Evaluation Report 2022

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Image: Saranam LLC

Saranam
A REFUGE FROM HOMELESSNESS, A JOURNEY HOME

UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO
EVALUATION LAB

Measures of Success: A Deep Dive

Executive Summary

Saranam is an organization that provides a two-year housing, education, and community building program for families experiencing homelessness in Albuquerque, New Mexico. By providing shelter and intensive case management Saranam aims to break the cycle of generational homelessness.

This year, the project centered on reviewing administrative data to document trends and patterns in terms of adult characteristics, program outputs, and family success in the program. Saranam's administrative data includes family characteristics by family member, family demographics, episodes of homelessness, family time spent at Saranam, and class grades for classes offered at Saranam. The evaluation team (consisting of the Saranam Executive Director, Program Director, and Director of Continuous Improvement, two UNM Evaluation Lab students, and a Team Lead) compiled and analyzed the data to understand Saranam family characteristics over time and to determine whether any family and program characteristics were associated with program success.

The data showed that Saranam families reflect the diversity of the underlying community: 47% of family members identified as Hispanic, 17% identified as Native American and 9% identified as African American. No family characteristic or family structure was associated with program success.

The stated reasons for homelessness at intake have fluctuated from cohort to cohort. Reasons for homelessness include economic and relationship issues, domestic violence, substance abuse, and health. The team found no meaningful correlation between any reason for homelessness and program success. Nor were the previous number of homelessness episodes or the length of the last homelessness episode associated with program success.

Two program characteristics: Saranam class grades and length of time at Saranam *were* significantly related to program success. Those who earned average class grades of 70% or higher were significantly more likely to achieve program success than those with lower grades. Families that stayed at Saranam longer had significantly higher housing and success rates. For example, 94% of families staying a year or longer achieved program success, compared with only 40% of those who stayed for less than a year. And 70% of families staying a year or longer are stably housed at exit, compared with only 33% with shorter stays.

Introduction

Since 2004, Saranam LLC has served families experiencing homelessness in the City of Albuquerque by providing them with a home of their own, education, and intensive case management. By providing families with their basic needs, families can then focus on pursuing their goals in higher education and learning how to live independently. Saranam's 2-year, two-generational (2-Gen) approach seeks to end the cycle of homelessness and provide parents with academic, parenting, and soft-skills training. Saranam recently acquired a second location, which will double its current capacity of serving 20 families at a time.

The Saranam model includes both housing and support for education and community connectedness as ways to overcome barriers to success and stability. Cohorts of 10 families enter the program together, creating an intentional system of community support as families each begin their journey out of homelessness. The 2Gen approach creates opportunities for and addresses the needs of both adults and children so that families can pass wealth from one generation to the next. Sometimes referred to as the whole family approach, the 2Gen approach has six key components:[1]

1. Social capital, meaning families have and form connections that can support them overall
2. Early childhood education
3. K-12 education for dependent children
4. Post-secondary education and career pathways for adults
5. Financial stability and developing economic assets in the family unit
6. Health and well-being, providing access to healthcare for physical, mental, and behavioral health

In the first program year, Saranam provides 250 hours of academic skills and 420 or more hours of life skills classes for adults. The classes prepare families for pursuing post-secondary education in the second program year. Saranam also provides educational support for school-age children, and age-appropriate life skills training that aligns with the adult life skills courses.

The following evaluation questions guided this year's project:

- What are the demographics and other characteristics of Saranam families over time?
- Are reasons for homelessness and history of homelessness correlated with successful exit from the program?
- Are attendance and performance in life-skills and academic classes correlated with family success?
- Is length of stay in program correlated with family success?

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[1]Ascend at the Aspen Institute. What is 2Gen? (2021, November 1). https://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/two-generation/what-is-2gen/

Saranam's administrative data includes adult and family characteristics, including demographic information and history of homelessness; program outputs, including grades in life skills and academic classes and time at Saranam; and program outcomes, including Saranam's "Measures of Success." Saranam measures success in six areas: housing, education, employment, life skills, parenting, and overcoming major barriers to stability. Any client who has achieved three or more measures of success is considered successful. (See Table 1 for definitions of each measure of success.)

