

2022-2023

Evaluation Plan for
Saranam, LLC

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Summary

Saranam has been serving families experiencing homelessness in the Albuquerque community since 2004 with the purpose of “empowering families to end their homelessness and poverty....” Upon entering Saranam’s program, families experience an immediate home, they are provided educational support or a plan to learn the desired skill, and they are also part of a supportive community where peer-to-peer engagement occurs both in the classroom and in their home environment. Saranam uses a two-generation approach to support families and their children in overcoming generational poverty.

Saranam is interested in tracking their families’ long-term outcomes to determine the effectiveness of their model.

The literature on “what works” in ending family homelessness is surprisingly thin. There is only one high-quality study—The Family Options Study—that provides some answers. The Family Options Study tracked housing and well-being outcomes in a study of over 2,000 families in 12 communities in the United States. Families who had spent at least seven days in an emergency shelter were randomly assigned to priority access in one of three programs or a control group of “usual care.” The three programs were: (1) long-term housing vouchers, (2) temporary housing subsidies, or (3) project-based transitional housing (PBTH) programs that provided support for families to become independently housed. Saranam is an example of project-based transitional housing, which the study defined as temporary transitional housing with a service-intensive component, lasting up to 24 months in a housing facility, like an apartment complex. PBTH programs are designed to support families by providing services that reduce barriers to housing and improve access to employment and education, increase earnings, and promote adult-child well-being. The study followed families for three years to assess their stability in terms of housing and other measures of adult and child well-being. (See Gubits, et. al., 2016, and Appendix B.)

The study found that long-term housing stability and other measures of adult and child well-being were significantly higher for those who received priority access to long-term housing vouchers, compared to usual care. Priority access to PBTH (or temporary housing subsidies) did not improve outcomes compared to usual care. Two significant limitations of the study make it hard to conclude that long-term

housing vouchers do lead to better outcomes than PBTH. The first is that the intervention was receiving priority access to a PBTH program, not participating in a PBTH. Only half of those offered priority access enrolled in a PBTH. Second, there is a wide variety of PBTH models. The study was unable to distinguish whether some models worked better than others. Thus even this high-quality study can’t render a verdict on Saranam’s model.

In its first year with the Evaluation Lab, Saranam refined its logic model and revised an alumni survey to align with desired program outcomes. Last year, the project looked for correlates of family success in Saranam’s program data and found that families that engaged more in the educational component of the program and those that stayed at Saranam longer had greater success rates. Staying at Saranam longer was also associated with much higher housing success rates. (Evaluation Reports <<are they both posted?>>) This year, Saranam wants to focus on assessing its long-term impact, to become an evidence-based program.

1. Organization and program overview

Saranam LLC is a not-for-profit organization that has been serving homeless families and their children in New Mexico since 2004. Their mission is to “empower families to end their homelessness and poverty through housing, education, and supportive communities.” The organization’s leadership consists of a diverse team in public service in the areas of program and project management, trauma-informed care, education, community outreach, and social work. Next year, Saranam will be expanding its organization and programs. They have spent the last two years managing a capital campaign fundraising and planning a second campus that will provide 25 additional residential units and program space in Northwest Albuquerque, NM beginning in the summer of 2023. This will more than double their current program capacity. They are supported by funders, volunteers, in-kind contributions, individual contributors, and grants.

Saranam has served 152 families over 18 years and three years ago added an Alumni Program component to begin analyzing post-program success in ending homelessness and poverty while providing parallel services like assistance with navigating job-related resources, other social services, financial planning, and even emotional support. Saranam serves families by focusing on its three mission components (housing, education, community) through two semesters of life skills classes, a second year of accessing education in the community, and case management focused on helping families to overcome economic and social barriers to their economic stability.

Families who apply for a coveted space in the program go through a rigorous interview process to be accepted. Applicants who meet the requirements for the program must be at a high level of readiness to qualify: they must be free of substances and highly motivated. Upon acceptance, families receive up to two years of housing with furnished apartments, living supplies, weekly cash allowance, intensive case management, full-time education, life skills classes, child care assistance, and the opportunity to thrive within a supportive community cohort.

