensive to help families maintain their housing and to avoid the emergency shelter system once a family becomes homeless. RAFT is critical in helping families remain in safe, affordable housing and as a result, experiencing fewer traumas and retaining their dignity.”

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If RAFT were not available, the state could expect to pay \$36,855 a year to keep a family sheltered for an average stay of 10 and a half months; in 2016 in the RCAP Solutions service area, it would've cost the commonwealth \$11,056,500. RAFT aid payments only cost \$800,707 by comparison.

For more information, contact Maegen McCaffrey, Chief Communications Officer at 617.974.2579 or mmccaffrey@rcapsolutions.org.

About RCAP Solutions, Inc.

RCAP Solutions has been helping people throughout central Massachusetts with a wide range of housing and supportive services since 1969. Our mission is to foster personal and public self-reliance and improve the quality of life for individuals, families and the communities in which they live. RCAP Solutions is the Worcester County affiliate of The Regional Housing Network of Massachusetts and the Northeast affiliate to the national RCAP (Rural Community Assistance Partnership) Network. For more information, please visit www.rcapsolutions.org.

About The Regional Housing Network of Massachusetts

The Regional Housing Network of Massachusetts has worked on a regional level to address the needs of constituents for 38 years. Network members – Berkshire Housing Development Corporation, Community Teamwork Inc., Franklin County Housing and Redevelopment Authority, HAPHousing, Housing Assistance Corporation, Housing Solutions for Southeastern Massachusetts, Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership Inc., RCAP Solutions Inc. and South Middlesex Opportunity Council Inc. – cover the commonwealth and are available to all 351 cities and towns for assistance with housing development, management and policy setting. All of this is in addition to the network's core work of implementing and managing innovative and traditional housing programs designed to assist people of all income levels. Learn more at www.regionalhousing.net.

To learn more about the statewide RAFT program or to receive a copy of the Regional Housing Network's companion report, "Raft in Massachusetts 2015-2016: A survey of the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition program," contact the RHN at pbymes@regionalhousing.net.

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