

THE MASSACHUSETTS RAFT PROGRAM

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS, PROVIDING FAMILY STABILITY

A Report on the Residential Assistance
for Families in Transition Program,
South Middlesex Opportunity Council,
Fiscal Year 2017



EVERYBODY MATTERS

SUMMARY

South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC) provided assistance to 76 households through the RAFT program in FY 2017. The average RAFT payment was \$2,550. The average household that received RAFT assistance from SMOC had three family members; most were female-headed households with children. Two households that received RAFT in FY 2017 also received assistance from the program in FY 2016, accounting for less than three percent of the families that received RAFT from SMOC in FY 2017.¹

NEED FOR RAFT: HOUSING COSTS AND INCOME IN MIDDLESEX COUNTY

Affordable rental housing is scarce in SMOC's service territory in the Metrowest region. The rental housing vacancy rate in Middlesex County is lower than the statewide average at 3.4 percent, and fewer than two percent of rental units in Framingham are vacant and available for rent.²

The HUD Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Middlesex County is \$1,691.³ To afford a two-bedroom apartment at the Fair Market Rent, a household would need an annual income of \$67,640.⁴ The average income of the households that received RAFT from SMOC in FY 2017 was \$22,063.

The Fair Market Rent for this region includes the rental market in Boston and Cambridge. According to the U.S. Census American Community Survey, the median gross rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Framingham is \$1,390.⁵ This lower estimate still represents nearly 75 percent of income for the average household that SMOC assisted through the RAFT program in FY 2017.

The households that received RAFT from SMOC in FY 2017 are a very small percentage of the region's residents who struggle to pay for housing. In Framingham, **more than 42 percent of renters, representing a total of 5,158 households, pay more than 35 percent of their income toward housing costs.** The 24 Framingham households that received RAFT from SMOC in FY 2017 represent less than one half of one percent of rent-burdened households in the city. There are an estimated 14,578 families with children living in poverty in Middlesex County; nearly two thirds are single mothers with children.⁶ A tight rental market results in families spending more than they can afford to rent apartments that are often too small and in poor repair.

FRAMINGHAM BY THE NUMBERS

Families with Children Living in Poverty	1,130
Poverty Level for Family of Three	\$ 20,420
Affordable Rent at Poverty Level	\$ 511
Median Gross Rent for Two Bedroom Apartment	\$ 1,390
Rental Housing Vacancy Rate	1.9 %

SMOC'S RAFT PROGRAM

South Middlesex Opportunity Council administers the RAFT program in parts of Middlesex and Norfolk Counties.⁷ In FY 2017, SMOC provided a total of \$193,770 in RAFT assistance to 76 households.

Households received RAFT from SMOC in 15 communities in two counties.⁸ Slightly less than a third of these households that received RAFT lived in Framingham.

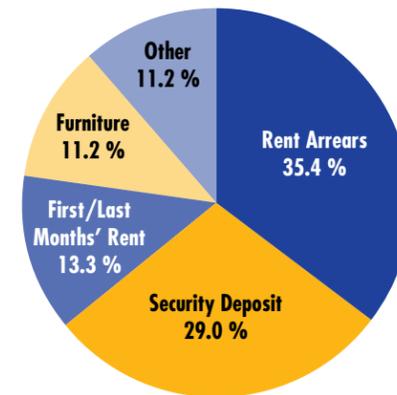
TABLE 1: SMOC RAFT ASSISTANCE BY COMMUNITY, FY 2017

Town	Assistance	% of Assistance	Households	% of Households
Canton	\$ 23,393	12.1 %	9	11.8 %
Dedham	\$ 6,741	3.5 %	2	2.6 %
Foxborough	\$ 2,660	1.4 %	1	1.3 %
Framingham	\$ 44,196	22.8 %	24	31.6 %
Holliston	\$ 4,000	2.1 %	1	1.3 %
Hudson	\$ 5,185	2.7 %	2	2.6 %
Marlboro	\$ 40,963	21.1 %	14	18.4 %
Maynard	\$ 7,105	3.7 %	3	3.9 %
Medway	\$ 2,724	1.4 %	1	1.3 %
Natick	\$ 7,746	4.0 %	2	2.6 %
Norwood	\$ 20,361	10.5 %	7	9.2 %
Sharon	\$ 4,000	2.1 %	1	1.3 %
Stoughton	\$ 16,622	8.6 %	6	7.9 %
Walpole	\$ 4,000	2.1 %	1	1.3 %
Wellesley	\$ 473	0.2 %	1	1.3 %

More than 85 percent of RAFT households that received assistance from SMOC were headed by women. Forty-nine percent of households identified as white and 42 percent as black/African American. Twenty-five percent identified as Hispanic/Latino. The average age for heads of household that received RAFT in FY 2017 was 38. Three households received RAFT from SMOC under new eligibility criteria in FY 2017.

