

HENNEPIN-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP 2024

STREETS TO HOUSING

A Qualitative Evaluation and Summary Report

SONIA ROSE HARRIS, MPH



Image courtesy of Star Tribune May 2024

“(Streets to Housing Staff Member) just treated me like anybody else. I didn't feel like she was looking down upon me or anything like that. And I mean, she explained [the program] well enough. It just gives me an idea that there's something else out there, something I can be doing, something different.”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
I. INTRODUCTION	4
II. QUANTITATIVE BACKGROUND	6
<i>Data Analysis</i>	6
<i>Exit Destinations by Race/Ethnicity 2023</i>	6
<i>Exit Destinations by Year</i>	8
III. QUALITATIVE EVALUATION 2024	9
Methods	9
<i>Participants</i>	9
<i>Ethical Considerations</i>	10
Results	10
<i>Program Strengths</i>	11
<i>Areas of Growth</i>	15
IV. DISCUSSION	19
<i>Limitations</i>	20
V. RECOMMENDATIONS	21
TABLES	23
<i>Table 4. Program strengths themes and sub themes with example quotes</i>	23
<i>Table 5. Areas of growth themes and sub themes with example quotes</i>	25
APPENDICES	27
<i>Appendix A. Interview Protocol.</i>	27
<i>Appendix B. Informed Consent introduction</i>	29
REFERENCES	31

Executive Summary

Streets to Housing, which launched in August 2022, is Hennepin County's response to unsheltered homelessness. Streets to Housing provides trauma-informed, housing-focused services for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The program aims to reduce barriers to access housing and county-based programs and identify safe, appropriate alternatives to living outside. The program works with single adults as well as with youth and families throughout Hennepin County. Streets to Housing prioritizes providing suitable housing as quickly as possible, without preconditions.

This report provides an overview of the findings from a 12-month (2024) qualitative evaluation of the Streets to Housing program. This evaluation was conducted as part of the Hennepin-University Partnership, a collaboration between Hennepin County and the University of Minnesota. The evaluation also represents partnership with community members from Hennepin County Lived Experience Advisory Group to center perspectives of folks with lived experience of homelessness.

Quantitative data supplied by Hennepin County's Housing Management Information System were analyzed to provide contextual understanding of the program. The quantitative results presented in this report include client exit data across time periods and race demographic data for 2023. Across time periods, the most common exit destination for Streets to Housing clients is "stayer" and "lost to follow-up," suggesting a need to improve continued engagement with clients and consider timeliness of program. Regardless of race/ethnic identity, the most common exit destination for streets to housing clients was Lost to Follow-Up.

The majority of this report presents findings from the year-long qualitative evaluation. Interviews with staff and clients (n=22) were conducted to understand perspectives of Streets to Housing. Interviews were recorded, deidentified, and analyzed to identify themes and patterns in the data using a group coding process. Overall, participants' perspectives identified elements of Streets to Housing that contribute to program success and areas for continued growth. Identified strengths included leadership, work culture, system partnerships, humanizing approach, knowledge of the housing system, and community-based referrals. The areas for growth were categorized into two main sections: growth opportunities within the Streets to Housing program and broader system-level improvements.

This report recommends that Streets to Housing:

- Invest in mid-level and senior leaders to maintain and sustain staff involvement.
- Increase training to improve the accuracy of coordinated entry assessments and data input, ensuring greater equity in the program.
- Invest in relationships with other county programs in the homelessness and housing sector to clearly identify unique program goals.
- Increase transparency around Coordinated Entry Assessments
- Manage and consider ways to support continued client engagement with Streets to Housing.

I. Introduction

Streets to Housing

Hennepin County’s Streets to Housing program was started as a response to an increase in encampments and individuals living unsheltered in August 2022. The program states that it provides comprehensive, holistic programming including needs assessments, coordinated entry assessments, and housing-focused case management. The program’s goal is to assist individuals and households in identifying a safe, appropriate alternative to sleeping in places not meant for human habitation (*Streets to Housing*, n.d.). Built on the principle of “housing first” (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2022), Streets to Housing prioritizes providing suitable shelter as quickly as possible, without preconditions such as mandatory participation in treatment programs or achieving sobriety.

The Streets to Housing team provides housing-focused services as well as support in navigating the housing and benefits system (e.g. health insurance and SNAP). Streets to Housing staff conduct coordinated entry assessments to add clients to the housing priority list. When clients do not meet the requirements of coordinated entry, staff help to identify alternative routes for accessing housing. Streets to Housing also helps connect clients to appropriate support services tailored to their needs. These services include mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment, job training, and medical care. Staff meet clients at drop-in locations (libraires, churches, community centers), encampments, and other known locations where people are sleeping such as vehicles, abandoned buildings, and on transit.

Streets to Housing began operations in August 2022. The program currently has six System Navigators and one Opioid Use Disorder Specialist. Since its inception, Streets to Housing has exited over 1,000 people from the program. More information can be found in the quantitative section below.

Hennepin-University Partnership Assistantship

[Hennepin-University Partnership](#) is a jointly funded program between Hennepin County and the University of Minnesota. The Hennepin Evaluation Assistantship partners a graduate student with a Hennepin County program for a year-long evaluation project. In 2024, Sonia Harris, an MSW student, partnered with Streets to Housing to complete the evaluation.

Harris has over two years of experience in academic research and evaluation, a master’s degree in public health that concentrated in community-based research, and experience working with families across social service systems.

Positionality Statement

As a white, upper-middle class woman who grew up predominantly in suburban Bay Area California, my perspective and understanding of homelessness is shaped primarily through my social values and limited direct experience with the subject. My academic and professional experience in social work and public health has concentrated on social justice, advocacy, and social policy. While in academic settings, I have studied challenges faced by marginalized populations. My own identities and experiences still distance me from the lived realities of participants in this evaluation, in particular people of color, low-income individuals, and those experiencing homelessness. As an outsider to these communities— and as a newcomer to Hennepin County— I recognize the power dynamics at play throughout this evaluation. My position of relative societal privilege— and position as a representative from an academic institution— likely influenced the ways in which participants shared information with me. As such, I have committed to practicing reflexivity throughout the research process by consistently questioning how my biases and preconceptions could influence data collection, interpretation, and analysis. In addition, I enlisted partners in the evaluation process who had lived experience to

Partnership with Advisory Group with Lived Experience of Homelessness

To engage voices and perspectives of people with lived experience as much as possible, Harris partnered with members of the Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG). LEAG is a coalition of Hennepin County residents with lived experience of homelessness that advise and consult on homelessness response programs. Their insights help ensure that efforts to reduce homelessness respond to the needs of the community. Two members of LEAG have participated in this evaluation since February 2024—Alexis Kramer and Michael Giovanis. LEAG members were compensated for their time on an hourly rate set by Hennepin County. Together with Harris, the team developed the evaluation goals, evaluation plan, data collection tools, data analysis, and this final report.

To foster meaningful engagement, conversations in the first quarter of the evaluation focused on identifying goals and strategies for evaluation. LEAG members shared their insight and experience with Hennepin County programs with Harris to provide context. In the spring, participants from LEAG received free training on qualitative research data collection and analysis. This training was conducted by Harris and a professor at the University of Minnesota. This initiative equipped the participants with valuable skills and ensured that their

contributions were informed and impactful. The training emphasized the importance of the LEAG members' distinct perspectives, enabling them to function as true partners in the research process. Michael Giovanis, reflecting on this experience, noted, "Being part of this project has not just been about giving feedback but truly shaping the outcome. The training we received made us feel like we were genuinely heard and valued, not just as participants, but as co-researchers." This sentiment highlights the project's success in achieving equitable engagement, ensuring that those with lived experience had a significant and recognized role in the research efforts.

Evaluation Rationale

The primary purpose of this evaluation is to identify the strengths and areas for improvement of the Streets to Housing program. The results will inform program modifications and future training to support continued growth.

Guiding Evaluation Questions

This evaluation attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What draws participants to the program?
2. How do the people involved in the program (e.g., staff, program participants, staff at other programs) experience and describe the process of Streets to Housing
 - a. What is working well?
 - b. What can be improved?
3. What barriers do participants have in engaging with the program?
4. What barriers do staff have in delivering components of the program?
5. What changes could improve the program’s components to better support staff and participants?
6. To what extent does Streets to Housing advance equity?

II. Quantitative Background

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed to understand the scope of Streets to Housing from program implementation to current date. CORE reports from the Housing Management Information System (HMIS) from Aug-Dec 2022, Jan-June 2023, July-Dec 2023, and Jan-June 2024 were supplied for analysis. Exit destination data (location of client at program exit) were compared across time periods for Streets to Housing clients. Additionally, for 2023 only, we compared demographic race data with exit destination to understand the extent to which race may be related to exit destination.

