

**Cleveland Mediation Center Homeless Prevention Project
Evaluation 2008**

Submitted by

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SYNOPSIS

A survey of mediations for the homeless prevention project shows that the majority of clients remained in their housing (approximately 56%) and those that eventually were evicted, were able to avoid eviction for approximately 8 months. Of the 44% that were evicted, the program assisted those clients in maintaining their residence for an extended period time (approximately 8 months).

Therefore, the program was successful in helping the majority of clients avoid eviction altogether and prolonged eviction for those who eventually experienced an eviction notice after mediation. Examination of difference between the four groups of client circumstances revealed minor differences in effectiveness. In summary this program is considered effective in preventing homelessness in the Greater Cleveland area.

BACKGROUND

Eviction is an increasingly severe problem for individuals and families in our community. In 2007, there were 11,416 evictions in the Cleveland Municipal Housing Court according to Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless.

Since 1994, Cleveland Mediation Center's Homeless Prevention Program has used a combination of mediation and rental assistance to ensure that people remain in housing and avoid becoming homeless. The program works with tenants that have a court ordered eviction in the City of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County.

The homeless prevention project was created after Cleveland Mediation Center conducted a listening project conducted in 1994. It is affirming to learn today that evidence based best practices concur with Charles, a homeless electrician, who observed:

*They call us homeless yet they spend money on drug and alcohol rehab
They call us homeless yet they spend money on mental health
They call us homeless yet they spend money on education
They call us homeless yet they spend money on employment training
We have all of those problems but---
If they gave us a bed in a room that had a door that locked we would not be
homeless.*

What Charles described then has now become the nationally heralded Housing First Initiative. It also informed CMC's leadership to devise the Homeless Prevention Project by intervening at the point of eviction, now called "shutting the front door to homelessness."

Since that time the Homeless Prevention Project has successfully prevented the eviction of over 3000 households in Cuyahoga County and provided \$2,012,173.37 in rental assistance.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Homeless Prevention Program works with tenants with a court ordered eviction in the city of Cleveland and the surrounding suburbs in Cuyahoga County, Ohio. The suburbs include: Bedford, Bedford Heights, Broadview Heights, Brook Park, Cleveland, Cleveland Heights, East Cleveland, Euclid, Fairview Park, Garfield, Garfield Heights, Lakewood, Maple Heights, Middleburg Heights, Newburgh Heights, North Randall, North Olmsted, Oakwood Village, Orange, Parma, Parma Heights, Richmond Heights, Rocky River, Shaker Heights, South Euclid, Strongsville, University Heights, and Warrensville Heights. In a small minority of cases, the program accepts clients who have only received a three day notice as long as they are referred by a social service agency or have extraordinary circumstances.

In Ohio, a landlord can begin the eviction process once a tenant has not paid rent on the agreed due date. The landlord first must serve the tenant a three day notice. Three days after serving the tenant with the three day notice, the landlord then files the eviction at the Clerk of Courts of the municipal court where the tenant lives. The tenant receives notice of the court date, which generally occurs between 2-4 weeks after the landlord has filed the eviction in court. During the eviction hearing a magistrate hears the case. As long as the landlord appears and the 3 day notice has been served appropriately the landlord will generally receive the eviction. The tenant usually has to move out in 7-10 days.

Program Activities

The Homeless Prevention Program is comprised of four components: intake, case development, mediation, and rental assistance.

Intake- Tenants facing eviction meet with mediation advocates for an intake if they meet initial criteria (have a court date, live in Cuyahoga County, want to stay where they are living and think their property manager is willing to work with them). The mediation advocate addresses several areas: ascertaining the client's housing concerns such as upkeep, safety, and repairs; determining eligibility for rental assistance and the amount of back rent owed; discussing intervention strategies and payment plans for amounts not covered by the rental assistance, and making referrals to community agencies to address employment, financial planning, and other needs the client identifies.

Case Development- Mediation advocates contact the landlords, hear their concerns, determine if mediation is appropriate, and educate the landlords of the merits of mediation *versus* eviction. All case files are submitted to Cuyahoga County's CRIS-E system to determine whether clients have received assistance in the past year and then reviewed internally to approve or deny assistance. The advocates then inform the parties of the result, tell them how much assistance is available, and schedule a mediation.

Mediation- Volunteer mediators facilitate the mediations and receive on-going training and supervision from senior staff. The mediation is an opportunity for both parties to talk about any issue they may have about the rental situation. This usually includes a discussion about the rental assistance and payment plans for back rent, opportunities for the tenant to discuss repair issues and the condition of the dwelling, along with more effective ways to communicate. If parties are unable to come to an agreement, CMC assists the tenant with first month's rent for a new residence.

Rental Assistance --- After a mediation agreement has been signed where the landlord agrees to cancel the eviction and accept the rental assistance, the landlord meets with the mediation advocate to make payment arrangements.