Approximately 55 percent of the households that received RAFT from SMOC in FY 2017 were facing eviction, and another 13 percent of households were living with other families and were asked to leave. Uses of RAFT funds are shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: USES OF RAFT FUNDS BY SMOC



ESTIMATED SAVINGS FROM THE RAFT PROGRAM

Families with children and single pregnant women earning up to 115 percent of the Federal Poverty Level may be eligible for Emergency Assistance, the state's family shelter program. On average, the Commonwealth spent \$41,990 on each family that used the Emergency Assistance Program in FY 2017.⁹ The income eligibility threshold for a family of three to receive Emergency Assistance was \$23,483 in FY 2017. Forty-three families, representing 57 percent of the households that received RAFT from SMOC in FY 2017 had incomes below this threshold.¹⁰ Table 2 shows estimated savings from the RAFT program based on different assumptions about the percentage of RAFT recipients that might have become homeless and eligible for shelter without assistance from RAFT.¹¹

In addition to representing savings from the avoided cost of the Emergency Assistance Program, RAFT also provides critical stability for families facing challenging circumstances, like Ashley and her daughter Olivia (not their real names).

TABLE 2: ESTIMATED EA SAVINGS FROM SMOC RAFT PROGRAM

Assumed % of EA Eligible RAFT Clients That Could Have Needed Shelter	Number of EA Eligible RAFT Clients That Could Have Needed Shelter Based on Assumed %	Cost of EA	Cost of RAFT	Estimated Savings
10 %	4	\$ 180,557	\$ 13,262	\$ 167,295
25 %	11	\$ 451,393	\$ 33,155	\$ 418,237
50 %	22	\$ 902,785	\$ 66,311	\$ 836,474
75 %	32	\$ 1,354,178	\$ 99,466	\$ 1,254,711
100 %	43	\$ 1,805,570	\$ 132,622	\$ 4,672,948

Ashley is a single mother. “I did not have a stable job so my income was inconsistent. As a result of having little or no money, I got behind on my bills, including rent, car insurance, gas, food. I was literally sinking.” SMOC used RAFT funds to preserve Ashley’s tenancy. “My life changed for the better because I did not drown. I did not become homeless again because I got money to help me pay for my rent so I could move on with my life and my child.” Ashley is in college, pursuing a better life for herself and Olivia.

ABOUT SMOC

South Middlesex Opportunity Council is an umbrella organization that works to provide opportunities to enhance self-sufficiency and to create a safety net when short term and/or continuing support are needed. It provides comprehensive housing services in Framingham and nine other towns in the Metrowest region. Its other programs include behavioral health services; economic development, education, employment, and workforce development services; energy and financial assistance services; and family and nutrition services. For more information on housing services, please contact Leslie Lee, (508)872-6098, LLee@smoc.org.

REPORT FOOTNOTES

- ¹ All data on RAFT provided by SMOC and Tracker Systems, the Commonwealth’s software vendor for the program. In the course of preparing this report, RHN encountered significant inaccuracies in the data provided by Tracker Systems. All reasonable efforts were made to correct any apparent errors using data provided by SMOC. This resulted in discrepancies with Tracker data, and between data in different categories.
- ² U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2012-2016, 5-year estimates.
- ³ HUD Fair Market Rent (FMR) is used to determine payment standards for the federal Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) program. FMRs reflect the cost of rent and utilities paid by tenants, and are determined regionally. FMRs must be both high enough to permit a selection of units and neighborhoods and low enough to serve as many low-income families as possible. The standard represents the 40th percentile rent, i.e., the dollar amount below which 40 percent of the standard-quality private market housing units are rented.
- ⁴ National Low Income Housing Coalition, Out of Reach 2017. Housing costs, including rent and utilities, are considered to be affordable if they are no more than 30 percent of household income.
- ⁵ U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2012-2016, 5-year estimates. Median gross rent, which also includes the cost of rent and utilities, is calculated differently than HUD Fair Market Rent, which specifically excludes public housing and other subsidized rents that do not represent market conditions.
- ⁶ U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2012-2016, 5-year estimates.
- ⁷ SMOC offers RAFT assistance in the following towns: Acton, Ashland, Boxborough, Canton, Carlisle, Concord, Dedham, Dover, Foxborough, Framingham, Holliston, Hopkinton, Hudson, Lincoln, Littleton, Marlborough, Maynard, Medfield, Medway, Millis, Natick, Norfolk, Norwood, Plainville, Sharon, Sherborn, Stoughton, Stow, Sudbury, Walpole, Wayland, Wellesley, Weston, Westwood and Wrentham.
- ⁸ SMOC also provided \$4,000 in assistance to one household with an address outside the region.
- ⁹ Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Housing and Community Development, Emergency Assistance Program Fiscal Year FY 2017, Fourth Quarterly Report.
- ¹⁰ This is a rough estimate of the number of EA-eligible households, assuming average family size of 3. Some of the families that received RAFT from had more than three members, and some had fewer. The income threshold for EA is adjusted based on family size, so it is possible that more or fewer of these households that received RAFT would have been eligible for the family shelter program.
- ¹¹ For the purpose of this table, the average cost of the RAFT program is a statewide figure that includes all administrative expenses for the program.

Report written by
Robin Sherman
for the Regional
Housing Network
of Massachusetts