Prior to analysis, the evaluation team cleaned the data sets. For exit dates, we removed all data points with exit dates prior to August 2022 or after June 2024, given that these data points were likely erroneous; Streets to Housing began operation in August 2022, and the data was pulled in June 2024. To aid in understanding, we also consolidated exit location categories as follows: Permanent, Stayer, Temporary, Homeless, Loss to follow up. If no known exit location was identified, we assigned the category ‘Other’. Race data was collected differently across years. To minimize assumptions about race, we decided to use only one full year of demographic data (2023).

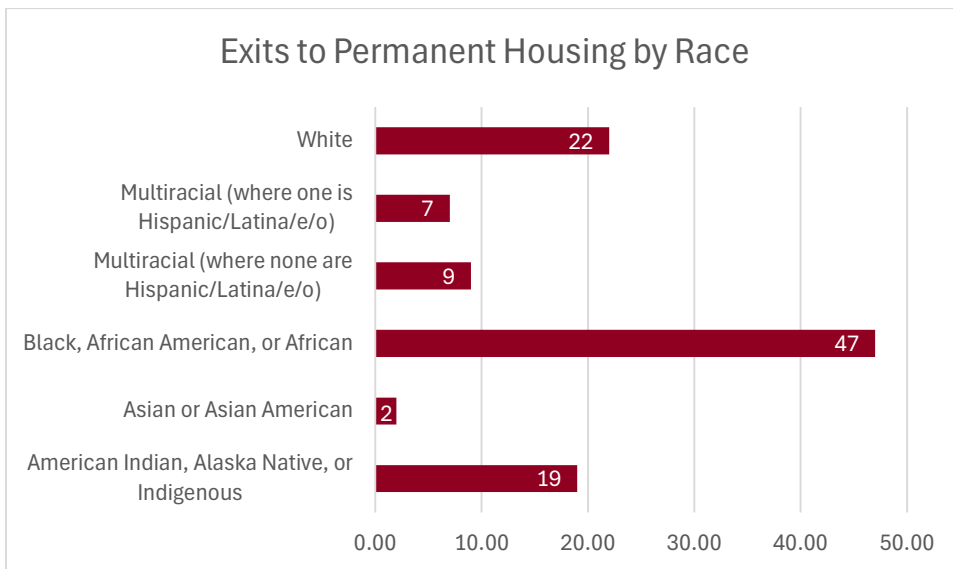
Exit Destinations by Race 2023

Table 1. Exit Destination by Race

Race/Ethnicity	Exit Destination							Total
	Stayer	Homeless	Temporary	Other	Lost to follow-up	Permanent		
American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous	36	4	6	1	65	19	131	
Asian or Asian American	1	1	0	0	2	2	6	
Black, African American, or African	79	5	4	2	174	47	311	
Hispanic/Latina/e/o	4	0	0	0	4	0	8	
Multiracial (where none are Hispanic/Latina/e/o)	21	0	1	2	23	9	56	
Multiracial (where one is Hispanic/Latina/e/o)	21	6	1	1	24	7	60	
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	
White	46	2	6	4	79	22	159	
Missing/Prefer not to state	4	0	0	2	8	0	14	
Total	213	18	18	12	380	106	747	

Race is self-reported during client engagements. Race categories are determined by HUD. Definitions for exit destinations are as follows: Stayer- client who at the end of the time-period is still in the program, Homeless- emergency shelter or a place not meant for habitation (e.g. car), Temporary- institution (e.g. rehab program or jail) or shelter, Other- blank, other, or does not know, Lost to follow-up- no exit interview, permanent- permanent shelter.

Figure 1. Exit to Permanent Housing by Race



Hispanic/Latina/e/o, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Missing/Prefer not to state are removed from this chart because their exit destination to permanent housing is 0.

Regardless of race identity, the most common exit destination for streets to housing clients was Lost to Follow-Up, which is often a common in outreach due to the highly mobile nature of the population being served. After Lost to Follow-Up, another common exit destination for most race identity groups is exit to permanent housing, which suggests program efficacy regardless of racial identity. Stayer was also a common exit destination, which suggests that the length of time to for a client to access permanent housing through the Streets to Housing program is greater than 6 months because they stay in the program past the time period. The range for number of people exiting to permanent housing in each racial group is 2 to 47 client exits, with an average of 17.7 exits to permanent housing.

The three groups with the highest exit rate to permanent housing are White; Black, African or African America; and American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous. Based on the 2024 Point in Time Count, which counts people experiencing homelessness, in emergency shelter, transitional housing, and unsheltered

locations on one night, Hispanic (35.6%) and Black African American, or African (35.9%) represent the highest proportion of people experiencing homelessness across Hennepin County. American Indian or Alaskan Native, Black, African American, or African, and Hispanic people are disproportionately overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness in Hennepin County. Thus, findings indicate a need to focus engagement with Hispanic/Latina/e/o clients to ensure this population is receiving support from the program.

Exit Destinations by Year

Table 2. Exit Destinations by Year as Counts

	Streets to Housing Exit Destinations by Year as Counts						
	Stayer	Homeless	Temporary	Other	Lost to follow up	Permanent	Total
2022 (aug-dec)	149	9	11	0	31		218
2023 (jan to june)	19	8	9	4	197		291
2023 (July to December)	194	10	9	8	183		456
2024 (Jan to May)	217	10	9	5	125		420
Total	579	37	38	17	536	178	1385

Table 3. Exit Destinations by Year as Percentages

	Streets to Housing Exit Destinations by Year as Percentages						
	Stayer	Homeless	Temporary	Other	Lost to follow up	Permanent	
2022 (aug-dec)	68.3%	4.1%	5.0%	0.0%	14.2%		8.3%
2023 (jan to june)	6.5%	2.7%	3.1%	1.4%	67.7%		18.6%
2023 (July to December)	42.5%	2.2%	2.0%	1.8%	40.1%		11.4%
2024 (Jan to May)	51.7%	2.4%	2.1%	1.2%	29.8%		12.9%

From August 2022 to May 2024, a total of 1385 exits were recorded. Number of clients served by the program increased from year to year, with a slight drop in the first half of 2024. The three largest exit destinations in all three years were Stayer (n=579), Lost to follow-up (n=536), and Permanent (n=178). Exits to Homeless, Temporary, and Other have remained low (min=0, max=11) across all three time intervals. Exits to Permanent housing have increased from the first six months of program implementation to the second six months and then have remained at the same rate. This suggests that Streets to Housing may only have capacity to support approximately 50 exits to permanent housing per six-month time intervals coupled with a lack of housing availability across the county. For all three years, a common exit destination is Stayer, which suggests that it takes longer than 6 months for most clients to get a housing referral and exit the program. This further points to a need for more housing in Hennepin County to decrease timelines.

Lost to Follow-Up steadily increased from 2022 to the first half of 2023 and began to decline incrementally in the 2024 (January to June). This finding points to a potential concern with the structure of the program as may clients are lost to follow-up. One reason for the substantial number of clients lost to follow-up could be that Streets to Housing is assessing and engaging more clients than they have the capacity to sustain relationship with. Another reason could be that there are requirements for remaining in the program that are not feasible for Streets to Housing clientele.

Recruitment in Detail

All current staff of Streets to Housing were invited to interview. Prospective participants were contacted from May to June 2024. Staff were contacted a maximum of three times by email to schedule an interview. Streets to Housing leadership also helped schedule interviews with Streets to Housing staff through text, virtual, and in-person meetings. Staff of adjacent programs were identified by Streets to Housing leadership based on their relationship with Streets to Housing and their engagement in other street outreach programs in Hennepin County. These prospective participants were also contacted by email a maximum of three times. Interviews were rescheduled with no-show participants a maximum of three times, only if interest in rescheduling was initiated by the potential participant.

Most prospective client participants were identified by Streets to Housing leadership and staff based on their history of maintaining contact with the team (i.e. recency of most recent phone call or in-person meeting) and their access to a working phone. Prospective participants were also invited to participate through Street Voices for Change meetings. Prospective participants were contacted a maximum of 5 times. Canceled interviews were rescheduled a maximum of three times. The evaluation team made reasonable attempts (flexibility in location, timing, modality of interview) to engage with any prospective

III. Qualitative Evaluation 2024

Methods

Participants

Recruitment. Interview participants were recruited through purposive and convenience sampling; participants were identified based on certain criteria (purposive) and/or by ease of access (convenience) (Andrade, 2021). The evaluation team purposefully kept eligibility criteria broad to maximize participation potential.

Compensation. Staff completed interviews only during regular work hours to ensure their time was compensated. Streets to Housing leadership communicated to staff that participation in this evaluation would be considered work and compensated accordingly. Clients were compensated with a \$40 dollar Visa gift card funded through Hennepin County Community Engagement funds. This value was determined by Streets to Housing gift card policy, which specifies that peers (also known as people with lived and/or living experience of homelessness) will be compensated \$20 per hour for engagement with Streets to Housing. To account for travel time and gravity of the topic, all participants were compensated \$40 dollars regardless of length of interview.