METHOD

Data Collection

Data used for this project is documented the client file and then entered into a Microsoft Office database. These areas include: rent amount, demographics, amount of assistance, number of people in the household, income, and characteristics of the clients among other areas. Prior to 2007, only a portion of this data was inputted into the database but was documented in the case files. As part of the project, this information was collected from the files and inputted into the database.

In addition, the information on whether the clients were evicted after the mediation was gathered. This was done for a majority of the cases by searching the municipal court docket to see whether the magistrate or judge ordered an eviction for each of the clients. In a small percentage of the cases, this information was gathered by the clerk of courts for the municipality. In cases where this information wasn't readily available from the court, it was obtained from the landlord. This information was then inputted into the database.

The random sample of 498 cases was taken from a total of 2260 cases where the client and landlord attended mediation and rental assistance was given.

Method Explanation

The objective of this evaluation was to determine the effectiveness of the Cleveland Mediation Center Homeless Prevention Project. Effectiveness was measured by two components: a) the number of evictions filed in Cuyahoga housing courts, and b) the length of time between mediation and date of eviction filed.

Clients in the program were put into four subgroups of *client circumstance*: currently skilled unemployed; employed with temporary hardship; unskilled unemployed; and retired/ SSI (supplemental security income). The subgroups are defined in the chart below.

Explanation of sub-groups	
Currently unemployed, skilled	Clients in this group are unemployed at the time of the intake appointment but have previously had a job and/or have training or education in a particular field.
Employed with temporary hardship	Clients in this group are currently employed but have experienced a temporary hardship such as an illness, robbery or personal belongings, or expenses relating to death in the family among other areas.
Unskilled, unemployed	Clients in this group are unemployed but have no previous job experience and have no education or training in a particular field.
Retired/SSI	Clients in this group are retired and/or receive government benefits such as supplemental security income (SSI) or social security disability insurance.

A 4 group design was used to analyze the program's effectiveness. Specifically, analysis of variance tests were conducted to determine if the four groups varied in effectiveness. In addition the eviction data was analyzed over a period of time (months and years) to determine possible differences among the four groups. Therefore three specific research questions were posed:

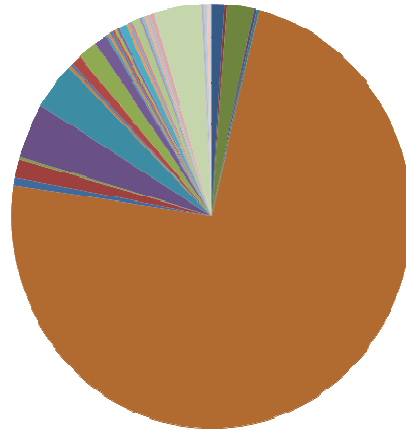
- RQ1:** What are the characteristics of the clients we have worked with in regards to demographics and financial data (ethnicity, sex, income, rent, number of family in household, amount of assistance, and city)?
- RQ2:** What is the success of the mediation and rental assistance overall and within the four groups?
- RQ3:** What was the average length time between the intervention and eviction for those who eventually were evicted and were there group differences?

RESULTS

This study utilized a random sample of 498 intake surveys that were selected during the period of 2002-2007 as part of the evaluation of the CMC Homeless Prevention Program.

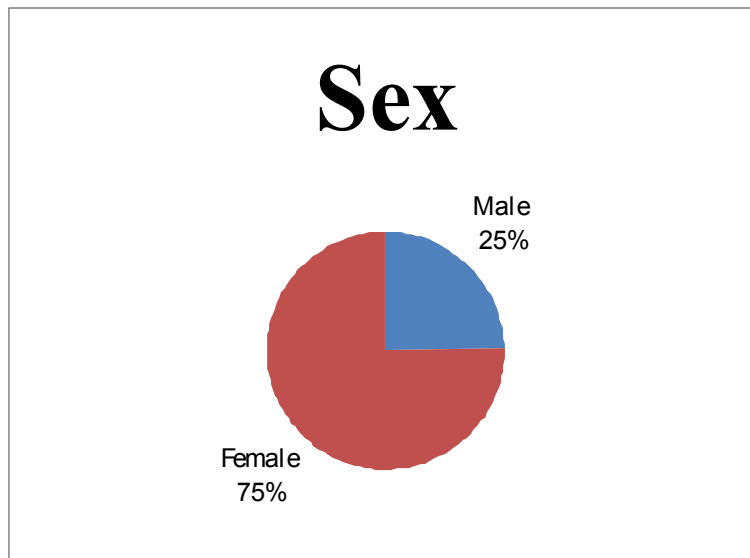
The majority of the clients were from the city of Cleveland (73.49%).