Saranam measures success at exit in six domains:

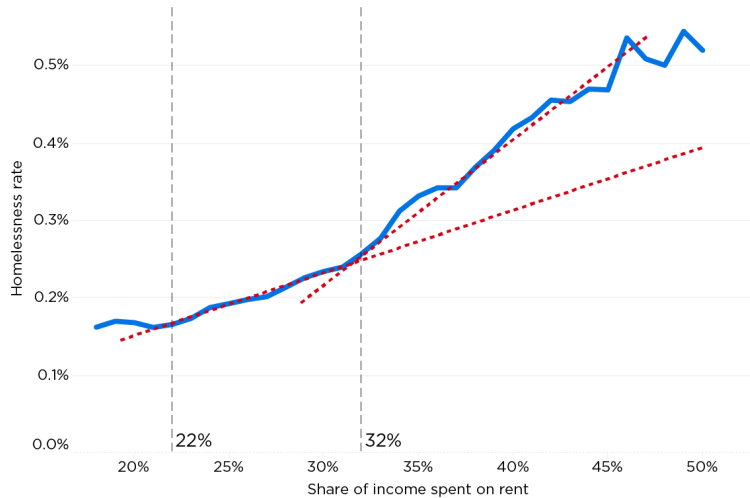
- 1) housing,
- 2) education,
- 3) employment,
- 4) life skills management,
- 5) children/parenting, and
- 6) overcoming major barriers to stability.

When a family succeeds in three or more measures upon exit, they are considered successful. Data from the most recent cohorts show a success rate of 80 percent, although housing success (following the string McKinney-Vento definition) was only 40 percent.

Past evaluations by previous UNM Evaluation lab fellows and Saranam have compiled descriptive and visual data on education in proportion to income level, (Annual Report, 2021), the percentage of New Mexico’s poverty level compared to other states and the U.S. When thinking about the housing domain and the requirements needed to be a successful renter or homeowner, the U.S. Census reports the median income for a female head of household is 53,000. This median income could afford an average rental or mortgage in Albuquerque, NM.

Homelessness climbs faster when rent affordability reaches 22% and 32% thresholds

An uptick in rent affordability beyond 22 percent translates into more people experiencing homelessness. Beyond 32 percent means a faster-rising rate of homelessness — which could mean a homelessness crisis, unless there are mitigating factors within a community.

