

IN SUPPORT OF THE GOVERNOR'S EXECUTIVE ORDER 12D

Good day, my name is Destiny De Jesus and I am a bilingual homeless prevention case worker at New Reach Inc. Currently I oversee New Haven county and receive my referrals for clientele through Unite CT; though not the only way to retrieve new client referrals it is the primary one. As a caseworker my caseload can be anywhere from 15-30 households' sizes of the households varying client to client. The goal of the homeless prevention program is simple, eviction prevention/ homeless prevention for those in dire need of assistance through case management services. However, when I am working with my clients, the goal is not only to stabilize their housing but stabilize themselves and their households. This means I provide a numerous and an array of services, jack of all trades and master of some if you will. These services include child care services (surrounding actual care, financial supports, and mental health services through the collaboration with Clifford Beers and CT Cares 4 Kids), mental health support (referrals to clinicians, assistance with completing both SSI & SSDI applications, facilitating in home supports via med nurse), employment services (assistance in searching for employment, referrals to outside agencies for continued assistance, referrals to credit repair programs, assistance in filing documentation needed to expunged criminal background records,etc.), increase in overall household support (applying to government supporting programs such as SNAP, TANF, SAGA cash, Medicaid/Medicare, etc.), connections to legal aid services (specifically New Haven legal aid), mediation services (mediating family quarrels, landlord and tenant disputes, assistance in completing roommate agreements, etc.), utility assistance (through Unite CT, Homeless prevention program, and the Community Action Agency of New Haven), immigration services (through connections with IRIS to begin the process of obtaining permanent residency, green card renewal applications and housing

assistance) and of course housing stabilization (through relocation utilizing the funding of Unite CT, the homeless prevention program, CASTLE program, or mediation techniques utilized to keep the client housed in their current properties). I tell you all of this to stress the gravity and the need for more support services not only for our staff who have been assisting these clients through this ever-changing pandemic, but to make sure we are doing the best we can for the people that we serve.

This program began at the end of the 2020 year and since has changed protocols and programming to fit the needs of the population and individuals we serve through these trying times of the pandemic and the unforeseen needs that our clients are presenting. Ideally, we hope to see clients enrolled in the program for up to 6 months in order to see successful completion, however, on average our clients are enrolled for a total of 8 months before being successfully discharged (successfully discharge being defined as eviction/homelessness has been prevented, and the client's identified service needs have been met) due to the gravity of these needs. Being that this program has been in effect for a little over a year we have seen many successes and many not to successful. Before their being Unite CT, a client could qualify for rental assistance through HPP and could receive up to \$8,000 (not guaranteed that the total amount would be received), a percentage of which was awarded to the rental arrears and the remainder to prospective rent if qualified. With the emergence of Unite CT, and the assistance of the moratorium, we saw an increase in the housing stabilization of the client's being served. Landlords were more inclined to complete the rental assistance application with Unite CT vs that with HPP being that Unite CT required far less paperwork, and at the time was processing financial service request at a higher pace then HPP. In addition, the moratorium allowed for more room for mediation efforts; with landlord's inability to evict and the client's ability to attempt to resume good payments in faith upon securing employment, plus the added factor that a case manger would be present to mitigate and support issues for both parties we saw more positive changes in landlord to tenant relations and were able to keep our client's housed within their units avoiding relocation all together. However, then came the shift of the moratorium coming to an end.

Once the moratorium came to an end, and landlord's discovered that they could not proceed to evict a client in court without applying to Unite CT first, in addition to gradual halt of Unite CT

representatives ability to process these applications as fast as they were coming in, landlord's began to apply to Unite CT just to proceed with the eviction in court and began pulling their applications (or being unwilling to continue with the Unite CT application process) in order to be able to do so. Decreasing a case worker's ability to keep the client housed in their current unit/mediate any quarrels between the landlord and tenant. Keeping in mind that the effects of the pandemic have turned the housing market in favor of the landlords, disqualifying any new potential tenants due to the need to show proof of 3 times the rental price of any unit, having a clean tenancy record (not one with ANY evictions infringements), and being able to provide proof of a good credit score. During this time many outside agency fundings were also paused for review specifically within New Haven County (a county statistically showing one of the greater increases in the homeless population) those including the community action agency of New Haven, the CASTLE program, and the homeless prevention program, so much so that agencies like Clifford Beer were even beginning to assist some clients with at least one month worth of their rent. That in accordance with the upcoming pause that Unite CT will be initiating on the 15th of this month will be a detriment to the efforts of case workers not only within New Haven County but throughout Connecticut to prevent homelessness from increasing and keep our clients housed.

With this in mind I ask you our state legislative elects to first continue to fund and support the efforts of Unite CT, second to halt or pause the evictions proceedings within various courts to allow Unite CT time to process the applications they currently have pending, and to increase the funding to agencies like my own so we can not only pay case managers for the work that is being invested outside of normal office hours to stabilize our clients housing but to increase our overall staff size as well, to be able to assist more families. Housing relocation search for just one client (which is equal to one household again sizes varying from client to client) can take anywhere between 1-2 hours of the workday, and this doesn't factor in all the other support and services needing to be implicated so that they can resume independent living and be able to resume on time rent payments. Now imagine this for one case worker for thirty clients/thirty households, all during a time where a new variant of the pandemic has presented itself, a little over a third of the state remains unvaccinated, agencies throughout the state are experiencing budget cuts, and Unite CT is pausing its acceptance to applications come the 15th of this

month. If we do not get ahead of the eviction proceedings now, we will have undone all the progress that has been made since the end of 2020 and our number for those homeless in the state will see a drastic increase. If those requests cannot be made, then I will strongly encourage the consideration of refunding the states DSS program for security deposits. This alone could be the difference in someone obtaining new housing and someone becoming homeless. I thank you all for your time in hearing my experience as a case worker starting this position in a new program at the beginning of the pandemic, and where I have since been led.

SINCERELY,

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