Data Collection and Analysis

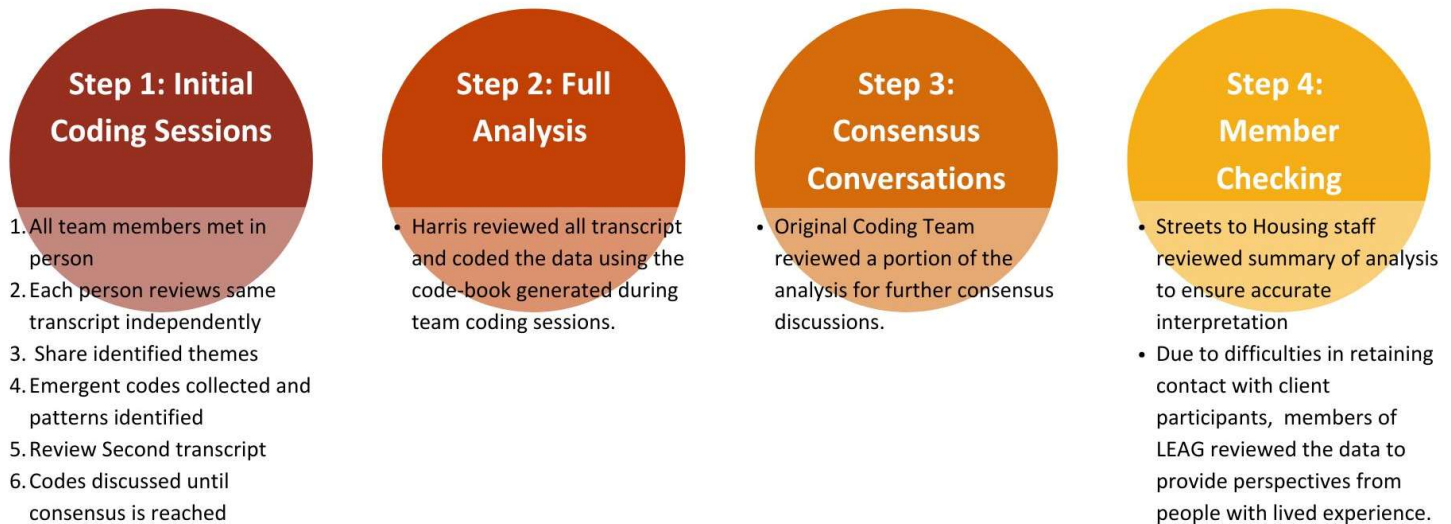
Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews (Appendix A. Interview Protocol) from May to June 2024. Interviews were conducted in-person, on Zoom, and via phone call, depending on participant preference. Interviews were transcribed, de-identified, and imported into a qualitative analysis software (NVIVO 14). Observational data were used to understand context and work procedures.

Interviews were analyzed using an inductive approach; based on patterns identified from the dataset, emergent themes were identified during analysis (Azungah, 2018;

Thomas, 2006). A group of five people¹ coded a subset of interviews (n=4) until the team reached consensus

¹ LEAG members, Harris, one HUP staff member, and one University of Minnesota professor with expertise in evaluation

(Pfeifer, 2023). Harris analyzed the remaining interviews based on the codebook that the group developed. Two groups (original coding group and Streets to Housing Staff) all reviewed summarized data as a member check (Birt et al., 2016).



Ethical Considerations

The University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board assigned a non-research determination for the purpose of quality improvement to this evaluation. Staff and client participants were given an informed consent sheet that explained the purpose of the interviews and outlined unintended consequences (Appendix B. Informed Consent). Interviews occurred in the preferred modality identified by the client. Interviews also

followed best practices in trauma-informed interviewing to minimize risk- to the participants (Campbell, 2022; Isobel, 2021).

Results

Twenty-two interviews were conducted in-person, via phone, or zoom with participants—eleven with staff participants and eleven with client participants. 77.7 % of Streets to Housing staff participated in the evaluation. Non-participation was reportedly due to scheduling constraints. Participant demographic data was not collected to maintain privacy. To maintain anonymity, participants have been assigned a random participant number (1-22) and their role

What is Trauma-Informed Interview Training?

- Developed by Harris in 2022 for qualitative researchers.
- Training described principles of trauma-informed care:
- Training participants work together to determine how they can consider principles of trauma-informed care in their interviews.

(staff or client).

Overall, participants’ perspectives identified elements of Streets to Housing that contribute to program success and areas for continued growth. Strengths included: leadership, work culture, system partnerships, humanizing approach, knowledge of the housing system, and community-based referrals. The areas for

growth were categorized into two main sections: growth opportunities within the Streets to Housing program and broader system-level improvements.

Program Strengths

Both staff and client participants shared experiences and perspectives of Streets to Housing that identified elements that enable program success. Strengths included: (1) supportive and available leadership; (2) positive work culture; (3) system partnerships that further program goals; (4) humanizing and individual approach in interactions; (5) awareness of housing system; and (6) community-based referrals. Table 4 presents themes and sub-themes and provides further qualitative examples.

Leadership. Staff participants indicated that Streets to Housing leadership is part of what makes the program successful. Staff members reported feeling supported and valued by their program supervisor. A few people commented that they did not feel “micromanaged” (Staff Participant 3 and Staff Participant 1). The supervisor encourages members to rely on each other and ask for support from one another:

“[The supervisor] does a really good job at not overworking us and if we need a break, she does a really good job of saying, Hey, let's rely on one another.” Staff Participant 7

“Because for the most part, when something happens, I can manage it. I just might need a little bit of moral guidance from [my supervisor]...[My supervisor says]“Well, just let me know if I need to step in, and I will.” And I know that she will.” Staff Participant 1

Additionally, the program supervisor encourages staff members to show up as their true selves, which encourages staff to “work how we work best” (Staff Participant 3). One participant highlighted that unlike other social services agencies, Streets to Housing has had little turnover during the 2-year tenure of the program. This participant credited staff retention to Streets to Housing leadership:

“It's a true testament to [leadership] that we haven't had that much turnover. Like new programs are usually pretty tumultuous.” Staff Participant 2

Positive Work Culture. Staff participants agreed that Streets to Housing has a positive work culture that promotes collaboration, flexibility, and pride in work. In terms of **collaboration**, Streets to Housing staff explained that they work together and rely on each other to make responsibilities more manageable.

“We also do help each other out. For example, if somebody gets a referral, like, multiple at once, and then they have multiple intakes at the same time...one of my other coworkers can take the [referral].”

Staff Participant 9

This culture of collaboration and shared responsibilities was-described as an expectation modeled by leadership:

“So, you should be able to call up anybody and ask them for a favor or to cover you if you need help doing something. So they might not say yes right now, but you should be able to ask and it's totally fine.” Staff Participant 6

Regarding **flexibility**, staff reported that the ability to work remotely, in-person, and at different locations throughout the county makes the job more manageable and convenient.

“Being remote, that is wonderful. I can just start working from [home] while my kids are getting ready to go to school, checking emails. And it's very convenient to be able to answer some emails after hours if I need to, if something comes up. Working over the phone, being able to connect to people over the phone...” Staff Participant 10

“If we had to just sit in these spaces [drop-in centers] worried about house outreach, we'd be burnt out. The two hours here, two hours there, running around the background work...I love the flexibility.” Staff Participant 1

One participant shared that being flexible and adaptable is necessary to perform the job successfully. The participant also expressed liking that the job is “kind of chaotic”:

“Streets to Housing requires a lot of flexibility because like with the schedule, there is consistency, there's also a lot of unknown. And you just have to always be ready for anything.” Staff Participant 1

Flexibility of location also makes it possible for Streets to Housing staff members to literally meet clients where they are. Staff reports that the immediacy of contact makes a difference for client engagement:

“I feel like that's another thing that's special about [Streets to Housing] is that we really do go beyond to find clients. We just won't do the bare minimum level... We go out there in the field, go to drop-in centers, go to the encampments, things like that.” Staff Participant 7

Participants also reported feeling **proud of the work** they are doing, which contributes to strengthening work culture and moral. One participant shared that they felt like the program is doing a good job “because we really care. I really care about the job that I’m doing” (Staff Participant 3). And, clients feel it, too. One client participant noted that “I feel like the people in Streets to Housing care about what they’re doing. They care about helping individuals” (Client Participant 14). The positive work culture, in part formed through flexibility and strong leadership, contributes to staff feeling proud of the work they’re doing, which ultimately impacts the experience of clients.

System Partnerships and Communication. Participants commented that partnerships across the housing management system are necessary to meet program goals. When partnerships are strong, communicative, and collaborative, both clients and staff report program successes. One participant said that “when things are going well, we’re all working together as a team” (Staff Participant 1) across the housing system. For example, working closely with property owners that are willing to support folks with complex backgrounds and behaviors improves outcomes. Another participant noted that currently, strong communication exists between Streets to Housing and Coordinated Entry (Staff Participant 4). Similarly, one participant noted that there is a fair amount of overlap of clients across street outreach teams in Hennepin County. Programs may reach out to each other when they are looking for clients, or to discuss shared problems they face. (Staff Participant 5). Close collaboration between programs strengthens Streets to Housing success.