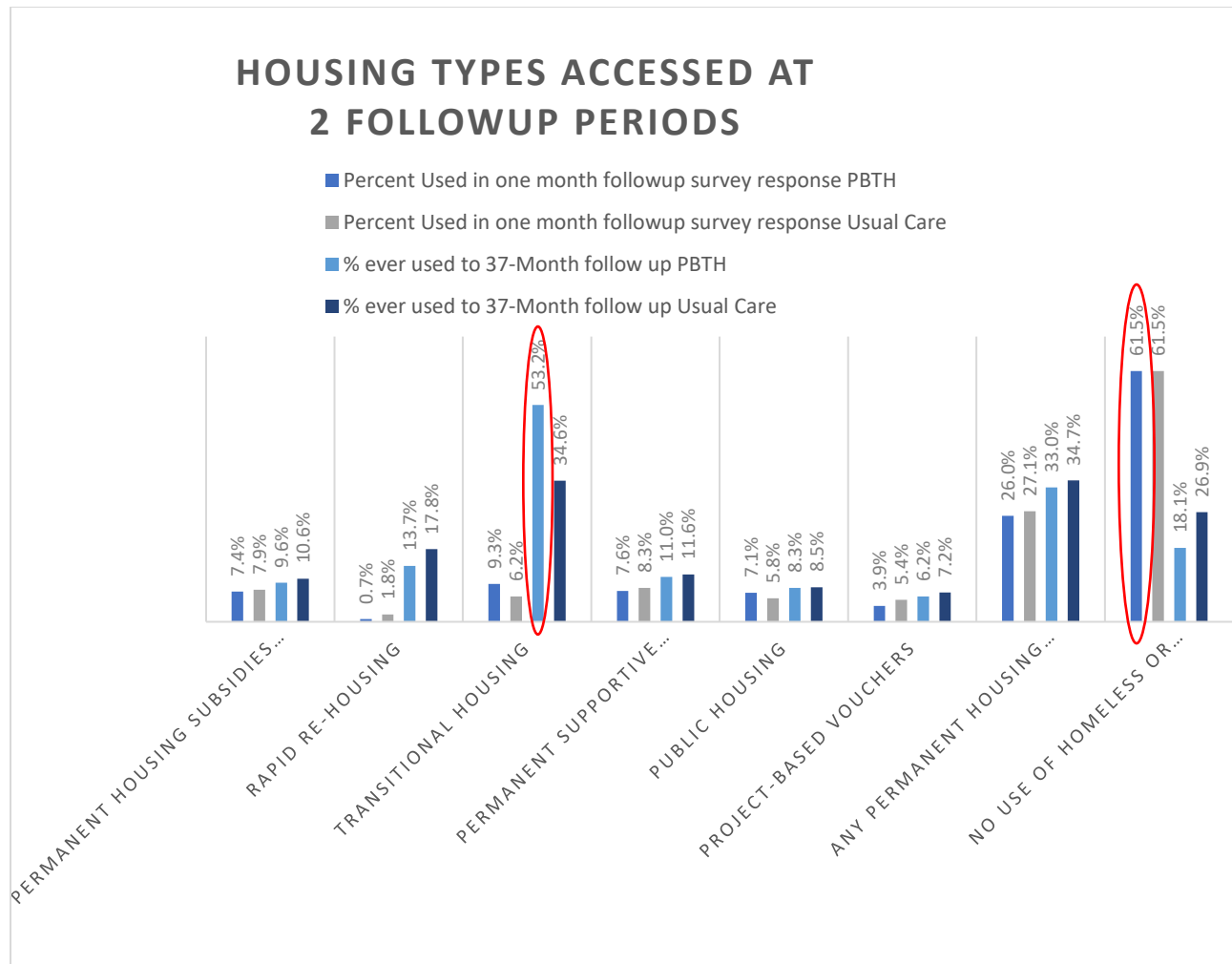


Zillow Economic Research | Source: An analysis by Zillow Research Fellow Chris Glynn of the University of New Hampshire, Thomas H. Byrne of Boston University and Dennis P. Culhane of the University of Pennsylvania.

According to RentCafe (rentcafe.com, 2022), the average rent in Albuquerque is \$1,235 but varies depending on factors like location, size, and quality. The average size for this rent is 812 sq. ft. and depending on the unit type, this price can be for a studio apartment, a 1-bedroom, and sometimes a 2-bedroom depending on the location. The website also depicts a range from the most affordable neighborhoods (\$878) to the most expensive neighborhoods (\$1,908) as of July 2022. It is

important to understand these metrics as participants in intervention programs transition from project-based transitional housing to permanent housing whether it be housing assistance or market housing.

The graph below illustrates which housing the participants accessed during the follow-up period one month and 37 months after exiting an intervention program from the Family Options Study (2017). After one month of exiting the program, 61.5 percent of PBTH participants utilized market-rate housing however, at 37 months, PBTH participants utilized another transitional housing. Saranam wants to know where their participants are long-term. This is an example of how stability can change over time for vulnerable families.



Currently, Saranam is in its third year of collaborating with the UMN Evaluation Lab and is addressing the need to assess its effectiveness in ending homelessness and poverty through its Alumni Program. They began by asking themselves simple questions. How do we know we are transforming the lives of families in the long term? Does our program make a difference in ending poverty and homelessness in the lives of the families and their children we serve?

After analyzing the data the Alumni Coordinator collects and manages, the team began to look at a bigger question, does Saranam’s programming end homelessness and poverty both in the individual (caregiver/s) and for their children?

