Income Now Initiative Handbook

System Overview:
Income Now, as an initiative of The Way Home CoC, will enroll at least 1,042 men and women who are currently homeless in employment services and ensure that 521 (50%) or more obtain regular employment. Of those employed, 50% (261) will remain with the same employer for a minimum of 30 days and receive wages at or above 125 percent of federal poverty income guidelines. The CoC Lead Agency (The Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County) will lead the coordination of efforts with our 100+ housing, services and employment partner agencies to guarantee an employment or income plan for every homeless household assessed through the Coordinated Access System. Those households for whom Coordinated Access matches with non-specialized employment will be incorporated into this program.

The population targeted for services in this initiative is those who have been assessed through The Way Home Continuum of Care (CoC) Coordinated Access system and matched with a housing plan of Rapid Re-Housing. The Rapid Re-Housing intervention targets families and individuals who are able to work. Many are recently homeless and can quickly return to work with minimal support. Like the Rapid Re-Housing population in general, the target population is primarily single (but does include families) without a long history of homelessness. The Way Home CoC Coordinated Access System assesses all homeless households/individuals at designated access points (Coordinated Access Hubs) that are strategically placed throughout the geographic region. These hubs are designed to be easily moved in order to adapt to the location trends of our homeless population. Every household that is matched with the Rapid Re-Housing intervention will also be matched with this initiative (services to support access to mainstream competitive employment).
Recognizing the Need:
In October 2014 The Way Home CoC was invited to Washington D.C. to participate in a Housing and Employment Summit at the Department of Labor and in March 2015 we were invited to D.C. to participate in intensive coaching with the Heartland Alliance’s Connections Initiative between employment and homeless systems. Our Workforce Investment Board (WIB) Director and CoC Leadership recognized that there is a disconnect between individuals being referred to employment services and those individuals actually obtaining employment. This disconnect is reflected in the ways below:

1. The mainstream workforce offices are high volume and successful at assisting people in securing employment, however, the homeless population requires a more intense service than is currently offered.
2. Not only does this population require more intense case management, but also needs additional resources to match their needs than can be provided at mainstream workforce offices. These resources include training, food and transportation, clothing, coordination with housing case management and follow-up supports.
3. Homeless Service Providers do not have direct access to the robust network of employers that a mainstream workforce office does.

This initiative will eliminate these barriers by providing Employment Counselor staff in designated High Demand Workforce Solutions offices throughout The Way Home CoC area. Additionally, Employment Counselors will staff satellite Workforce Solutions offices embedded in Coordinated Access Hubs. These satellite offices become the bridge from the Homeless Response System to our community’s mainstream workforce development provider, Workforce Solutions. The Income Now Initiative will also fund System Navigators who will act as a liaison between the Income Now Initiative and the already established Workforce Solutions system to properly support the Employment Counselors in assisting higher need populations to gain employment.

Upon enrollment the Employment Counselor documents work history, skills and the participant’s own perceived needs; Job Search/Placement Assessment. The client’s skills and experience are compared to the skill set requirements of a desired in-demand employer in agreement with the Income Now Initiative. In the case where additional skill development is necessary to secure employment, the Employment Counselor and participant select trainings or certifications that will quickly upgrade the client’s marketable skill base to help them obtain employment. Additionally, they assess need for other resources, such as transportation assistance, clothing, work tools, housing, food, hygiene items, etc. Income Now staff work with employment candidates to ensure their success in the workforce. All of the resources available through the Workforce Solution offices will be employed as well as the additional supports available through this program. Transportation assistance through Metro bus fare will be provided for candidates to interview and begin work, initial work tools, safety equipment and uniforms, and access food and clothing. Employment Counselors assist in accessing other mainstream resources,
such as TANF or SNAP. They coordinate with the client’s rapid re-housing case manager if applicable. Once employed Employment Counselors and System Navigators will continue to provide limited non-cash assistance for a short period of time in the form of bus tokens and food vouchers during the follow-up period. No cash assistance is provided to participants. All support services are entered into the HMIS system on a daily basis by the Income Now staff.