City

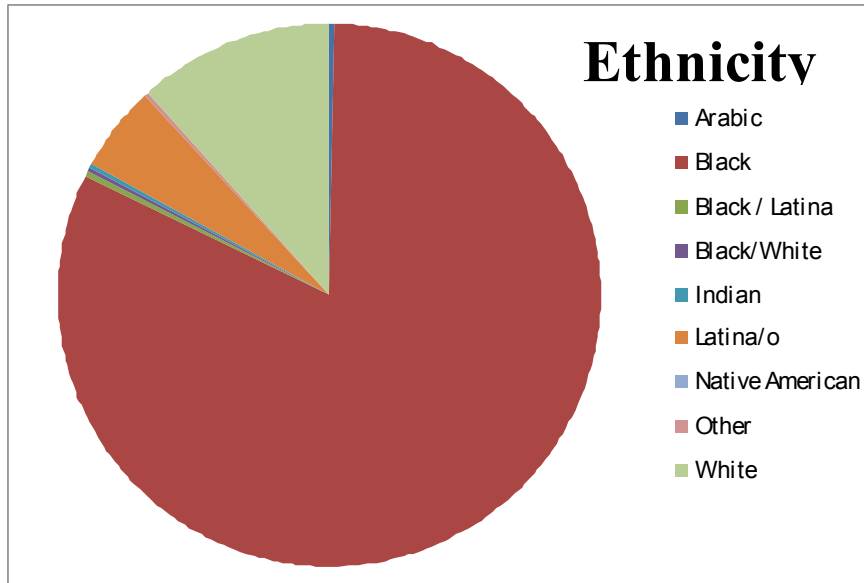


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|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| ■ Bedford | ■ Bedford Heights | ■ Bedford Hts | ■ Broadview Hts | ■ BrookPark | ■ Cleveland |
| ■ Cleveland Heights | ■ Cleveland Hts | ■ Cleveland Hts. | ■ East Cleveland | ■ Euclid | ■ Fairview Park |
| ■ Garfield | ■ Garfield Hts | ■ Lakewood | ■ Maple Hts | ■ Middleburg Hts | ■ Newburgh Hts |
| ■ North Randall | ■ NorthOlmsted | ■ Oakwood Village | ■ Orange | ■ Parma | ■ Parma Hts |
| ■ Richmond Hts | ■ Rocky River | ■ Shaker Hts | ■ South Euclid | ■ South Euclid | ■ Strongsville |
| ■ University Hts | ■ Warrensville Heights | ■ Warrensville Hts | ■ Warrensville Hts., | ■ Westlake | ■ Willoughby Hills |
| ■ Woodmere | | | | | |

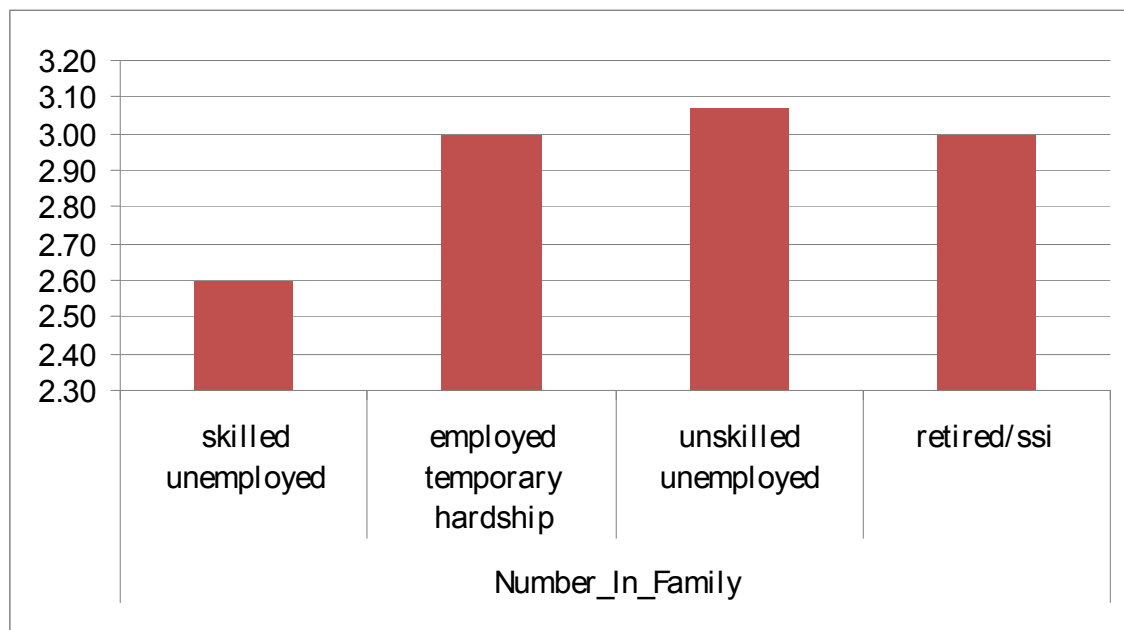
Overwhelmingly, females (75.3%) represented the household seeking assistance.