The team then decided to develop a research proposal with a randomized controlled trial (RCT) to learn whether Saranam’s programming breaks generational cycles of poverty and supports families in becoming stable and self-sufficient in the long term. The study will conduct a series of questionnaires following cohorts for up to five years during prearranged times. The questionnaires may be conducted

through interviews or online surveys asking questions under several domains, i.e., housing, financial management, child/adult well-being, food & nutrition, and transportation. Saranam expects to see that their program is effective for their families and their children in the long term.

2. Purpose of the Evaluation and Evaluation questions

The purpose of the evaluation is to scaffold the organization’s previous work that found their participants were 77% successful at exit in 2021. The next natural step for Saranam is to show success beyond the initial exit data and thereafter for up to 5 years.

After lengthy discussions with Saranam’s leadership discussing and assessing their previous work and expertise, the Evaluation Lab proposed writing a research proposal to conduct a randomized controlled trial (RTC) to examine the evidence from follow-up surveys/questionnaires for up to five years showing whether participants of Saranam’s program end homelessness and poverty.

The Evaluation team will support Saranam in mapping the process of identifying a control group, identifying funders, and developing a research proposal.

The following evaluation question guides this year’s Research Proposal project:

- Are Saranam’s families stable in the long term?

Another question that precedes the work of designing a research proposal is, what is Saranam’s definition of stability? Saranam’s leadership will plan and conduct a focus group with families past and present to address this stability question. Also, in preparation for designing the RCT, Saranam will develop a process and plan to increase the alumni survey response rate for participants who left the program in the last five years and for future participants.

The Alumni Program Coordinator has begun mapping the program theory in a second logic model (Appendix 1) for the program. The logic model outcomes state, by one-year post-exit, the participant’s short-term goals will continue to have met three or more measures of success. Long-term goals are housing, employment/income, community involvement, and economic factors that have remained mostly constant for up to five years beyond exiting the program. More detail will be gathered in this area as the Alumni Program logic model is updated and the design of the RCT is developed. According to the Family Options Study (2017), survey/questionnaire instruments were used systematically at specific date intervals. Currently, Saranam’s survey questions are modeled after the Crisis to Thriving Scale: 5 Primary Domains and 10 additional domains.

3. Stakeholders [optional]

Stakeholders include families, staff members, volunteers, donators, grantors, and the community.

Saranam is in its third year of working with the UNM Evaluation lab with a set of new evaluation questions that will support the program’s mission which is to end homelessness and poverty in the participants and their children (2Gen). Results from an RTC study could potentially verify that Saranam is an evidence-based program and could provide more opportunities for other organizations to contribute to their mission.

4. Evaluation Design and Data Collection

Data and information from the alumni program consisted of the Alumni Survey, the number of families that engaged with Saranam as alumni (Appendix 3), the number of families that attended the annual reunion, and the number of families that responded to the survey by cohort (Appendix 4). The Alumni Survey was developed during the first Evaluation Lab partnership and was modeled after the Crisis to Thriving Scale. Engagement with families was captured by case notes recorded by the Alumni Program Coordinator in Saranam’s Apricot database which could be by email, phone, or text. The data displays engagement increasing over the last three to five years. The annual reunion resulted in low attendance overall from 2013-2022 except for 2022 when 17 alumni attended. The average attendance between 2013 and 2021 indicated 4.4 families. The number of families that responded to the survey by cohort was low with a 40 percent response rate.

The Evaluation Lab team will develop a research proposal with a randomized controlled trial (RCT) study to learn whether Saranam’s programming breaks generational cycles of poverty and supports families in becoming stable and self-sufficient in the long term. The study will conduct a series of questionnaires following cohorts up to five years during prearranged times. The questionnaires may be conducted by asking interview questions under several domains, i.e., housing, financial management, child/adult well-being, food & nutrition, and transportation. The expected results are to find that Saranam’s programming ends homelessness and poverty in their families and their children and ultimately becomes an evidence-based program.