Table 1: Saranam's Measures of Success

Area of Success	Achieved if:
Housing	Family is no longer considered homeless as defined by the McKinney-Vento Act. (The same definition is used to determine Saranam eligibility.) The McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness "includes children living in emergency shelters, motels, hotels, trailer parks, cars, parks, public spaces, or abandoned buildings, and those sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason."[2]
Education	Adult increased one course level on Accuplacer, earned HSE/diploma, passed 2 off-site classes, or received certification or degree.
Employment	Adult is stably employed upon exit.
Life Skills	Adult met at least two of three self-identified life skills goals.
Major Barriers	Adult resolved or made significant improvement to overcome the majority of 1-3 major barriers identified by Saranam staff.
Parenting	Adult met at least two of three self-identified parenting goals.

Source: Saranam, Exit Summary Form.

Saranam uses the Apricot data management system. Ellen Shepherd, the Director of Continuous Improvement, exported the data to multiple Excel Workbooks with multiple sheets. The UNM team linked all the data with the "Client ID" field, using the XLOOKUP command to compile the data onto one sheet. We then read the data into Stata, a statistical software package. We used Stata to summarize family charcteristics, calculate success rates, and test for signficance between groups, for example, between families with a spouse present and families with a single parent, and between those who listed substance abuse as a reason for homeless and those who did not list that reason.[3]

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[2] https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/understanding-federal-definitions-3-12-18_508_0.pdf, accessed on April 28, 2022. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act establishes a federal program to support the education of homeless youth.

[3] We used the prtest command in Stata to test for differences in success rates across groups.

Saranam families reflect the race and Hispanic origin distribution of Albuquerque and students in the Albuquerque Public Schools McKinney-Vento Program.[1] Compared with Albuquerque, Saranam family members are more likely to identify as African American and American Indian, and less likely to identify as white non-Hispanic. Forty-seven percent of Saranam family members identify as Hispanic, similar to the 49% of Albuquerque residents who identify as Hispanic. Compared with McKinney-Vento students, Saranam family members are more likely to be African American, American Indian, and white, non-Hispanic, and less likely to identify as Hispanic. (See Figure 1.)

There was no association between program success and any race and Hispanic origin group.

Figure 1. Race and Hispanic origin distribution for Saranam family members, Albuquerque residents, and McKinney-Vento program students
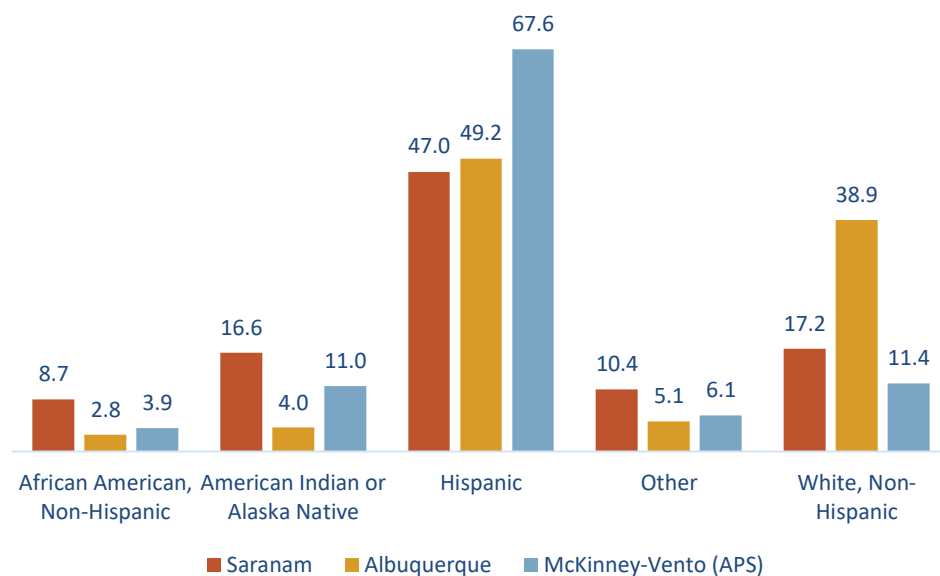
Sources: Saranam administrative data, American Community Survey 2019, Albuquerque Public Schools.

The average age of Saranam adults at intake was 31 years. The average ages of the oldest and youngest child were 8 and 4, respectively. Most families were headed by a single parent; only 15% of families were headed by two parents. About two-thirds of Saranam families were composed of 2 or 3 family members and the average family size was 3.2. (See Table 2 and Figure 2.)

There was no association between program success and any of these family characteristics.