Humanizing. Streets to Housing elevates a humanizing approach in relationships with clients, through: belief in clients; non-judgmental support; treating clients with dignity; and tailored, individualized support. Regarding **belief in clients**, participants highlight how they continuously believe in their clients—and share this

belief—even when clients give up on themselves. This belief extends beyond identifying housing—to providing emotional support, hope, and understanding of the difficult journeys clients face. Often, a staff member’s own personal experience deepens their commitment to their clients, fostering a shared sense of humanity:

“I believe in them. I know it's a tough journey, and if they give up, just wait for them to try it again. Try it again. And I mean, I've tried it a million times too. So, I understand where they're coming from, and I know they can do it. Even though they don't believe in themselves, I believe in them.” Staff Participant 10

“My job is to assist people in housing, but it's also to give them hope. You know, because a lot of people come to me during crisis and [are] ready to give up... To me, it's just to give him that little, like, it's gonna be okay. You're in the right place. You're here for a reason... I can't promise them housing, but I can promise them, you're in the right place, you're here for a reason, it's gonna be okay.” Staff Participant 3

Staff also offer **non-judgmental support**, which reflects the intention to meet clients on their own terms. One participant acknowledged that clients may not always been ready to tackle administrative burdens, and that without knowing the reason, that is okay:

“But not everybody is ready to go to the DMV immediately for an ID, whether that's just personal preference or there's other documentation that has to be gathered first, birth certificate or whatever... Usually, it's just somebody doesn't want to go that day, and that's fine.” Staff Participant 1

One client recalled not feeling judged by staff, even during difficult moments, like an argument:

“When me and my girl were fighting and they just didn't judge us, [Streets to Housing team members] just stood outside the tent. [They] oh, it's okay, you guys just come out and talk to me when you're ready.” Client Participant 12

This non-judgmental approach ultimately contributes to engagement with Streets to Housing. Client participants also commented that staff show a deep respect for the **dignity** of each client, regardless of their circumstances. This approach contrasts with the marginalization and societal stigma faced by people experiencing homelessness.

“They never looked down on us, which is a big thing because a lot of people look at homeless people, they're like, oh, dirty people. They're just thieves or drug addicts.” Client Participant 12

“[Streets to Housing] just treated me like anybody else. I didn't feel look[ed] down upon or anything like that.” Client Participant 20

Staff members were sincere and upfront with clients, elevating the values of respect and dignity:

“To me, they weren't just doing a job. It felt sincere.” Client Participant 17

Last, participants noted that staff approach each interaction **with tailored, individualized support**. A staff member commented that “treating everyone the same isn’t going to work. Some people need more handholding to get things done. Others are more independent” (Staff Participant 1). One participant emphasized that staff go beyond the basics, thinking about small but significant details to support client comfort:

“[Streets to Housing] is thinking about maybe this guy needs a TV. If they're thinking that far into my housing and me being comfortable in my housing, that is really great because a lot of people don't.”

Once you get your housing, oh, he's in the door. Goodbye. See you later. And no more thinking about that person or dealing with that person. It's over. And they were like, did you get utensils and plates and stuff like that? You got laundry detergent and toilet paper? Even asking me those questions shows that they cared about what they were doing.” Client Participant 14

Staff’s engagement to ensure client comfort demonstrates a genuine investment in client well-being and an understanding of individual preferences. Another participant commented that staff considered their desired housing location: “[Streets to Housing] said, ‘You pick up a place and I’ll try and get you in there’” (Client Participant 18) In sum, because Streets to Housing staff aspires to a humanizing and individualized approach, clients feel respected, understood, and empowered.

Knowledge of Housing System. Streets to housing staff have a vast knowledge of the social service system and share tailored information to help clients access housing. One participant commented that without Streets to Housing’s “knowledge and guidance, you’re just lost and stuck.” The participant continued: *“Fortunately for me, those people were there, and I was not stuck any longer. [Getting housing] moved along pretty much as fast as it could once I was given the information I needed to get things in process. And that's really all that it is. If you follow their directions, if you follow their guidance, you'll have the success you want in getting out of homelessness.”* Client Participant 14

This participant also said that Streets to Housing helps client identify and apply for qualifying social services (e.g. SNAP, group residential housing, Medicare). Facilitating clients’ access to resources improves their overall experience and supports well-being. Ultimately, “Just having someone who knows the system and knows how to find what a person needs, that's tremendous” Participant 14. Another participant echoed this strength, commenting that the staff member they worked with “always had a lot of information” and when the staff member didn’t know how to help, “then she tried to get you to a place that can help” (Participant 16).

Streets to Housing Staff adapt the resources they share to best fit the client’s needs and circumstances. At drop-in locations, Streets to Housing staff offer clients “second-chance landlord” and very low-rent housing options for clients who do not meet the criteria for coordinated entry. Staff’s robust knowledge of available supportive resources throughout the county contributes to clients’ perception of the program’s success.

Community-Based Referrals. Referrals from former clients is a significant conclusive indicator of positive client experience. Many client participants commented that they first heard of Streets to Housing from a friend. Since they heard about the program from a trusted person, clients said that they were more likely to connect with the program:

“A friend had recommended them and said what they had done for them and how they helped them out. So, I went down there right away and did a kind of walk-in interview type deal.” Client Participant 20

“These are people that I trust and I've shared a lot of my personal things with. So when [community members] gave me the advice to talk to [Streets to Housing], I trusted that they were sending me in the right direction.” Client Participant 14

Other client participants commented that they refer friends to Streets to Housing because of their positive experience, and because they successfully accessed housing through the program.

“I point people to let 'em know it is definitely a program that's working.” Client Participant 18

“I [refer] people to them, people that are homeless, people that's on the street being where I been. I let them know, this is where you can go.” Client Participant 22

One staff participant noted that they consider these referrals as a huge indicator of success:

“That referral by client is a huge deal because we hear all the time about service providers, housing providers not doing what is expected of them for clients... So when clients bring other people to meet with us to talk about housing or benefits or whatever it is, that really speaks volumes to me.” Staff Participant 1

Ultimately, former client referrals to Streets to Housing is a strong indicator of positive perception of the program.

Areas of Growth

Areas of program growth fall into two broad categories: Streets to Housing program-specific concerns and housing management system concerns. Regarding Streets to Housing, participants identified the following areas of growth: (1) program size; (2) dedicated time to bolster knowledge and enhance equity; (3) administrative burden; and (4) program awareness. Regarding the housing management system, participants identified the following areas: (1) salary of employees, (2) administrative red tape, and (3) unsafe conditions. Table 5 displays theme, sub-theme, and qualitative example(s).

Areas of Growth for Streets to Housing

Program size. Participants reported that the size of the Streets to Housing program may impact its ability to operate effectively and efficiently, and to reach people across the county. Several participants expressed that having more staff would improve the program's reach:

“I wish that we could have more [staff]. It would be nice to be able to reach out to more of Hennepin County.” Staff Participant 1

“And they only had one person [at the drop in site]...And I was like, I don't think [they'll] have enough time.” Client Participant 15

Additionally, increasing staff size would ensure ability to maintain individualized, quality support for clients:

“I think making sure we can have small caseload sizes, too, so that we can get to know people... that you have time to do an individualized approach. There's a lot of pressure to push things forward quickly and do things quickly, and you can't. You're working with human beings.” Staff Participant 11

Training and Time to Enhance Equity and Consistency. A few participants identified areas of knowledge or practice gaps that could be rectified through dedicated time. One participant identified a desire for de-escalation training to “have more tools to understand what's going on [when folks have serious mental

illness]" (Staff Participant 7). One participant suggested a county-wide data day to ensure staff have enough time to accurately and efficiently input their data:

"Data day. A day where I just do that and nothing else . Just make those calls... At least one day or twice a month where you do nothing but data. The county should make a data day. Nothing but data. no meetings, no nothing. Just lunch." Staff Participant 3

Additionally, participants noted that there may be incongruities in the quality of coordinated entry assessments between Streets to Housing Staff (Staff Participants 4 and 8); these differences may contribute to certain people accessing housing more quickly than others. One participant commented on the culture of going around the system, which impacts fidelity to standards of data collection. Both participants suggested training to improve this gap:

"There are a couple people on the Streets to Housing team doing assessments, and we kind of question the quality of those assessments. But that's a training thing for us." Staff Participant 4

One participant advocated for a decision tree to support fidelity to process and equitable assessment:

"There almost needs to be a decision tree as opposed to just being like, we'll just do an assessment for every person that we talk to, more structured boundaries around who should be assessed for coordinated entry." Staff Participant 8

Below:
Training up staff on crisis de-escalation may enhance safety, and training on data collection may enhance equity. Instituting a data day could improve efficiency, and support staff well-being.