The ethnic distribution was reported as follows: Black (82.13%), white (11.65%), Latina/o (5.02%), others (2%).



The average number of family members living in the household at the time the participant was seeking mediation was 2.91 with the skilled unemployed reporting the lowest number of family members (2.6) and unskilled unemployed reporting the highest number of family members (3.07).

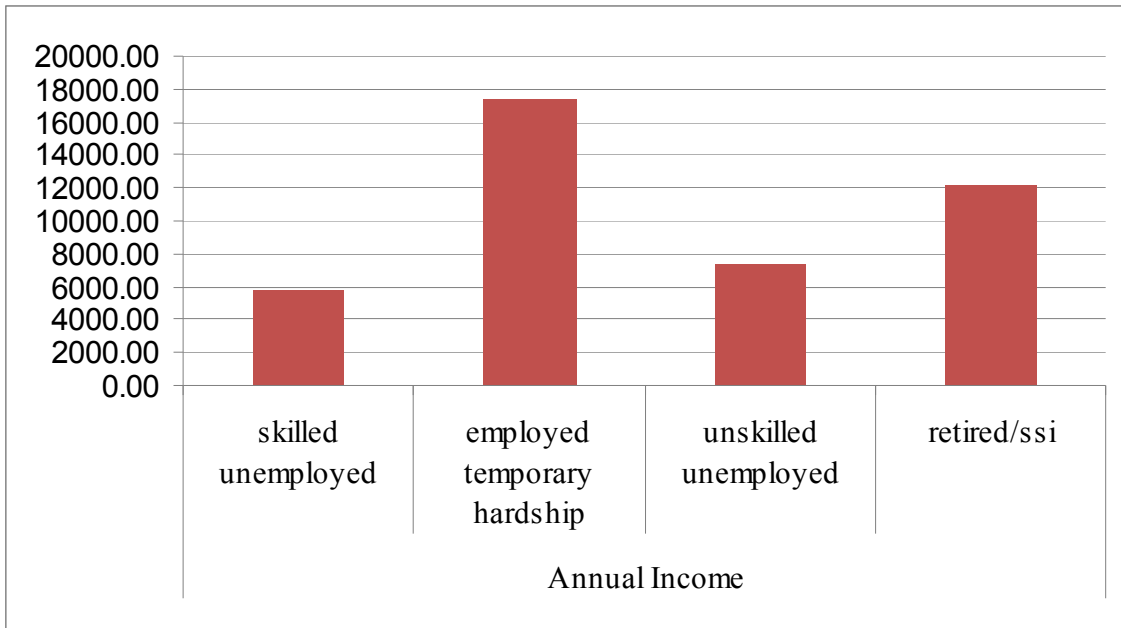


A random sample of 50 clients was taken to determine the number of children in the households. The data is as follows: 78% of households had children with a total of 90 children. 18% of those children were five years of age or under.

The average annual income was \$11, 915.00 with minimal differences found. Clients that were in the group of “employed with temporary hardship” had a higher income and

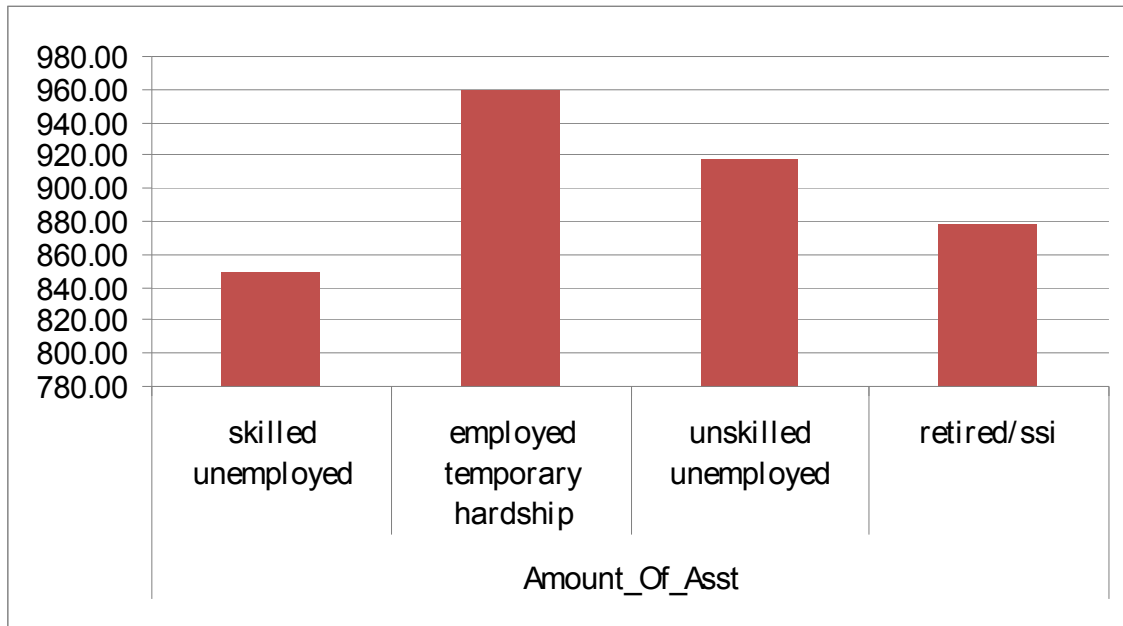
second highest rent. Retired/SSI clients reported the highest monthly rent and second highest income. The remaining two groups, unemployed unskilled and unemployed skilled were not significantly different in income and rent. The average rent per month for the four groups is as follows:

Average rent for sub-groups	
Skilled Unemployed	\$479.29
Employed, temporary hardship	\$545.12
Unskilled, unemployed	\$446.97
Retired, SSI	\$549.36



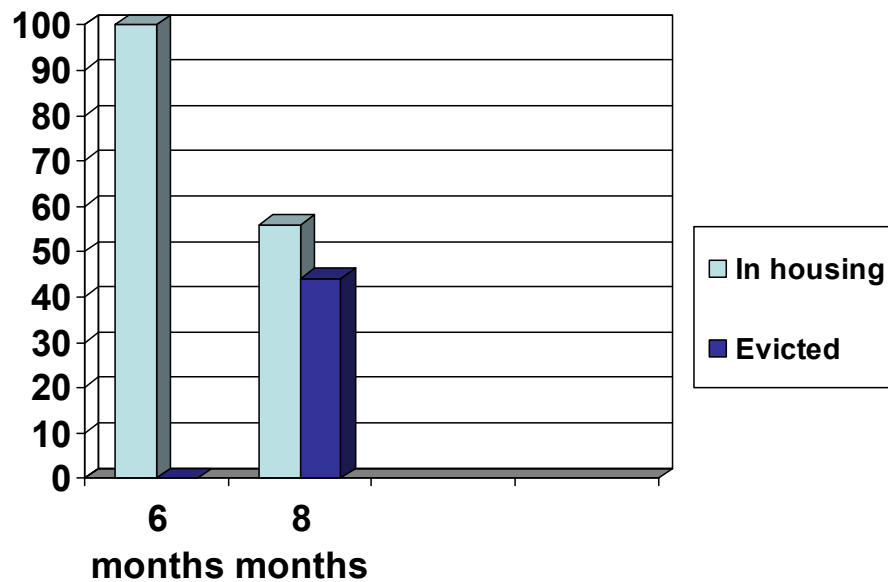
The percentage of income paid for rent was also examined with the sample of 50 cases. The results were an average of 72% of income being paid for rent. Four cases where the tenant had no income were removed from the sample.

The average amount of assistance given was \$912.96 with the skilled unemployed receiving \$849.54, employed with temporary hardship receiving 960.33, unskilled unemployed \$917.19, and retired/ssi receiving \$877.89. In addition, only 43 participants received secondary assistance with an average of \$476.37. No significant differences were found between the four groups.

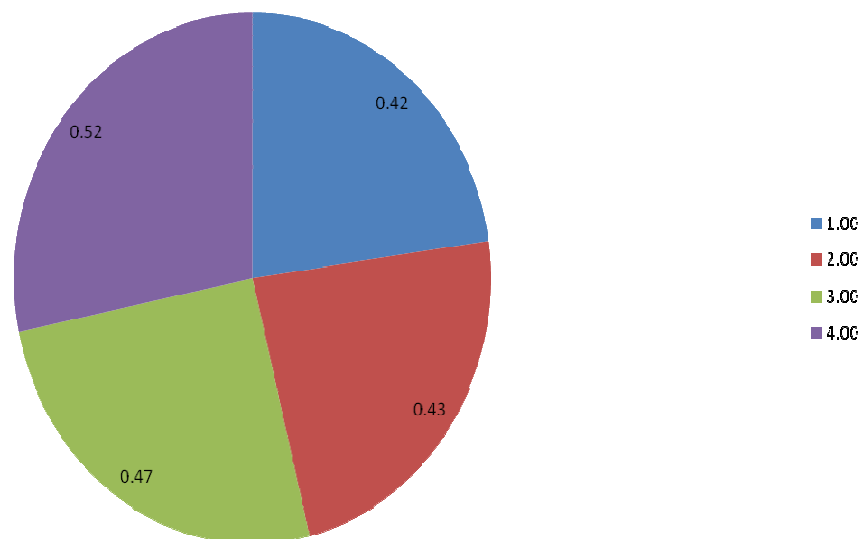


Program effectiveness was measured by the absence or the presence of eviction filed in the appropriate courts. Presence of eviction was considered both a categorical variable (eviction/no eviction) and a continuous variable (length of time between mediation and eviction). In summation, the program was 100% effective for all those who participated in the mediation at least 6 months from the intervention. This is a compelling statistic for the overall program's effectiveness. Over half of the clients during the 2002-2007 time period (56%) were never evicted and the 44% that were listed as evicted averaged an eight month time period between mediation and eviction. It is clear to see that for the majority of clients, the intervention was very effective.