Table 2. Family characteristics
(Standard deviations in parentheses)

Average age of household head	30.6 (7.1)
Average age of oldest child	8.3 (7.5)
Average age of youngest child	3.7 (4.0)
Average family size	3.2 (1.2)
Percent of families with 2 spouses present	14.8%
Number of families	147

Source: Saranam administrative data.

Figure 2. Family size
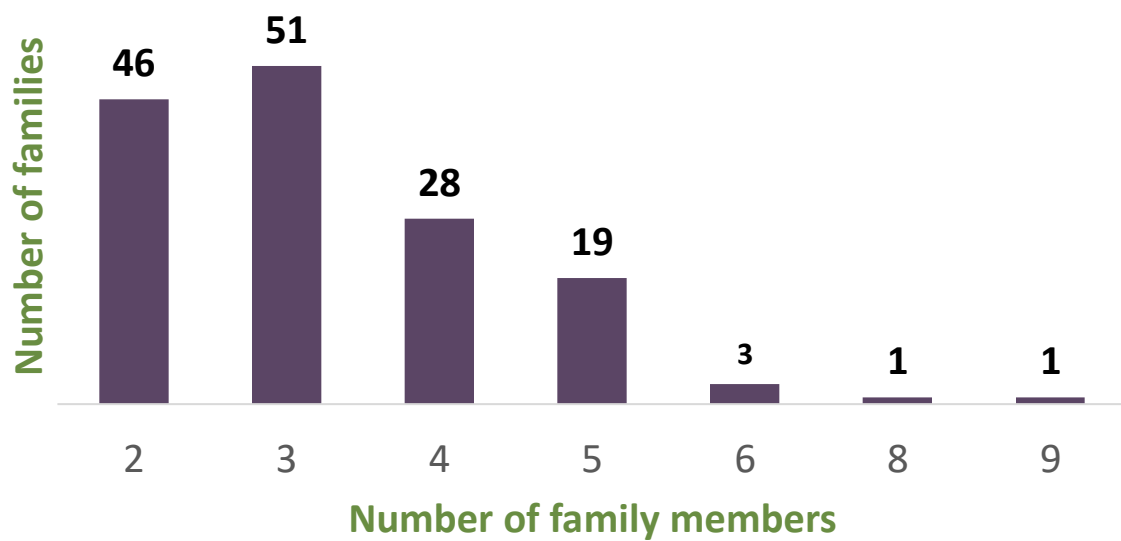
Source: Saranam administrative data.

Prior to arriving at Saranam, about 40% of families had been without housing for three months or less, and another 35% had been without housing for between 4 months and a year. 25% had been homeless for more than a year. The average time without housing was 13 months. (See Table 3 and Figure 3.)

Saranam families had experienced an average of 2.7 separate episodes of homelessness. About 45% had experienced just one episode, and another 30% had experienced two or three episodes. About 25% had been homeless four or more times. (See Table 3 and Figure 4.)

As far as the reasons for homelessness, 60% of Saranam families identified economic problems, 53% mentioned problems in relationships with others, and 46% listed domestic violence. Less common reasons were substance abuse (20%), incarceration (15%), mental health (15%), and physical health (11%). (See Table 3.)

While relationship and economic reasons have been fairly consistent over time, Saranam cohorts have varied in the share of families indicating domestic violence, substance abuse, incarcertaion, and physical and mental health as reasons for homeless. (See Figure 5.)

Table 3. Homeless experiences
(Standard deviations in parentheses)

Average number of episodes without housing	2.7
	(3.2)
Average length of last episode of homelessness in months	12.5
	(18.7)
Reason given for homelessness at intake (% of families)	
Domestic Violence	46%
Economic reasons	60%
Health issues	11%
Incarceration	15%
Mental health	15%
Relationship issues	53%
Substance Abuse	20%
Number of families	147*