Administrative burden. Administrative burden is defined as program participants' onerous experiences with policy and program (Barnes, 2021). Research indicates that administrative burden impedes effective implementation and increase inequities throughout the system. Aspects of administrative burden include learning about program eligibility criteria, demanding application processes, and extensive documentation and paperwork. For Streets to Housing staff, administrative burden included efforts to maintain contact between staff and clients- Many participants shared that a major challenge of program engagement was lack of access to phones:

"Sometimes people don't have phones and they're homeless. So a lot of times people would get a referral and then they'd get missed because they didn't stay in contact." Client Participant 12

Streets to Housing has tried to provide phones to clients to mitigate this challenge, but client access to a phone remains a barrier, for a variety of reasons. The programmatic requirement to stay in contact with case workers poses a challenge for clients.

Participants also said that to stay in contact required significant personal work and involvement:

"It took my own footwork and my own mouth work to get the ball rolling. And nobody helped me out but myself because I knew different resources out there. And I took the opportunity to make the attempt by making one phone call and that phone call led to other things." Client Participant 13

One participant shared that they attributed their negative experience with the program to not applying themselves enough:

“[Streets to Housing] has tried to get in contact with me...multiple times.. come and talk...But I just can't even feel like it today. But I feel like if I would've applied myself more than, it probably would've been a better experience with Streets to Housing.” Client Participant 15

Participants reported administrative burden throughout the system that created inefficiencies and barriers for both staff and clients. A major barrier to street outreach is “what [the client] has to do after they have connected with somebody” (Staff Participant 11). Across the system, housing referrals are denied because people couldn't be located, which is “awful and a big waste of time” (Staff Participant 4). While this participant was referring to street outreach generally, quantitative analysis of Streets to Housing exit destination affirms that loss to follow up is a significant problem.

Coupled together, this feedback suggests that the administrative burden of maintaining contact requires significant personal work and investment, which is not possible for all clients. Streets to Housing is not for everyone. The intersection of homelessness and mental health requires recognition that clients who are struggling more may not be well-supported by the program.

Program Awareness. Most client participants commented that Streets to Housing should work to become better known across the county. A few mentioned specifically access to information in shelters.

“Be available in more places...like go to more shelters.” Client Participant 16

“The thing is they need to advertise more in the place where... make sure that they have their numbers up on bulletin boards in the shelter because they do have a bulletin board. ‘If you need housing and resources and everything, take this number.’” Client Participant 18

One participant recommended posting flyers around the metro area so more people would know about the program (Client Participant 22).

Areas of Growth for System

The following sections identify areas of growth for the housing management system. Challenging and difficult experience of staff and clients inform these areas of growth. While Streets to Housing may have limited ability to make changes in these areas, it is necessary to understand the context in which the program operates, and to consider how program level adjustments may deemphasize some of these challenges.

Salary of employees. A few participants identified the nuance and difficulty of staff salaries. One participant commented that, across the system, housing case manager staff do not receive appropriate pay.

“We're just not paying [housing case manager staff] appropriately [across the system] ...The people we're serving are not all that far away from the people that are doing the work, and that's really problematic...We need to be taking care of each other better and differently all across the system.”

Staff Participant 11

Another participant said that the salary structure at Hennepin County is rigid. There is a salary range set by the county for each job classification. For many street outreach positions, the job classification defines a range

that “isn’t the worst, but it’s not great” (Staff Participant 2). Staff Participant 2 commented that to “create a special team that wanted to do the work,” the job classification should not “screen those people out.”

Administrative red tape. Participants also reported **system level policies** that increase barriers to access housing, including number of days homeless, admission to residential treatment, and income limits:

“[If people go into treatment], they have to be taken off the priority list. And once they get out, then we can put them right back on. It sucks, but that’s the way it has to be.” Client Participant 10

“So much red tape. And so even though those different things that qualified me as chronically homeless, they said that I needed to be homeless for a year, and they took my grant back. So I had a grant...and they took it back because I hadn’t been homeless for a year, which I just think that is, how do you give somebody who’s homeless a time limit?...The red tape that’s in there, it needs to go.” Client Participant 14

“I was making too much money. I was on a referral for, I think it was for rapid rehousing where you only pay 30% of your income. And I guess I was making too much money. [Streets to Housing] had to take me off the referral program.” Client Participant 15

Additionally, one participant reported that because they had an outstanding warrant from another state, they could not access housing services in Hennepin County.

Participants also indicated that **slow timelines** negatively impacted both clients and staff. One staff participant reported that it was challenging to “not be able to give people what they need right away. That’s a struggle. People just want to be housed...” (Staff Participant 3). One client shared that the whole process is “not going fast enough. Everything’s always hurry up and wait” (Client Participant 16). Both participants commented on these challenges; the timeline is slow, *and* there is **limited information** on how the process works:

“Just the fact that [Streets to Housing case worker] gets back to me is a good thing and lets me know she’s received my message. But other than that, there’s not a lot of information given. So, I’m not even quite sure how the full process works or how they pick people.” Client Participant 20

The shift to increase supportive services throughout the county is also slow:

“We need public health on the site, we need different interventions, we need different funding, different programming, different facilities. And that’s all getting built. I mean, there’s a lot in the process right now. But it’s been a slow shift...There’s not enough support services.” Staff Participant 2

Unsafe conditions. Participants spoke about personal safety concerns during engagements. One staff participant said, “We’re still trying to do our jobs and be mindful of our safety, client safety, all of that” (Staff Participant 1). Safety concerns merit additional investigation. Participants also report that shelters are unsafe:

“Clients don’t go into shelters because they’re not safe, they don’t feel safe. I have a lady sleeping in her car...she don’t feel safe in the shelter.” Staff Participant 3

“I asked him if [client] wanted shelter, and he said, “No,” he didn’t want to be—he wanted to be safe and not raped somewhere.” Staff Participant 6

The above sections outline key areas for development within the housing management system, that impact the experience of staff and clients. Although Streets to Housing faces barriers and limitations in resolving these issues directly, exploring adjustments at the programmatic level could be an essential step forward.

IV. Discussion

The purpose of this evaluation was to document perspectives of Streets to Housing staff and clients to assess areas of strength and opportunities for improvement. Interviews identified areas of strength and areas of growth for Streets to Housing. The identified strengths included effective leadership, a positive work culture, strong system partnerships, a human-centered approach, expertise in the housing system, and the use of community-based referrals. Opportunities for improvement were divided into two main categories: enhancements within the Streets to Housing program and broader system-wide reforms.

In this evaluation, we found that a major area of satisfaction among both staff and clients was the Streets to Housing leadership. Participants reported overwhelmingly positive remarks regarding leadership quality, satisfaction with leader, and support by leader. Research on leadership and job satisfaction highlights that employee satisfaction and job retention is positively associated with leadership quality (Rad & Yarmohammadian, 2006; Tsai, 2011). While effective leadership is a huge strength of the Streets to Housing program, it also poses a risk to program sustainability and longevity. If leadership changes, staff turnover is a possibility, creating vulnerability for the program. Further exploration of leadership effectiveness and investment in leadership training and growth may be preventative. Bolstering mid-level leaders as a transition plan may further sustain program stability.

Staff reported concerns around the lack of quality and consistency of assessments. Staff noted that the differences in data collection techniques and standards may ultimately result in certain clients accessing housing more quickly. Quantitative data cleaning and analysis uncovered further inconsistencies and errors, including inaccurate dates. These findings highlight that a primary challenge to data collection and reporting is structural. Implementing data standards and data changes, including shared definitions, is one way to address structural challenges. To improve data collection and reporting, Streets to Housing could turn to CDC resources that establish recommendations on definitions, validated questions, and standardized elements (Meehan et al., 2023). Additionally, staff perspectives identified gaps that could be addressed through training, particularly around equity. Streets to Housing and Hennepin County may choose to implement a training parallel to the CDC's data collection training, that focuses on trauma-informed practices for effective communication, clarification of federal policies, and the use of data to benefit individuals and populations (Meehan et al., 2024).

To address program administrative burden on clients, system level policy and program level policy change is needed. Clients reported aspects of administrative burden that included barriers to maintain contact with workers, and psychological and personal cost for the client (Barnes, 2021). The personal work and investment required may not be possible for all clients, especially for clients who are experiencing the intersection of homelessness and mental health issues, and the impact mental health has on psychological well-being. Administrative burden undermines effective policy and program implementation, and ultimately strains relationships between citizens and government (Barnes, 2021). Further analysis of where and when

administrative burdens occur can help to unpack and to resolve the ambivalent experiences of participants. Loosening restrictions and enhancing flexibility may also improve the experiences of clients.