Average percentage of clients evicted at 6 months and 8 months after mediation



Evicted Rates by Group All Years



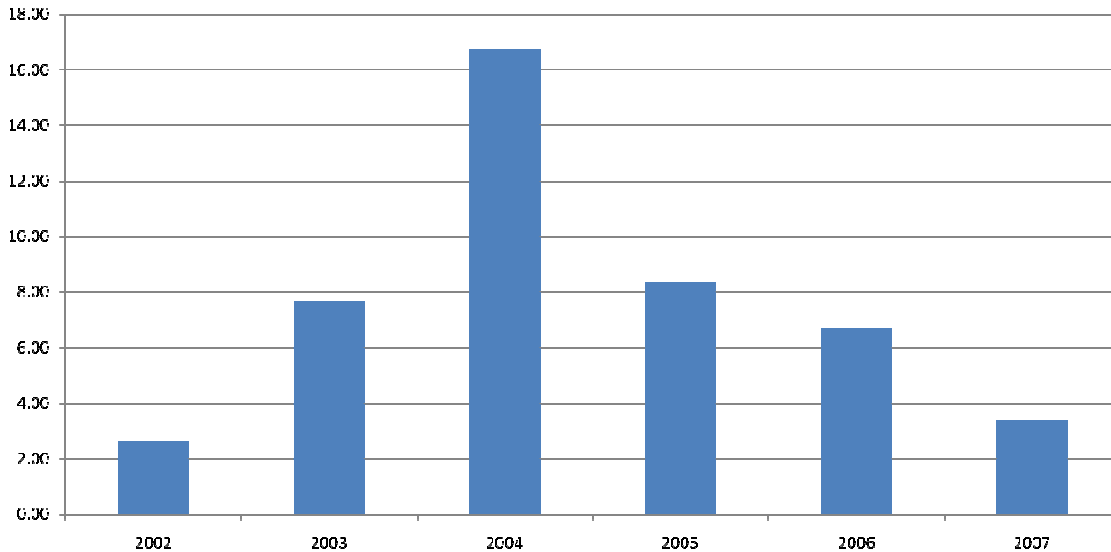
In addition, one may also view the extended time period that occurred after mediation to eventual eviction as an indication of successfully preventing homelessness and thus, program effectiveness. Accordingly, group effectiveness, as measured by non-eviction, is as follows: skilled unemployed (58%), employed temporary hardship (57%), unskilled

unemployed (53%); and retired/ ssi (48%) with the overall group average 56%. Specific breakdowns of client groups by years are presented in the tables provided. For example in the year 2006, 59% of the clients remained in non-eviction status. Please see the attached Non Eviction Chart. The average number of months between the time of intervention and time of eviction was calculated as follows: skilled unemployed (8.10 months); employed temporary hardship (7.78 months); unskilled unemployed (9.6 months); and retired, ssi (6.63 months) with the overall group average 8.12 months.

The length of time between mediation and eviction was examined by year by group. Specifically, groups and years remained relatively consistent over the evaluation period. There were some fluctuations from 2005 to 2006 mediations. Specifically, there was an increase from 46% to 59% effectiveness. It appears that this positive trend is continuing for the year 2007. For further group breakdowns see enclosed charts.