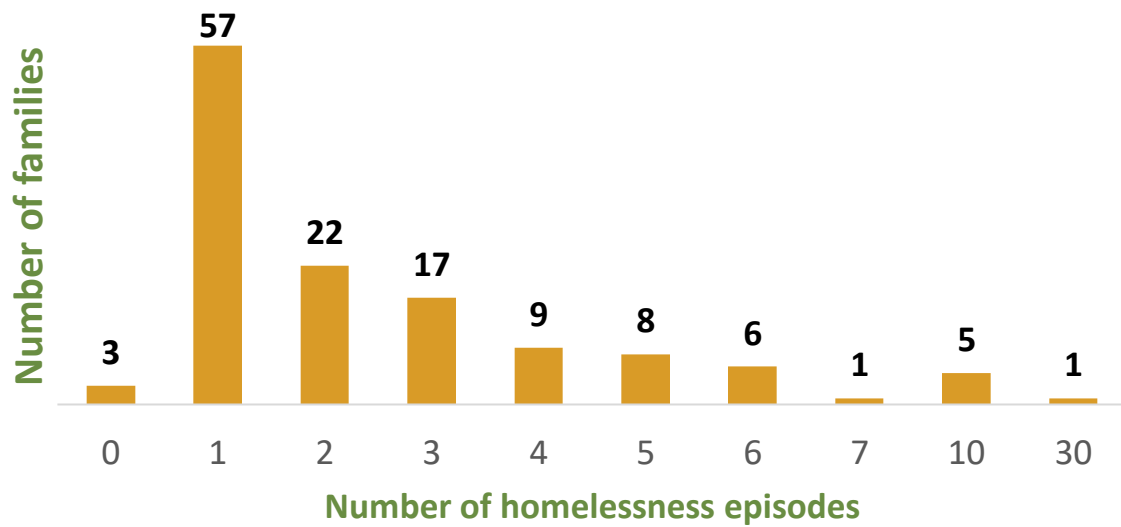Source: Saranam administrative data.
*Number and length of homelessness reflect data for 129 families exited families as of December of 2021.

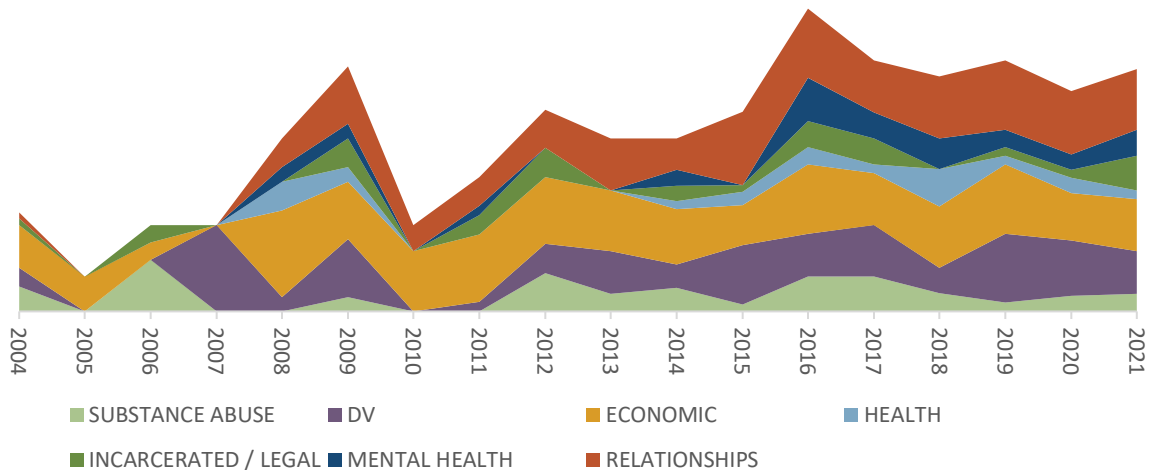## Figure 3. Number of months in last episode of homelessness
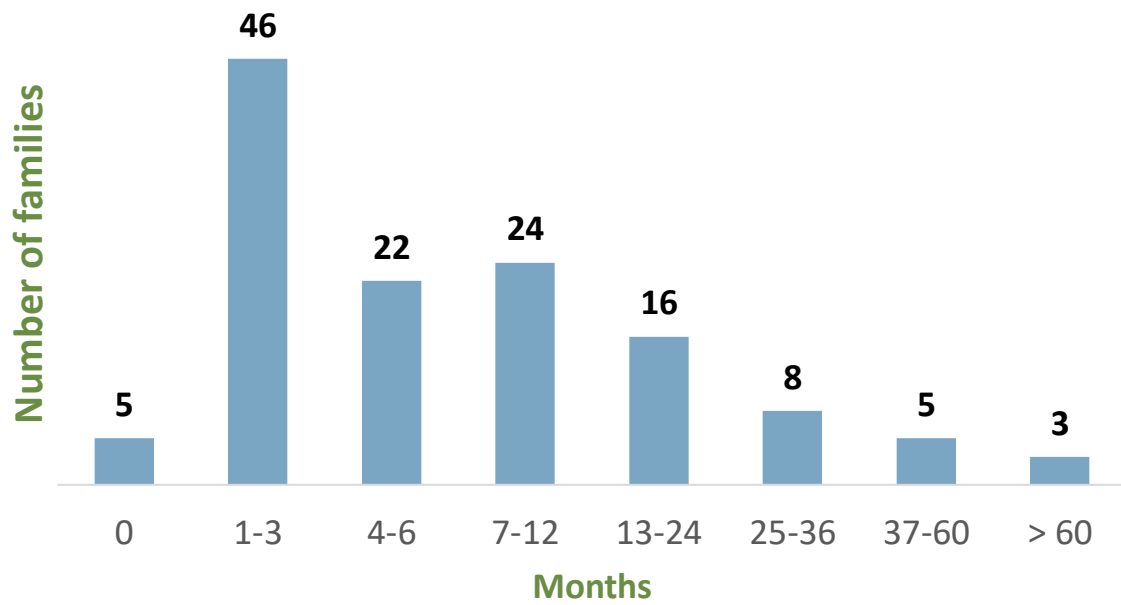
Source: Saranam administrative data.