Limitations

This evaluation had several limitations:

Community partnership: engagement with community partners occurred after the program had been selected by HUP and Harris was selected for the assistantship. Thus, the evaluation goals were determined by Streets to Housing leadership without involvement of community members. Collaboration with LEAG attempted to center community perspectives to ensure that the ongoing evaluation was engaged with community needs. To strengthen community engagement in HUP partnership, community members should be part of the application and selection process.

Participant recruitment: Participants who had a positive experience with the program may have been more likely to respond to outreach, perhaps creating a skew in qualitative data. Due to time and feasibility constraints, we were not able to contact former staff members or employees of peer programs for interviews.

Barriers to contact: Because of the challenges to sustain contact with client participants, we were not able to complete a member checking process with client participants.

Quantitative data: This evaluation had limitations in accessible data, in part due to a changes in the system that housed HMIS. Also, our concerns for data accuracy limited the type of analysis we could conduct. The knowledge and experience of our small evaluation team also impacted our lens of analysis.

V. Recommendations

- I. **Invest in mid-level and senior leaders to maintain and sustain staff involvement.**
 - a. Qualitative findings indicate that staff and participants place significant value on Streets to Housing leadership. Most staff members underscored the contributions of their supervisor to program success. To enhance program sustainability and minimize the impact of leadership turnover, Streets to Housing may identify mid-level leaders to bolster the leadership structure.
 - b. Support existing leadership by increasing salary and other benefits.
 - c. Collaborate with staff and outside key participants to understand and document aspects of leadership structure and methods of practice valued by this group, to maintain continuity of practice.

- II. **Increase training to improve the accuracy of data input, including coordinated entry assessments, ensuring greater equity in the program.**
 - a. Formalize protected and dedicated time for case managers and caseworkers to input data.
 - b. Data made available for this report suggest limitations in accuracy. Streets to Housing can provide additional training on how to input data to enhance accuracy and comprehensiveness for each client.
 - c. Continue to monitor demographic data in comparison to exit destination to ensure that the program serves clients across demographics equitably. Improving data entry into HMIS is necessary to accurately track demographic information.
 - d. Coordinated entry assessments differ depending on the caseworker. Train up on conducting coordinated entry assessments so that all workers conduct interviews and document with fidelity.
 - e. Create a decision tree to support workers as they guide clients through the process (i.e., coordinated entry assessment or not).

- III. **Invest in relationships with other county organizations and programs in the homelessness and housing sector to clearly identify unique program goals.**
 - a. Findings suggested that when relationships are strong across programs, Streets to Housing is better able to identify, maintain contact with, and support individual clients. Strengthening partnerships across programs through dedicated meetings, shared messaging systems, and clearly identified roles may support continued partnership.
 - b. Many participants commented that they heard about the Streets to Housing program by word-of-mouth. Some participants suggested advertising services in other locations to increase community knowledge. Working collaboratively with other programs would support greater awareness of the program.
 - c. Stronger partnerships and role identification could also support identifying appropriate clients for each unique program. Streets to Housing intends to support clients experiencing

unsheltered homelessness, while other programs support other client populations. Streets to Housing and Hennepin County could create a program decision tree that supports case workers as they help clients navigate the program most appropriate for them.

- d. Multiple participants noted that the small size of Streets to Housing limits their impact. Ensuring that Streets to Housing case workers are working with their designated clientele population—and connecting less appropriate referrals effectively to other programs—would help build capacity.

IV. Increase transparency around and knowledge around housing programs

- a. Many clients commented that aspects of the coordinated entry process and assessment process felt opaque or confusing. Clients did not understand the timeline or requirements to stay on the priority list. Clients should receive clear and transparent information so that they have realistic expectations. Streets to Housing can work to develop guidelines around requirements and expectations of the process.
- b. The county could analyze the length of time from entry to referral to paint a more accurate picture of the process.
- c. Streets to Housing can ensure that all case workers are aware of all alternative programs other than coordinated entry so that clients are given options and opportunities that best fit their needs.

V. Manage and consider ways to support continued client engagement with Streets to Housing.

- a. Quantitative findings indicate that nearly 50% of clients engaged by Streets to Housing are lost to follow up. Both staff and clients underscored difficulty clients have in maintaining contact with their case worker.
- b. Shift towards quality over quantity.
- c. Consider allowing a grace period for clients who have lost contact to hold their names on the priority list beyond 90 days (e.g. another 15 days)
- d. Hire more staff so that staff are available in more locations to support contact.
- e. Ensure that clients know at time of interview that they can check in with anyone who has access to coordinated entry. Give a list of locations to clients where contact can be made., Hennepin County could also provide clients with a phone at the time of assessment. Since phones may be lost or stolen, explore creative solutions to communicate and support engagement.
- f. Collaborate with mental health workers to engage with clients with mental health concerns—who may be at greater risk of losing contact.

Tables

Table 4. Program strengths themes and sub themes with example quotes

Theme	Sub Theme	Definition	Example Quotes
Supportive Leadership		Streets to Housing leadership supports staff members.	<p><i>"[The supervisor] does a really good job at not overworking us and if we need a break, she does a really good job of saying, Hey, let's rely on one another."</i> Participant 7</p> <p><i>"Because for the most part, when something happens, I can manage it. I just might need a little bit of moral guidance from [my supervisor]...[My supervisor says]"Well, just let me know if I need to step in, and I will." And I know that she will."</i> Participant 1</p> <p><i>"It's a true testament to [leadership] that we haven't had that much turnover. Like new programs are usually pretty tumultuous."</i> Participant 2</p>
Work Culture	Collaboration	Staff work together and rely on each other to support job responsibilities.	<p><i>"We also do help each other out. For example, if somebody gets a referral like multiple at once, and then they have multiple intakes at the same time...one of my other coworkers can take the [referral]."</i> Participant 9</p> <p><i>"I think we really rely on one each other. So, if I'm on PTO, I know I can rely on my teams to keep an eye out for my clients and get them connected to their housing programs. I know I've helped some of my teammates with taking their clients to an intake if they have overlapping responsibilities."</i> Participant 7</p>
	Flexibility	Choice of work location, including working remote or in-person.	<p><i>"Being remote, that is wonderful. I can just start working from [home] while my kids are getting ready to go to school, checking emails. And it's very convenient to be able to answer some emails after hours if I need to, if something comes up. Working over the phone, being able to connect to people over the phone..."</i> Participant 10</p> <p><i>"If we had to just sit in these spaces [drop-in centers] worried about house outreach, we'd be burnt out. The two hours here, two hours there, running around the background work...I love the flexibility."</i></p> <p><i>"We meet people where they are, you know, other programs just take phone calls... when you take the time to come to [clients] that makes a difference."</i> Participant 3</p> <p><i>"I feel like that's another thing that's special about [Streets to Housing] is that we really do go beyond to find clients. We just won't do the bare minimum level... we go out there in the field, go to drop-in centers, go to the encampments, things like that."</i> Participant 7</p>
	Pride in Work	Feeling proud of the work they're doing.	<p><i>"The idea was that the county would put together a team of people to go out, meet people literally where they're at, living outside, and connect them to resources. And we do that, and it's hard."</i> Participant 1</p> <p><i>"We're doing a good job because we really care. I really care about the job that I'm doing."</i> Participant 3</p>
System Partnerships and Communication		Communication and trust across the housing management system.	<p><i>"Working with Agate and Avivo, at least our team, you can communicate and they seem to trust us. So that feels good. We're not in constant communication. But, if you ask somebody for something, they will follow through for the most part, and that is good."</i> Participant 1</p>