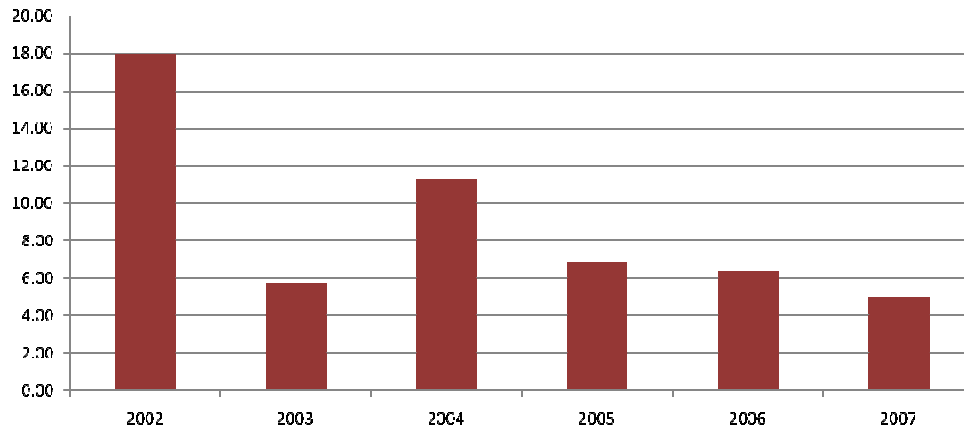
Skilled Unemployed Group

Mean months to eviction for Skilled Unemployed



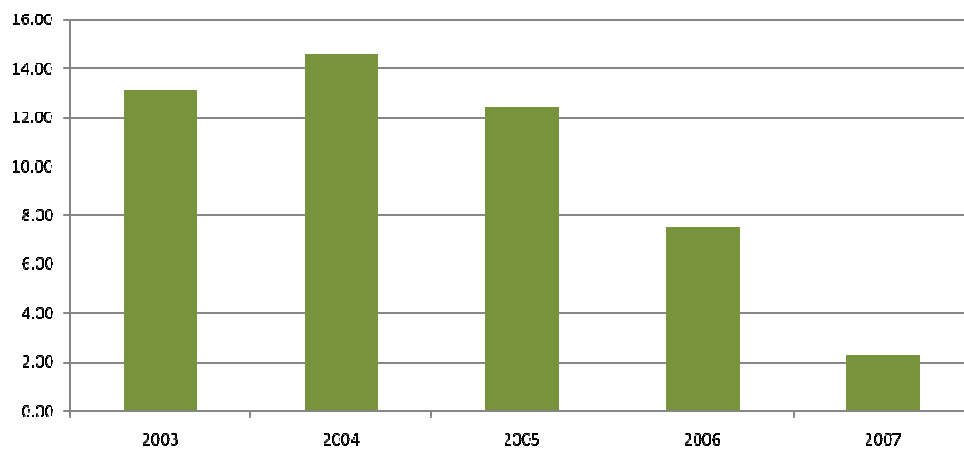
Employed with Hardship Group

Mean months to eviction for Employed with hardship



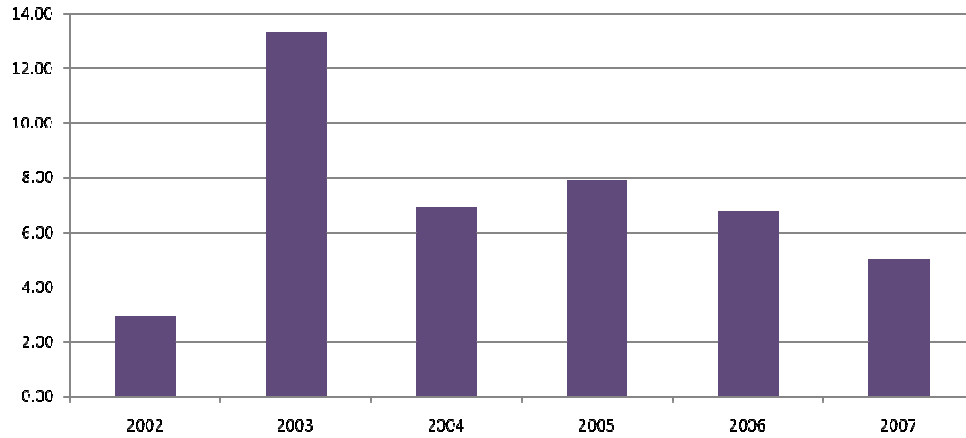
Unskilled Unemployed

Mean Months to Eviction for Unskilled Unemployed

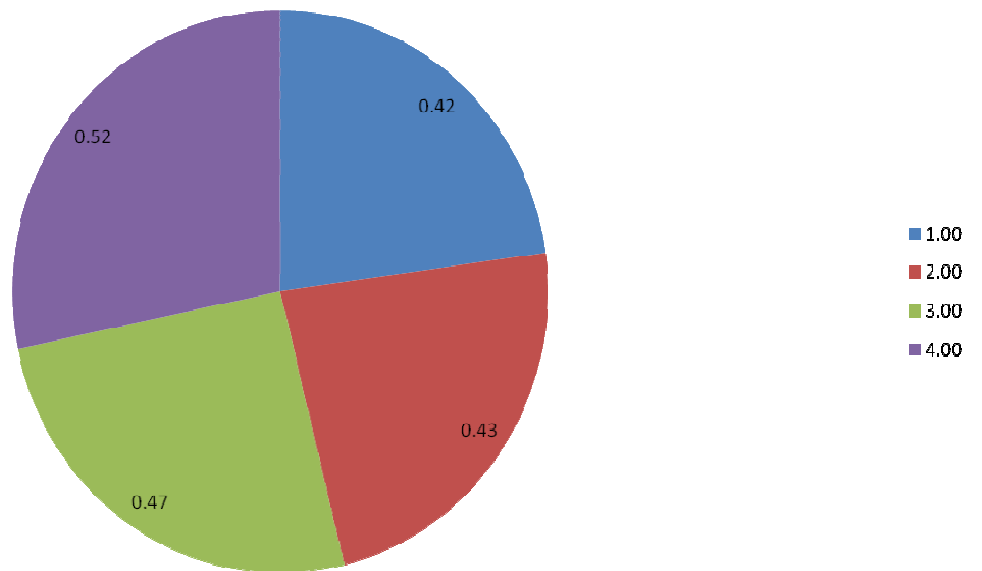


Retired/SSI Group

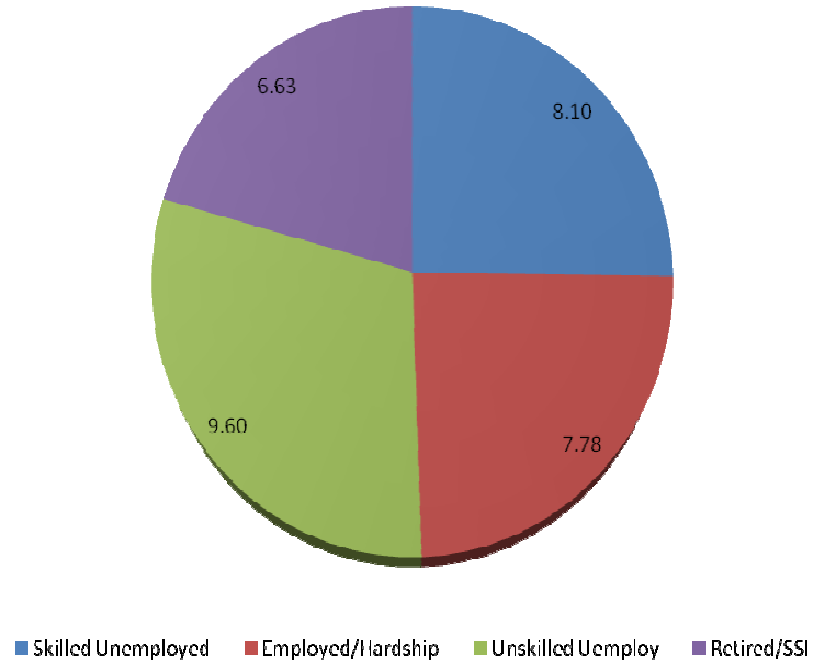
Mean Months to Eviction for Retired or SSI



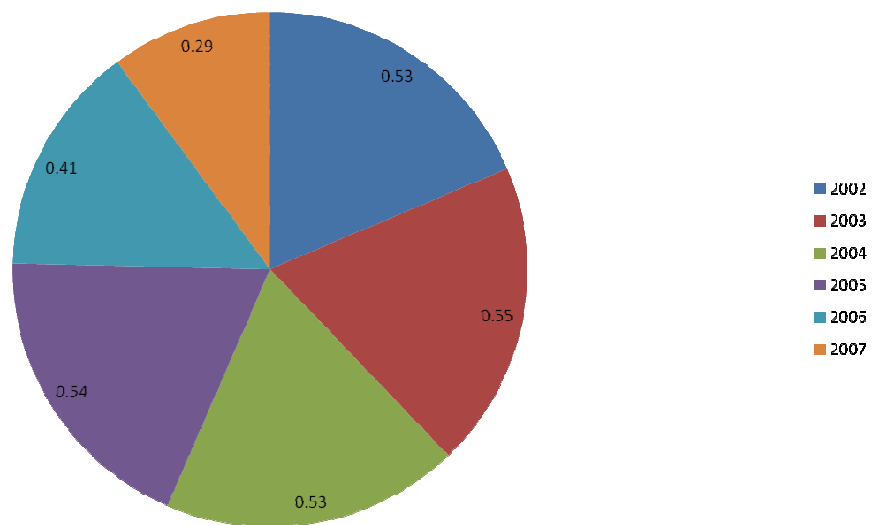
Evicted Rates by Group All Years



Mean Months from Mediation to Eviction for those Evicted.



Percent Evicted by Year



Conclusion

In conclusion the during 2003-2007 time period the CMC Homeless Prevention Program showed promising results. The following is a summary of the major research findings:

- Over half of the clients have non eviction status.
- The clients that eventually became evicted extended the eviction outcome for an average of 8 months (with a range of 6.63 to 9.60 months).
- The average amount of financial assistance given to clients was \$912.96, whereas the average rent was \$507.47 (highest \$549.36 retired/ssi group and the lowest \$446.97 unskilled unemployed). The average length of time between mediation and eviction and the limited amount of financial assistance given provides strong evidence that this program gives clients the opportunity for additional time to help their situation. Although it does not always prevent homelessness, it assists them in maintaining a home for an extended period of time.
- All groups benefited from the intervention. It is not surprising that the retired/ssi and the employed with temporary hardship reported slightly different rent and income than the other two groups. However, the difference is minimal and one should be cautioned to extrapolate any meaningful conclusions.
- Since 2006 there is a decrease in evictions which suggests that the program has experienced a promising shift in effectiveness.