Figure 4. Episodes of homelessness

Source: Saranam administrative data.

Figure 5. Stacked share of families with each reason for homelessness
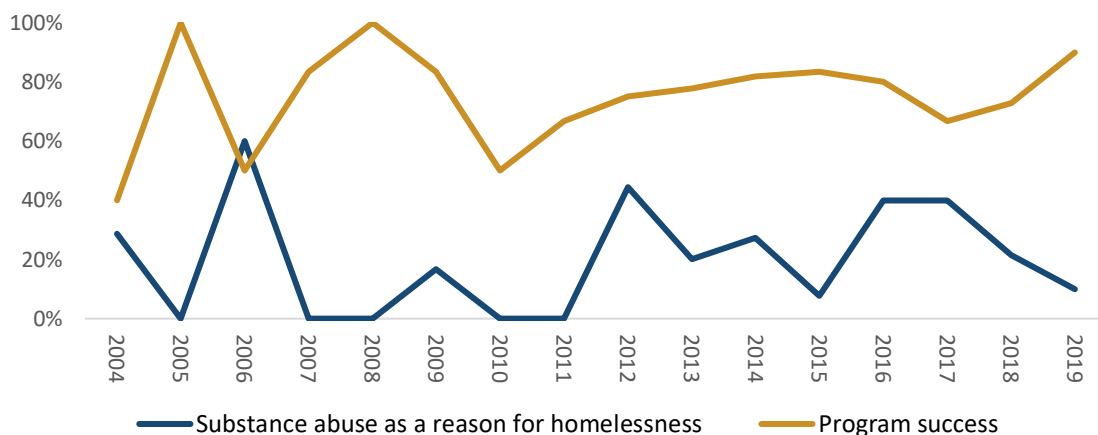

Source: Saranam administrative data, intake form on reasons for homelessness.

We compared families with and without each reason for homelessness. Only families with substance abuse and incarceration had significantly lower success rates, relative to those who did not list those reasons. To explore the effect of substance abuse and incarceration further, we plotted the success rate and the percent with those reasons for homelessness over time. We found a negative relationship between those reasons and program success in early years, but no relationship in more recent years. *Regression analysis confirmed that substance abuse and incarceration as reasons for homelesssness were NOT signficantly associated with success after 2010.* (See Figures 6 and 7.)

We also found no association between program success and previous number of homelessness episodes or between program success and the length of the most recent episode of homelessness.

Figure 6. Success rate and percent with substance abuse as a reason for homelessness, by cohort