5. Activities and Timeline

Saranam and the Evaluation lab team met bi-weekly between September and November 2022 to discuss data collection, the type of data, and the next steps in working toward the main evaluation question for

this year. The Evaluation Team consists of Melissa Binder, Marisa Wagner, Ellen Shepard, Rachel Zepper, Tracy Weaver, and Jennifer Mullen.

In November 2022, the decision made by Saranam’s team is to move forward with developing a research proposal and procure grant funding to conduct a randomized controlled trial to answer the evaluation question, is Saranam’s program effective?

Work that has been completed through November 2022 is as follows:

- Determined that the best way to capture outcomes is to conduct a Randomized Controlled Trial (RCT).
- Determined that random assignment is possible.
- Family Options Study will provide ideas for data collection and subject tracking.

Work to be Completed is as follows:

- The team lead will meet with fellow researchers at UNM, December 2022
- Recruit researchers, December 2022
- Data Collection, January 2023
- Develop Budget, February 2023
- Identify Funders, February 2023
- Complete Proposal, March 2023

Appendices

Appendix 1 Saranam Alumni Program Logic Model

LOGIC MODEL FOR: Alumni Program				
Resources/ Inputs	Activities (What you do)	Outputs (Evidence of what you do)	Within first year post-exit Outcomes (How participants benefit at the end of the program) 1 YEAR POST EXIT	After first year Long-Term Outcomes (How participants benefit into the future) MORE THAN ~5 YEARS
Funding for IDA & CSA Partnerships with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RGCU • PW • Financial teachers Volunteers Training & certification	IDA CSA – current families Group Financial Education Individual Financial coaching Provide referrals & resources Events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly • Reunion Capture end of year metrics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Survey Incentives for all of above Financial education (CSA nights & occasional daytime classes) with current families	Asset development Financial education hours Budget Savings Fun Stable/healthy relationships Saranam’s reliability/commitment Attendance/participation in events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current families • Alumni Volunteers & vol. hours Continued partnerships w RGCU & PW	Housing Job/increased income Saranam Community Asset Confidence Hope Continuing (or beginning) to meet measures of success	Stability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing • Employment/income • Relational (community) • Economic Resilience Hope 2Gen stability & resilience Self-sufficiency Continuing (or beginning) to meet measures of success
Assumptions:			External Factors:	

Appendix 2 Literature Review

Effectiveness of permanent supportive housing intervention programs for homeless families.

The federal government only began collecting national data and tracking overall homelessness, chronic homeless individuals, people in families, veterans, and youth homelessness in the United States in 2007 (National Alliance to End Homelessness). From 2007 through 2020 the overall homeless population decreased however, from 2016 up through 2020 homelessness began trending upward. The Alliance’s latest update for 2022 states that the pandemic interrupted data collection for point-in-time counts, therefore most data still reflects data from 2020. Also, due to the pandemic, the data saw a decrease in shelters and unsheltered homelessness rose. According to HUD (2017), approximately 34 percent of the total sheltered homeless population are families with children during the 12 months ending in 2017. The broad context of this literature review is to examine which intervention shows the best outcomes for families and their children in assisting them to end homelessness and become self-sufficient and stable, particularly with the intervention strategy, project-based transitional housing (PBTH).

In 2010, the federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness, *Opening Doors* was released, as a plan to decrease homelessness by offering a framework for action to state, local governments, and private and not-for-profit sectors. The paper discusses one of the four goals as being “prevent and end homelessness for families, youth, and children by 2020.” In 2020, a meta-analysis (Aubry, et. al., 2020) on the effectiveness of permanent supportive housing and income assistance interventions was conducted and within the article, there was the Family Options Study which focused on homeless families and children and their stability after an intervention program was accessed.