			<i>"And there's a fair amount of like, 'We're looking for someone. They're looking for someone.' There's a lot of communication between [Streets to Housing] and [Agate]." Participant 4</i>
Humanizing	Belief in clients	Staff communicate that they believe in their clients, often deepened by staff's own personal experiences.	<i>"I believe in them. I know it's a tough journey, and if they give up just wait for them to try it again. Try it again. And I mean, I've tried it a million times too. So, I understand where they're coming from, and I know they can do it. Even though they don't believe in themselves, I believe in them." Participant 10</i> <i>"My job is to assist people in housing, but it's also to give them hope. You know, because a lot of people come to me during crisis and [are] ready to give up... To me, it's just to give him that little, like, it's gonna be okay. You're in the right place. You're here for a reason.. I can't promise them housing, but I can promise them, you're in the right place, you're here for a reason, it's gonna be okay." Participant 3</i>
	Non-judgmental support	Staff show that they are meeting clients on their own terms.	<i>"When me and my girl were fighting and they just didn't judge us, [Streets to Housing team members] just stood outside the tent. [They] say oh, it's okay, you guys just come out and talk to me when you're ready." Participant 12</i> <i>"But not everybody is ready to go to the DMV immediately for an ID, whether that's just personal preference or there's other documentation that has to be gathered first, birth certificate or whatever... Usually, it's just somebody doesn't want to go that day, and that's fine." Participant 1</i>
	Dignity	Staff show respect for each client regardless of circumstances.	<i>"They never looked down on us, which is a big thing because a lot of people look at homeless people, they're like, oh, dirty people. They're just thieves or drug addicts." Participant 12</i> <i>"[Streets to Housing] just treated me like anybody else. I didn't feel look[ed] down upon or anything like that." Participant 20</i> <i>"To me, they weren't just doing a job. It felt sincere." Participant 17</i> <i>"They did everything they said and more...They never BSed us. They were very, very upfront." Participant 18</i>
	Tailored, individualized support	Staff approach each client interaction with specific resources and support that recognizes the humanity and individuality of each client.	<i>"[Streets to Housing] is thinking about maybe this guy needs a tv. If they're thinking that far into my housing and me being comfortable in my housing, that is really great because a lot of people want, once you get your housing, oh, he's in the door. Goodbye. See you later. And no more thinking about that person or dealing with that person. It's over. And they were like, did you get utensils and plates and stuff like that? You got laundry detergent and toilet paper... Even asking me those questions shows that they cared about what they were doing." Participant 14</i> <i>"Just treating everybody the same to an extent. Of course, treating everybody the same isn't going to work. Some people need some hand-holding to get things done. Some people are more independent. You go with the flow. But I'm going to walk up and say, "Hi, I'm [staff]," pretty much in the same way to everybody." Participant 1</i>
Knowledge of Housing System		Staff have a vast knowledge of the social service system and willingly and readily share	<i>"Once I completed those steps, the things that he said were going to happen happened, and without people with the knowledge and the guidance there, you're just lost and stuck. And fortunately for me, those people were there and I was not stuck any longer. It moved along pretty</i>

		tailored information to help clients access housing.	<i>much as fast as it could once I was given the information I needed to get things in process. And that's really all that it is. If you follow their directions, if you follow their guidance, you'll have the success you want in getting out of homelessness.</i> Participant 14 <i>"Just having someone who knows the system and knows how to find what a person needs, that's tremendous."</i> Participant 14
Community-based referrals		Clients learned about and shared about Streets to Housing through friends/community members.	<i>"I point people to let 'em know it is definitely a program that's working."</i> Participant 18 <i>"A friend had recommended them and said what they had done for them and how they helped them out. So, I went down there right away and did a kind of walk-in interview type deal."</i> Participant 20 <i>"I [refer] people to them, people that are homeless, people that's on the street being where I been. I let them know, this is where you can go."</i> Participant 22

Table 5. Areas of growth themes and sub themes with example quotes

Category	Theme	Definition	Example Quotes
Areas of Growth for Streets to Housing	Program Size	Impact on efficiency and effectiveness based on program size.	<i>"I think making sure we can have small caseload sizes, too, so that we can get to know people... that you have time to do an individualized approach. There's a lot of pressure to push things forward quickly and do things quickly, and you can't. You're working with human beings."</i> Participant 11 <i>"I wish that we could have more [staff]. It would be nice to be able to reach out to more of Hennepin County."</i> Participant 1 <i>"And they only had one person [at the drop in site]...And I was like, I don't think [they'll] have enough time."</i> Participant 15
	Training to enhance Equity	Areas of knowledge or practice gaps that could be rectified through dedicated time for training.	<i>"There almost needs to be a decision tree as opposed to just being like, we'll just do an assessment for every person that we talk to, more structured boundaries around who should be assessed for coordinated entry."</i> Participant 8 <i>"There are a couple people on the Streets to Housing team doing assessments and we kind of question the quality of those assessments. But that's a training thing for us."</i> Participant 4 <i>"Data day. A day where I just do that and nothing else . Just make those calls... At least one day or twice a month where you do nothing but data. The county should make a data day. Nothing but data. no meetings, no, nothing. Just lunch."</i> Participant 3 <i>"Having more tools to understand what's going on [when folks have serious mental illness], how to navigate that would be helpful. Deescalation training..."</i> Participant 7
	Administrative Burden	Onerous experiences of the client in dealing with system policy and programs.	<i>"Sometimes people don't have phones and they're homeless. So a lot of times people would get a referral and then they'd get missed because they didn't stay in contact."</i> Participant 12

			<p><i>"Last time I talked to [Streets to Housing] in person, it's been about a month and a half. I talked to [them] on the phone when [they] called the other day...They've always had my numbers. If it was any updates, I don't know why [they] couldn't call. I thought they were supposed to call."</i> Participant 15</p> <p><i>"Well, I wish there was a little more contact and information. I understand [Streets to Housing is] probably busy and stuff all the time, but I mean, it's just kind of a waiting game. I contact [them] once a month and I mean, [they] get back to me and then let me know that [they've] received my texts and whatnot. But other than that, I mean there's really no information shared."</i> Participant 20</p> <p><i>"Yes, because a lot of people don't know the procedure. Everything is like Chinese arithmetic and if you don't stay updated or in touch with your case managers, you miss some things. And so that makes you get off the list or stop you from getting housing."</i> Participant 16</p> <p><i>"If you don't stay updated or in touch with your case managers, you miss some things. And so that makes you get off the list or stop you from getting housing."</i> Participant 16</p> <p><i>"I text her once a month and just let her know where I've been sleeping and I have to keep up monthly contact with her just to let her know that I'm still interested and that I'm still around."</i> Participant 20</p> <p><i>"It took my own footwork and my own mouth work to get the ball rolling. And nobody helped me out but myself because I knew different resources out there. And I took the opportunity to make the attempt by making one phone call and that phone call led to other things."</i> Participant 13</p> <p><i>"[Streets to Housing] has tried to get in contact with me...multiple times.. come and talk...But I just can't even feel like it today. But I feel like if I would've applied myself more than, it probably would've been a better experience with Streets to Housing."</i> Participant 15</p>
	Program Awareness	Streets to Housing should become better known across the county.	<p><i>"Be available in more places...like go to more shelters."</i> Participant 16</p> <p><i>"The thing is they need to advertise more in the place where... make sure that they have their numbers up on bulletin boards in the shelter because they do have a bulletin board. If you need housing and resources and everything, take this number."</i> Participant 18</p> <p><i>"Put out flyers and stuff so people could know what they're about, because a lot of people don't know what the program is about... a lot of people don't know."</i> Participant 22</p>
Areas of Growth for System	Salary of Employees	Extent to which staff are paid appropriately for their work.	<p><i>"We're just not paying [housing case manager staff] appropriately [across the system] ...The people we're serving are not all that far away from the people that are doing the work, and that's really problematic...we need to be taking care of each other better and differently all across the system."</i> Participant 11</p> <p>Add quote from participant 2</p>

	Administrative Red Tape- System Level Policies	Policies that inhibit accessing housing services or make accessing services more difficult for clients.	<p><i>"[If people go into treatment] have to be taken off the priority list. And once they get out then we can put them right back on. It sucks, but that's the way it has to be."</i> Participant 10</p> <p><i>"So much red tape. And so even though those different things that qualified me as chronically homeless, they said that I needed to be homeless for a year and they took my grant back. So I had a grant...and they took it back because I hadn't been homeless for a year, which I just think that is, how do you give somebody who's homeless a time limit?...The red tape that's in there, it needs to go."</i> Participant 14</p> <p><i>"I was making too much money. I was on a referral for, I think it was for rapid rehousing where you only pay 30% of your income. And I guess I was making too much money. [Streets to Housing] had to take me off the referral program."</i> Participant 15</p> <p><i>"I had been approved and everything, but once they found out I had a warrant and I didn't even know I had it from back home, they was like, no, we have to get that taken care of before we can get you housing."</i> Participant 15</p>
	Administrative red tape- slow timelines	The pace of accessing housing has a negative impact on both clients and staff.	<p><i>"I'm not able to give people what they need right away. That's a struggle. People just want to be housed..."</i> Participant 3</p> <p><i>"Not going fast enough. Everything's always hurry up and wait."</i> Participant 16</p>
	Administrative red tape- limited information	Lack of information on how the process works.	<p><i>"Just the fact that [Streets to Housing case worker] gets back to me is a good thing and lets me know she's received my message. But other than that, there's not a lot of information given. So I'm not even quite sure how the full process works or how they pick people."</i> Participant 20</p>
	Unsafe Conditions	Aspects of the larger homelessness system (county, state, federal) that feel safe/unsafe	<p><i>"Clients don't go into shelters because they're not safe, they don't feel safe. I have a lady sleeping in her car...she don't feel safe in the shelter."</i> Participant 3</p> <p><i>"I asked him if [client] wanted shelter, and he said, "No," he didn't want to be-- he wanted to be safe and not raped somewhere."</i> Participant 6</p>

Appendices

Appendix A. Interview Protocol.

Client interview guide

Introduction and current housing

2. To get started, I'd like to hear a bit about your current housing?
3. What is working well?
4. What is sparking joy?

Experience with Homelessness

Now, I'm going to ask you a few questions about your experience with homelessness. As a reminder, everything you say is completely confidential and it is totally up to you what you share and how much you share.