Source: Saranam administrative data

Figure 7. Success rate and percent with incarceration as a reason for homelessness, by cohort
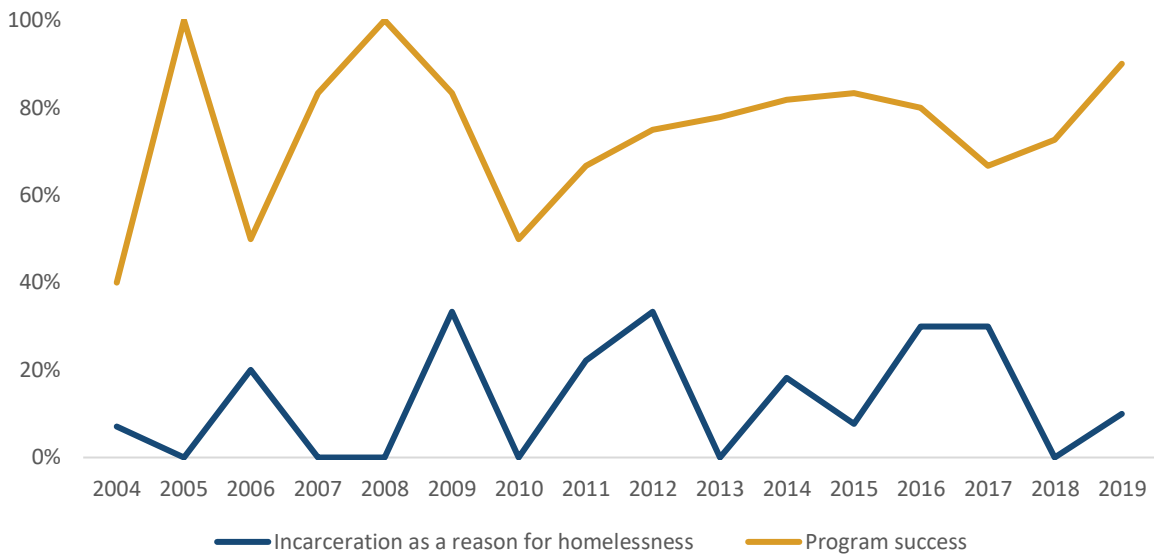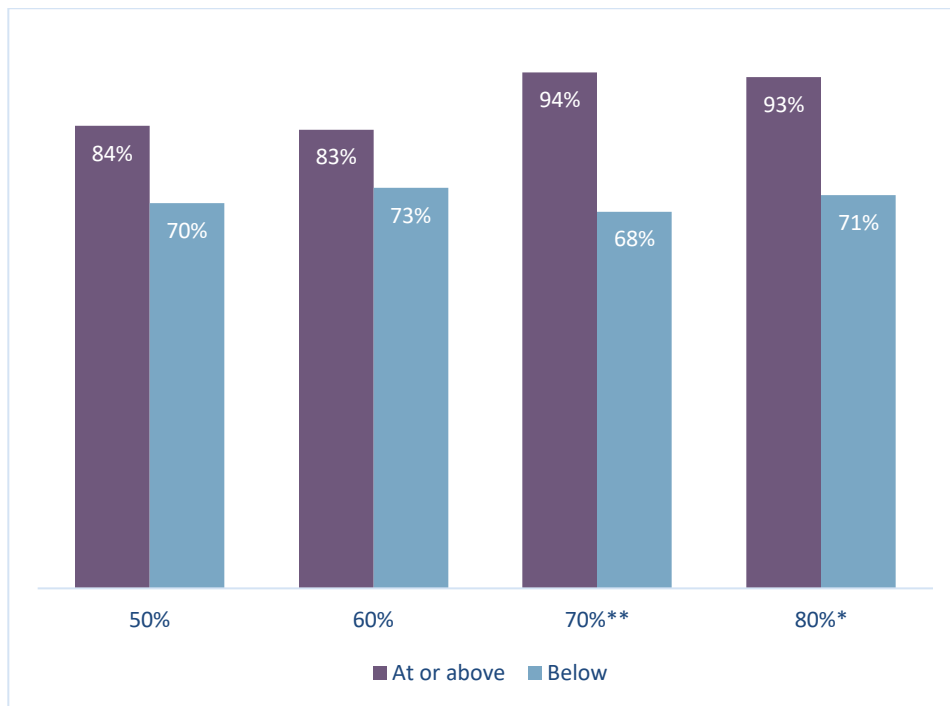

Source: Saranam administrative data

We also explored whether there was a grade threshold for success. Grades for Saranam classes in life and academic skills classes are awarded based on attendance and a behavioral rubric. There was class grade data for 33 adults beginning in 2016, when Saranam brought life skills and academic classes in-house.

Saranam had been using the 80% threshold as a predictor of future success. We compared adults at or above four grade thresholds in the Fall of the first program year—50%, 60%, 70%, and 80%—with those below the threshholds. Note that as the threshold rises, more adults go into the "below" category. Although those at or above every threshold have higher success rates, the difference becomes statistically signifcant at the 70% and 80% level. ***Ninety-four percent of those with a 70% or higher grade achieve program success, compared with only 83% of those who met the 60% threshold.*** (See Figure 8.)