Participants will be tracked with the use of data management systems including the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), Work Number, and/or TWIST. Clients will participate in regular follow up interactions with Employment Counselors with regular contact at the beginning of their employment and throughout participation in job retention activities to ensure that any potential concerns are addressed before resulting in a loss of employment. The vendor(s) will cultivate relationships with employers and assist the Income Now Initiative obtain a commitment from a minimum of 100 employers to consider hiring participants. Clients will be encouraged to submit paycheck stubs at 30, 60, and 90 day milestones. TWIST reports and Work Number data will also be used as external verification.

**Income Now Roles**

Texas Workforce Commission has funded 17 Income Now roles for the system beginning November 1, 2015 through October 31, 2016. The Way Home idealizes the roles being fulfilled with fourteen (14) FTE Employment Counselors and three (3) FTE System Navigators. The qualifications for these positions are bachelors or equivalent experience required. Income Now partners can bid for any number of positions, as The Way Home hopes to see a collaboration of agencies and partners to reach our outcomes and ultimately support those clients in our system with income solutions.

**Employment Counselors:** As a partner in our community, fourteen (14) Employment Counselors will be placed on-site at a number of locations. There will be three (3) Employment Counselors placed at three of our High Demand Workforce Solutions Offices (Northline, East End and Westheimer) and the remaining eleven (11) Employment Counselors placed in Workforce Solutions Satellite Offices embedded in 3-5 Coordinated Access Hub locations. Employment Counselors will assess clients for initiative eligibility; enroll in an income solution in HMIS and follow-through with document collection. Employment Counselors will assist with administering Supportive Services including, but not limited to; transportation assistance, work supplies, and training. The primary responsibility of Employment Counselors is to engage in any and all activities that support participants in securing and maintaining income. These activities include but are not limited to:

- Resume Writing
- Mock Interviewing
- Job Searching
- Application Support & Assistance
- Job Matching
Training/Certification Matching
• Support Development of Soft Skills
• Conflict Resolution
• Communication
• Discussing Criminal Backgrounds

System Navigators: The Income Now Initiative plans for three (3) FTE System Navigators as a mobile resource for this initiative between nine (9) Houston Area Workforce Solutions Offices. As an integral part in this Income Now Initiative, System Navigators will act as a liaison between the two systems, the Workforce Solutions System and the Homeless Response System, both of which bring different employment strengths to the Income Now Initiative. The System Navigator’s primary responsibility is to aide in system transformation by driving the culture shift within the Workforce Solutions system to more effectively serve those customers with more significant barriers to securing employment. To achieve this outcome System Navigator activities include but are not limited to:

• Facilitating networking activities for the staff within the 2 systems
• Provide/Facilitate/Host Cultural Competency trainings for Workforce Solutions staff
• Manage referrals to CA for Housing and from Satellite Offices to WFS Offices
  o Communication Oversight
• Communicate all hiring events to satellite offices

Supportive Services
The Income Now Initiative recognizes that in order for this population to overcome the hurdles to be successfully employed in our community, the system must support them with more wrap-around services. These services are vital to achieve success and can range from Transportation Assistance, Work Supplies, Training and Incentives. Income Now staff work with employment candidates to ensure their success in the workforce. All of the resources available through the Workforce Solution offices will be employed as well as the additional supports available through this Initiative.

Transportation Assistance: The Income Now Initiative is expecting to deliver direct transportation assistance to 890 clients based on need determined from the income assessment. It is expected that the average assist per client will be approximately $265.00 for the purchase or metro passes or other necessary transportation assistance. Transportation assistance will also include service linkage and connection with leveraged main stream transportation services.
**Work Supplies:** The Income Now Initiative is expecting to deliver direct supportive services work supplies assistance to a minimum of 670 clients based on need determined from the income assessment. Work supplies assistance will also include service linkage and connection with leveraged main stream resources and maybe offered in connection with supportive services training or job placement. All support services are entered into the HMIS system on a daily basis by the income now staff.

**Training Services:** The Income Now Initiative is expecting to deliver direct training assistance to a minimum of 670 clients based on need determined from the income assessment. Training Services will also include service linkage and connection with leveraged main stream training and education services offered by community partners.