In 2008 the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) launched the Family Options Study, an empirical study to determine the effectiveness of permanent supportive housing intervention programs for homeless families across 12 communities in the U.S. This study was an experimental study that randomly assigned families into four intervention homeless programs to determine the effectiveness of different interventions that local governments, private, and non-profit organizations use to assist families experiencing homelessness. The study wanted to know which of the four programs studied was best for families, and determine the relative effects of three interventions compared to usual care. It also performed a cost analysis during the follow-up period, but this literature will only focus on the analysis of which program is best for families. Follow-up data were collected through five

surveys at 6, 12, 20, 27, and 37 months to determine housing stability (Gubits, et. al., 2017). The interventions considered and examined are, 1) long-term housing subsidy (SUB), 2) project-based transitional housing (PBTH), 3) community-based rapid re-housing (CBRR), and 4) usual care (UC). The family participants of this study (n= 2282) were offered priority access which provides families with an immediate program slot within one of the three programs provided they were eligible and agreed to the program requirements and were in an emergency shelter for at least 7 days. The paper concludes that their random assignment into four intervention programs for measuring intervention impacts is a stronger design than that of other studies of programs for homeless families.

Long-term rent subsidy (SUB) typically assists a family with HCV. Community-based rapid re-housing (CBRR) provides a short-term rent subsidy, for up to 18 months. Project-based transitional housing is temporary with a service-intensive component, lasting up to 24 months in a housing facility, like an apartment complex. Usual care is where families have access to referrals to a program not in the study and most likely are on a waiting list.

The one intervention that this literature review is interested in examining is the theories behind PBTH and its key issues and/or its outcomes to it being the best intervention program for families. Project-based transitional housing programs are designed to support families by providing services that reduce barriers to housing and improve access to employment and education, increase earnings, and promote adult-child well-being. There is not a one size fits all PBTH program, but the common theme is PBTH programs extend beyond housing stability to well-being and self-sufficiency. Child well-being is sometimes a direct service in PBTH programs and other times it is a distal outcome, for example, questions on surveys about child assessments of focal children measure child well-being. Proponents of the other interventions question PBTH programs on their intensive services and question whether all families *need* intensive services. The hypothesis behind the PBTH programs is that intensive services and interventions have greater effects on outcomes for families who faced more barriers to housing and psychosocial challenges (Gubits, et. al., 2015). The results from Gubits, et. al., (2017) show that during the 32-month follow-up, families that chose the PBTH assignment initially and at 32 months, have fewer families living on their own compared to the UC group. The data also showed that the PBTH group alongside the CBRR and UC groups are equivalent in proportions of families “doubled up” after 12 months of follow-up but slowly decreased throughout the 32-month follow-up.

The study did not find that PBTH programs were a better choice for intervention other than housing stability (compared to usual care) and that intensive services in other domains (adult well-being, child

well-being, and self-sufficiency) did not make a difference compared to families in usual care (Aubry, et. al., 2020). This is where Saranam would like to show how the program they offer to their families will show better results than the Family Options Study.

References

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Appendix 3

The number of families engaged with Saranam as alumni

*Contact is defined as case notes recorded by the Alumni Coordinator in Saranam’s Apricot database.

Count of Families	Cohort Year <input type="button" value="v"/>														Grand Total
Year of Contact <input type="button" value="v"/>	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2007	2005	Grand Total
2019			2	4	4	2	2	1	1		2				18
2020	1		7	5	6	4	6	6	1			1			37
2021	3	7	6	5	5	3	3	5	2	2	1				42
2022	8	8	7	8	9	10	8	7	4	4	2		2	1	78
Grand Total	12	15	22	22	24	19	19	19	8	6	5	1	2	1	175

Appendix 4

Alumni Survey response rates since 2012

*2021 responses have not been completed at the time of this data retrieval.

Year family entered Saranam	Original Saranam families	1 st Gen Adults	2 nd Gen Adults
2012	3	2	1
2013	6	7	2
2014	2	2	2
2015	4	4	0
2016	4	4	2
2017	5	5	2
2018	5	6	0
2019	5	5	0
2020	3	3	0
2021*	0	0	0
Total	37	38	9