For housing success, those below each threshold had higher rates of housing success. However, the difference is statistically significant only at the 60% grade threshold, and is therefore likely driven by the small sample size. (See figure 9).

Figure 8. Program success by class grades in Fall of the first program year

At or above: 84%, 83%, 94%, 93%
Below: 70%, 73%, 68%, 71%

Categories: 50%, 60%, 70%**, 80%*

■ At or above ■ Below

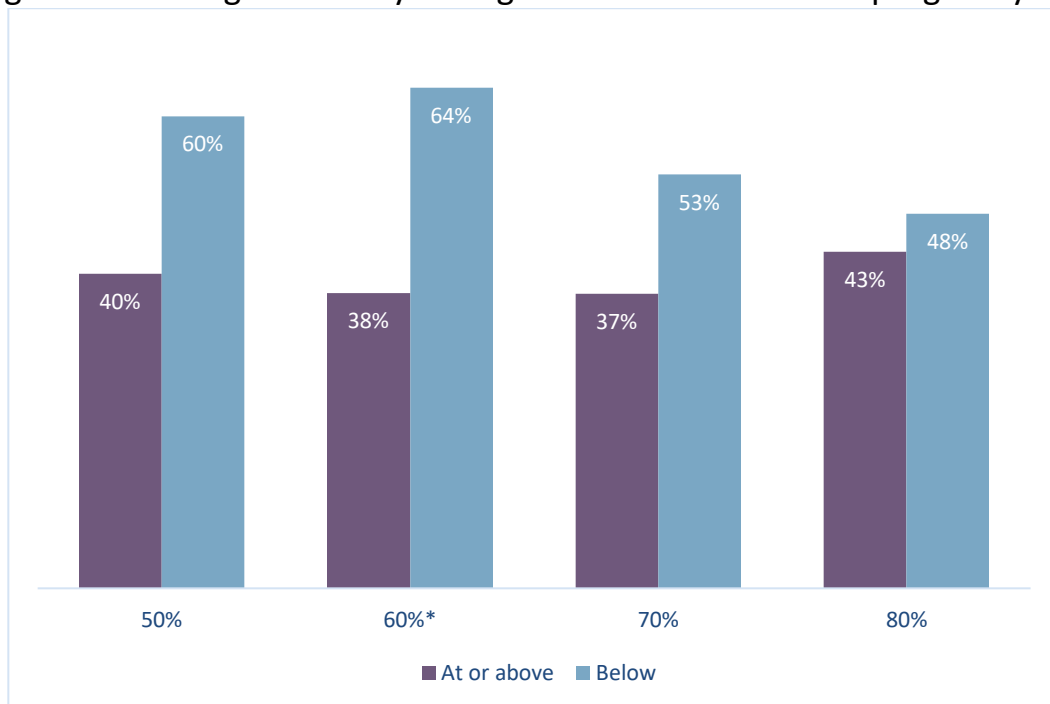Source: Saranam administrative data.
**Difference between bars is significant at the 5% level.
*Difference between bars is signficant at the 10% level.

Figure 9. Housing success by class grades in Fall of the first program year

At or above: 40%, 38%, 37%, 43%
Below: 60%, 64%, 53%, 48%

Categories: 50%, 60%*, 70%, 80%

■ At or above ■ Below

Source: Saranam administrative data
*Difference between bars is signficant at the 10% level.