5. Tell me your story/experiences about being unhoused/homeless/living outside/shelter/encampment
 - a. Approximately when/what year did you transition into and out of homelessness (*keep it super general*)?
 - b. What happened to cause you to begin to experience homelessness the most recent time?

-
- c. Where were you staying and how were you living right before you became homeless?
 6. Have you had other times in your life where you've been homeless?
 - a. If you are comfortable, tell me about those experiences.

Experience with Streets to Housing

7. Tell me a story about the first time you connected with the streets to housing staff.
 - a. Probing question: Where was it?
 - b. Probing question: How did you find out about Streets to Housing?
 - c. Probing question: What concerns or worries did you have at first about working with program?
8. What made you decide to work with the Streets to Housing program?
 - a. Have you worked with any other street outreach programs?
 - b. If so, what was different about streets to housing?
9. Tell me about a specific interaction with Streets to Housing staff.
 - a. How did staff make you feel?
 - b. To what extent did you feel informed about the process?
 - c. Do you think the staff respected your needs?
 - i. Listen for: What could they have done better?
 - ii. Listen for: What worked well?
10. Do you think the staff respected your cultural background? What could they have done better?
11. What about the program works/worked well for you?
12. What was a challenge or difficulty with working with the streets to housing program?
 - a. How did you manage this challenge/difficulty?
 - b. *Probe for additional challenges (i.e. barriers to engagement)*
 - c. *Ask about peers/community similar or different experiences*
13. What advice would you give to streets to housing staff to guide them in helping other people in the future?
14. What changes would you suggest?

Current Housing

15. Tell me about your first week/month in your new housing
 - a. What has the experience been like adjusting to current housing
16. What services, if any, are you receiving in your housing?
 - a. Who/what group provides these services
 - b. How have they helped you?
 - c. What services would you like to see?
17. What, if at all, has been continued contact with streets to housing?

Wrap Up

18. Before we wrap up, is there something else you would like to add?
19. Are there any questions we should have asked?

Staff interview guide

Work Experience

I'm going to start by asking you a few questions about your work experience and what led you to work for *Streets to Housing/Hennepin County program*

1. *For non Streets to Housing program staff.* Tell me a little bit about your role in Hennepin County.
 - a. How long have you been in your current role?
 - b. What led you to work for this agency?
2. *For Streets to Housing Staff.* Tell me about what led you to work for Streets to Housing?

-
- a. How long have you been in your current role?
 - b. Does your job description accurately describe the work you do?

Role

3. What made you decide to work for *Streets to Housing/Hennepin Agency*?
4. For what elements of the housing system are you responsible?
5. Tell me about a typical day in your role.
 - a. What is usually the first thing you do when you start your work day? *Probe for details*
 - b. Who/what agencies do you typically interact with during a work day?
 - i. What are these relationships like?
 - c. If you were to paint a picture of your day, what would be included?
 - d. When you think about a typical work day/work week, how do you prioritize responsibilities?
 - i. What, if anything, gets pushed aside?
 - e. What policy tools/technologies do you use to complete your job?
6. What is your experience with the HMIS data software?
7. How do these tools/technologies help your job?

Streets to Housing

8. From your perspective, what about the Streets to Housing program is working well?
 - a. How, if at all, is the program different from other programs?
 - b. What else is working well?
9. Tell me about a memorable work day, perhaps a really good thing happened, or a difficult interactions
 - a. What made it memorable?
10. What has been a challenge or difficulty with the Streets to Housing program?
 - a. How did you manage this challenge/difficulty?
 - b. *Probe for additional challenges (i.e. barriers to engagement)*
11. What advice would you give to new staff/streets to housing staff to guide them in helping other people in the future?
12. What changes would you suggest?
13. If it were up to you, in an ideal world, what processes, protocols, etc. within your work would you change? How?

Equity and Assessment

14. In your experiences, what specific demographics/groups face more obstacles when it comes to housing?
 - a. How do you see this play out?
15. What has Streets to Housing done or what should they do?
16. What methods of outreach do you use to ensure fair and equitable access to the program (info left at service sites, on-street outreach, etc.)?
17. How has criteria for assessing individuals and families evolved?
 - a. What other factors can/should be considered, if any?

Wrap Up

18. Before we wrap up, is there something else you would like to add?
19. Are there any questions we should have asked?

Appendix B. Informed Consent introduction

Hi, my name is Sonia Harris and I am a graduate student at the University of Minnesota conducting an evaluation of the Streets to Housing program. This means, I am collecting information about the program to understand strengths and areas of improvement to recommend changes. As part of this evaluation, I am talking to former clients of Streets to Housing and staff at the program and other housing programs within Hennepin County. The conversation will cover your experience with homelessness and your experience with the Streets to Housing program specifically. We will start more generally about your experience and then talk more specifically about the program.

Today, if you are willing, I will be asking you questions about your experience with the Streets to Housing program at Hennepin County. Our conversation today will last approximately 30 minutes. To compensate you for your time, you will receive a gift card with \$40 dollars pre-loaded on it.

TIC principles

1. Everything you say today will be confidential and your identifying information will be removed from our records.
2. You can end our time together at any time
3. Please feel free to skip any questions or just say you'd like to pass on them for now. There are also no right or wrong answers, I don't know is also a great answer
4. Please let me know if you do not understand question and I will rephrase
5. Your participation is entirely voluntary

What questions can I answer so far? Please confirm that you are comfortable participating.

I would like to audio record the interview today if you are comfortable. The recording will only be used to ensure accuracy of our conversation. Your name will not be connected to the recording. After we conclude our evaluation, we will delete the recording.

What questions can I answer about recording?

Are you comfortable with me **audio recording** our confidential discussion?

- Ok, I am **turning on the recorder** now. Today is DATE.
- Can you **please say your name** and that you **consent to being recorded**?

References

- Andrade, C. (2021). The Inconvenient Truth About Convenience and Purposive Samples. *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine, 43*(1), 86–88. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0253717620977000>
- Azungah, T. (2018). Qualitative research: Deductive and inductive approaches to data analysis. *Qualitative Research Journal, 18*(4), 383–400. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-D-18-00035>
- Barnes, C. Y. (2021). “It Takes a While to Get Used to”: The Costs of Redeeming Public Benefits. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 31*(2), 295–310. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muaa042>
- Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member Checking: A Tool to Enhance Trustworthiness or Merely a Nod to Validation? *Qualitative Health Research, 26*(13), 1802–1811. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870>
- Campbell, B. A. (2022). Advancements in trauma-informed training and interviewing for law enforcement and prosecutors. In *Sexual Assault Kits and Reforming the Response to Rape*. Routledge.
- Isobel, S. (2021). Trauma-informed qualitative research: Some methodological and practical considerations. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing, 30* Suppl 1, 1456–1469. <https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.12914>
- Meehan, A. A., Cox, S. N., Thuo, N. B., Rogers, J. H., Link, A. C., Martinez, M. A., Lo, N. K., Manns, B. J., Rolfes, M. A., Chow, E. J., Chu, H. Y., Mosites, E., & Al Achkar, M. (2023). Previous Health Care Experiences’ Influence on Health Care Perceptions Among Residents of Six Homeless Shelters in Seattle, Washington, July–October 2021. *Journal of Patient-Centered Research and Reviews, 10*(3), 111–120. <https://doi.org/10.17294/2330-0698.2012>
- Meehan, A. A., Flemming, S. S., Lucas, S., Schoonveld, M., Matjasko, J. L., Ward, M. E., & Clarke, K. E. N. (2024). Data Equity as a Building Block for Health Equity: Improving Surveillance Data for People With Disabilities, With Substance Use Disorder, or Experiencing Homelessness, United States. *Public Health Reports®*, *139*(1_suppl), 62S–70S. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00333549241245624>
- National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2022, March 20). *Housing First*. National Alliance to End Homelessness. <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/housing-first/>
- Pfeifer, M. (2023). *Venturing into Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide to Getting Started*. The Council on Undergraduate Research. <https://www.cur.org/journal-article/venturing-into-qualitative-research-a-practical-guide-to-getting-started/>
- Rad, A., & Yarmohammadian, M. (2006). A study of relationship between managers’ leadership style and employees’ job satisfaction. *Leadership in Health Services, 19*(2), 11–28. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13660750610665008>
- Streets to Housing*. (n.d.). Hennepin County Housing. Retrieved October 13, 2024, from <https://www.hennepin.us/en/housing/hennepin-county-housing-stories/streets-to-housing>
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). A General Inductive Approach for Analyzing Qualitative Evaluation Data. *American Journal of Evaluation, 27*(2), 237–246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005283748>
- Tsai, Y. (2011). Relationship between Organizational Culture, Leadership Behavior and Job Satisfaction. *BMC Health Services Research, 11*(1), 98. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6963-11-98>