



UConn

CT DCF

The Connection, Inc. (TCI)

University of Connecticut, Department of Human Development & Family Studies

### **INTENSIVE SUPPORTIVE HOUSING FOR FAMILIES (ISHF) PROJECT**

The CT DCF currently has a federal (Administration on Children and Families, ACF) grant that funds an Intensive Supportive Housing for Families (ISHF) project. The new program is in addition to the existing SHF program you are familiar with.

#### **What is ISHF? How is it different from the usual supportive housing at TCI (SHF)?**

ISHF is very similar to SHF...but it has more intensive case management, systematic access to some clinical services (evidence based interventions), vocational services, and a few other differences. A federal grant supports those more intensive services and it requires us to study whether the intensity makes a difference in how clients do over time.

#### **What is random assignment and why is it being used?**

Random assignment is like a lottery or raffle in which every client has an equal chance of being chosen. In this case there are three groups that clients can be selected for:

- (1) The new, more intensive supportive housing intervention called ISHF,
- (2) Prompt access to the existing SHF program; and
- (3) Business as usual, where clients are referred to TCI and placed on a waitlist...this is how referrals currently happen.

Imagine a set of dice that have only the numbers 1, 2, and 3. Every time a new, eligible client comes in, we roll a die and one of those numbers comes up. The client is then assigned to the version of the program that corresponds to that number. It's completely up to chance and no one can influence where the client "lands." It's random.

#### ***Why randomize? Four reasons.***

**#1: It's fair.** Every client has an equal chance of getting into each of the options. The "least attractive" option is exactly what has been available for about the last 10 years: a waitlist for ISHF. In other words, the grant provides new resources, additional capacity, prompt voucher access, and enhanced services. Without the grant, all clients would stay in the current business as usual condition. With the grant, a number of clients will experience the ISHF program and another set will have priority access to the existing SHF program. So, the grant provides 1 out of every 3 clients with the ISHF experience, 1 out of 3 with faster access to SHF, and 1 out of 3 will experience a referral plus waitlist.

#### **#2: It's the only way we can evaluate the effects of supportive housing and intensive supportive housing.**

At this point we don't know whether ISHF will produce better family outcomes than regular SHF! We think it will, but we cannot say for sure unless we randomize assignment. Randomizing is an objective way to enable a small number of clients to experience the new ISHF model. If we leave program assignment to choice, social worker preference, or some other method, we will never know if the client's outcomes were due to the program, those factors, or some others. With random assignment, we learn whether clients do better in ISHF than in SHF and which program is a better match to family needs. Randomizing allots equal numbers of clients to the three groups without bias. Every family is equally deserving and randomizing removes any chance of preferential treatment.



**#3: It helps us make a case for supportive housing!** Randomized studies are the only way to scientifically tell whether one intervention is better than another. By randomizing, we will know which program works best for clients with various strengths and problems. This will inform future interventions and might influence policy so that, for example, more housing vouchers might be made available or services are matched to families. There are four other child welfare-supportive housing projects. Along with these other projects, Connecticut is in a position to help shape housing and child welfare policy for decades to come!

**#4: Our funding depends on it.** The federal grant that supports this project requires us to randomize. All five sites that are funded by ACF are using random assignment.

### **What happened to the existing SHF program?**

The regular SHF program still exists! Now there are TWO ways to enter:

- (1) TCI – SHF (existing access route, existing service): The first way is exactly as it has always been...through a waitlist. Everyone who was on the waitlist is *still* on the waitlist and we are doing our best to get them into the program – as always.
- (2) Project – SHF (new access route, existing service): The second way is through the ACF grant project that serves the most “needy” families, that is, those who have the most serious housing and child welfare needs.

### **How will this affect DCF clients?**

This project makes available new resources for certain DCF clients with housing concerns and very high service needs. Once DCF refers clients to TCI, all clients who are eligible for housing vouchers also will be screened for project eligibility. Clients who are eligible will be among the most “needy” cases. Once determined eligible, they will be randomly assigned to (1) ISHF, (2) SHF or (3) the current waitlist. Clients who have housing and child welfare problems but do *not* meet project eligibility will go on the waitlist, as per the usual course of business.

### **What’s the bottom line? Refer, refer, refer!**

Any time housing is or is likely to be a challenge for a family, DCF social workers should refer those families to TCI using the new referral form. Families are screened carefully at TCI using the information from DCF. Some families will be eligible for the ACF project; others will not. DCF workers don’t need to worry about that part...make the referral and TCI will do the rest.

### **How many families will be affected?**

The ISHF project has three case managers at TCI. Once their caseloads are full, they will stop taking new families until a new slot opens up. We expect to serve about 21 families in ISHF in the first year of the project and at least 50 across the next few years – and more if there are more vouchers available.

Please be patient as this project gets underway! If you have questions, contact XXXXXXXXXX.

**This demonstration project is a crucial part of building a strong scientific case for what works in child welfare and housing. You have an important role in the integrity of this process, which may determine child welfare policy and practice for years!**