Families that stayed in the program longer had higher program success. For example, program success rose from 84% for those who completed 26 weeks, compared with 94% for those who stayed for a year and 98% for those who stayed for a year and a half. The contrast between these success rates and those for families with less time at Saranam are striking. The success rates for those with less than 26 weeks is only 27%; success for those with less than a year is 40%, and success for families with less than 18 months is 55%. 133 families were included in this analysis. (See Figure 10.)
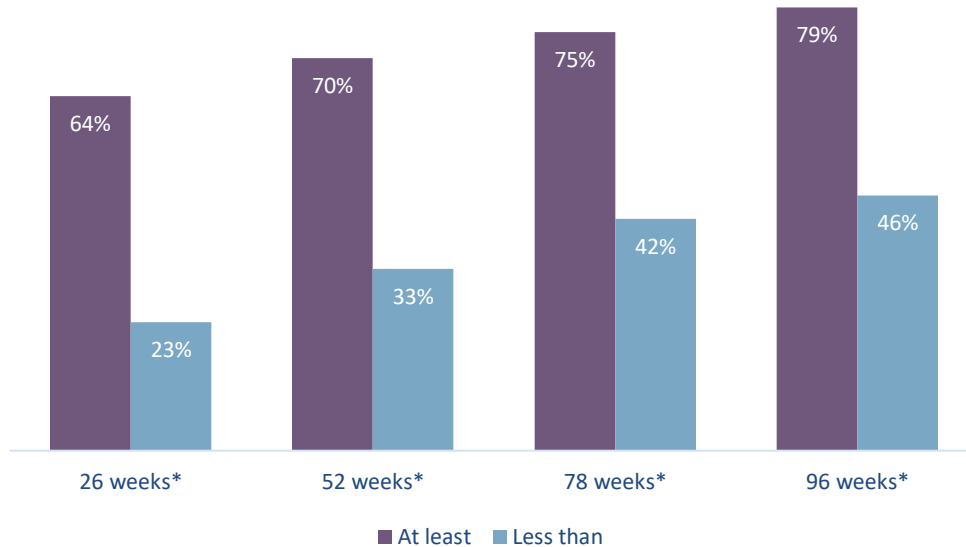
The association between program length and housing success is similar. 79% of families that complete two years at Saranam are stably housed at exit, compared with only 46% of families with shorter stays. (See Figure 11.)

Figure 10. Program success by weeks in program
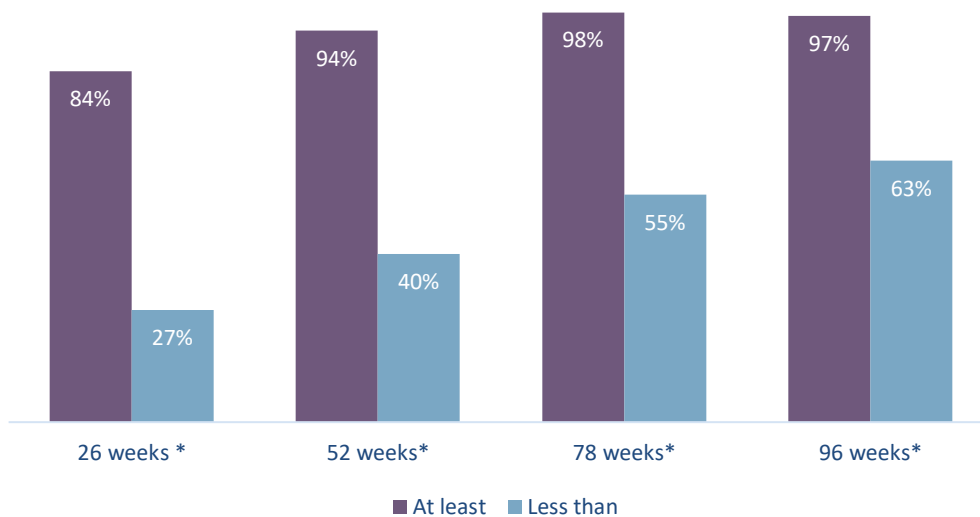
Source: Saranam administrative data

Figure 11. Housing success by weeks in program

Source: Saranam administrative data

Recommendations

Based on the work completed during this evaluation, the following recommendations emerged through conversations between the UNM and Saranam members of the evaluation team. These recommendations work to ensure there is continued evaluation of data collected by Saranam for family measures of success and reasons for homelessness:

1. Saranam should continue to collect data on class grades. Because Saranam has only recently brought classes in-house (previously Central New Mexico Community College provided them), there were only a few years of class grades available and the sample size was relatively small. Therefore, Saranam should reevaluate class grades and program success once they have 5 years' worth of class grade data.

2. Saranam should continue to use the Apricot data management system to capture qualitative data. While not in the scope of this evaluation project, Saranam has a wealth of qualitative data that could be used to tell the story of Saranam's families in new and innovative ways.

Next Steps

Since all of the correlations were made through Stata, which is a platform not used by Saranam, the evaluation team's next steps would consist of updating the script to be used in R studio. R studio is a free software open to everyone. Then when Saranam has more client data the same correlations can be ran through with the updated administrative family data.