

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 2018



SUMMARY

South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC) provided assistance to 121 households through the RAFT program in FY 2018. The average RAFT payment was \$2,350. Only one household that received RAFT in FY 2018 also received assistance from the program in FY 2017.¹

NEED FOR RAFT: HOUSING COSTS AND INCOME IN THE METROWEST REGION

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 3.6 percent. Just 2.3 percent of rental units in Framingham are vacant and available for rent.²

The 2018 HUD Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Middlesex County is \$1,740.³ To afford a two-bedroom apartment at the Fair Market Rent, a household would need an annual income of \$69,600.⁴ The median income of the households that received RAFT from SMOC in FY 2018 was \$20,616. *Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the region represents more than 100 percent of household income for the typical recipient of RAFT from SMOC.*

The households that received RAFT from SMOC in FY 2018 are a small percentage of the region's residents who struggle to pay for housing. In Framingham, nearly 53 percent of renters, representing a total of 6,412 households, pay more than 30 percent of their income toward housing costs. The 41 Framingham households that received RAFT from SMOC in FY 2018 represent less than one percent of these rent-burdened households. There are an estimated 14,588 families with children living in poverty in Middlesex County; nearly two thirds are single mothers.⁵

FRAMINGHAM BY THE NUMBERS

Families with Children Living in Poverty	1,460
Poverty Level for Family of Three	\$ 20,780
Affordable Rent at Poverty Level	\$ 519
Fair Market Rent for Two Bedroom Apartment	\$ 1,740
Rental Housing Vacancy Rate	2.3 %

SMOC'S RAFT PROGRAM

South Middlesex Opportunity Council administers the RAFT program in parts of Middlesex and Norfolk counties. In FY 2018, SMOC provided a total of \$284,366 in RAFT assistance to 121 households. Households received RAFT from SMOC in 26 communities. A third of the households that received RAFT from SMOC lived in Framingham.

TABLE 1: SMOC RAFT ASSISTANCE BY COMMUNITY, FY 2018

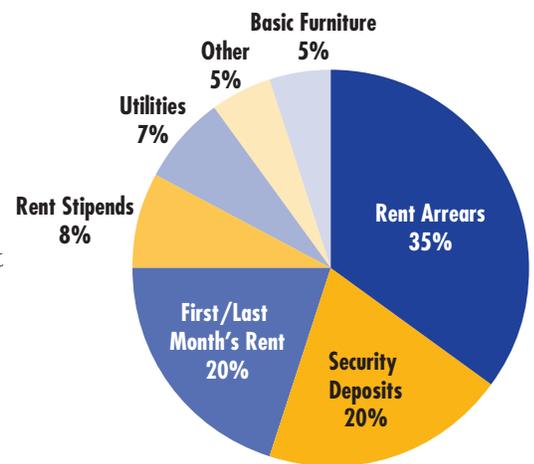
Town	Assistance	% of Assistance	Households	% of Households
ASHLAND	\$ 20,404	7.2 %	8	6.6 %
AVON	\$ 6,805	2.4 %	2	1.7 %
CANTON	\$ 24,029	8.4 %	8	6.6 %
CONCORD	\$ 2,662	0.9 %	1	0.8 %
DEDHAM	\$ 5,640	2.0 %	2	1.7 %
FOXBOROUGH	\$ 9,681	3.4 %	3	2.5 %
FRAMINGHAM	\$ 88,776	31.2 %	41	33.9 %
HOLLISTON	\$ 3,660	1.3 %	2	1.7 %
HOPKINTON	\$ 690	0.2 %	1	0.8 %
HUDSON	\$ 15,379	5.4 %	8	6.6 %
MARLBOROUGH	\$ 30,577	10.8 %	15	12.4 %
MAYNARD	\$ 4,550	1.6 %	2	1.7 %
MEDWAY	\$ 4,000	1.4 %	1	0.8 %
MILLIS	\$ 250	0.1 %	1	0.8 %
NATICK	\$ 11,843	4.2 %	5	4.1 %
NEEDHAM	\$ 2,363	0.8 %	1	0.8 %
NORWOOD	\$ 7,247	2.5 %	3	2.5 %
PLAINVILLE	\$ 11,599	4.1 %	4	3.3 %
SHARON	\$ 3,081	1.1 %	1	0.8 %
SHERBORN	\$ 650	0.2 %	1	0.8 %
STOUGHTON	\$ 18,697	6.6 %	5	4.1 %
STOW	\$ 1,575	0.6 %	1	0.8 %
SUDBURY	\$ 684	0.2 %	1	0.8 %
WALPOLE	\$ 6,605	2.3 %	2	1.7 %
WAYLAND	\$ 2,145	0.8 %	1	0.8 %
WELLESLEY	\$ 775	0.3 %	1	0.8 %

Seventy-nine percent of households that received RAFT from SMOC were headed by women. The typical household that received RAFT was a woman with two children. Sixty-seven percent of heads of household identified as white and 31 percent as Black/African-American. Twenty-six percent identified as Hispanic/Latino. The average age for heads of household that received RAFT from SMOC in FY 2018 was 44.

SMOC used RAFT funds to assist 38 households that did not include children under age 21 in FY 2018. SMOC staff person Lo-Ammi Rocha explains, “these were people who would have fallen through the cracks, including elderly individuals, homeowners who ran out of heating fuel, and young adults who would otherwise live on the streets. RAFT expansion has made a significant difference in the demographics of the population we serve; clients that once had to be referred to an external agency for assistance are now receiving all the services, education and information they need in one place.” Rocha notes that SMOC worked with several councils on aging, libraries and other organizations that were instrumental in referring elderly individuals that were unable to get assistance elsewhere to the RAFT program.

Forty-one percent of the households that received RAFT from SMOC in FY 2018 were facing eviction, and 11 percent of households were living with other families and were asked to leave. Almost a quarter of households that received RAFT from SMOC in FY 2018 experienced utility shut-offs. Uses of RAFT funds are shown in Figure 1. SMOC also offers fuel assistance in the Metrowest region, and explains that RAFT has filled an important gap in services during the months when the federally-funded Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program is not available.

FIGURE 1: USES OF RAFT FUNDS BY SMOC, FY 2018



ESTIMATED SAVINGS FROM THE SMOC 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 \$46,450 on each family that used the Emergency Assistance Program in FY 2018.⁷ The income eligibility threshold for a family of three to receive Emergency Assistance was \$23,892. Approximately 63 percent of the families that received RAFT from SMOC in FY 2018, 52 households, had incomes below this threshold.⁸

TABLE 2: ESTIMATED EA SAVINGS FROM SMOC RAFT PROGRAM, FY 2018

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 @ \$46,450/ Household	Cost of RAFT @ \$3,130/ Household	Estimated Savings
10 %	5	\$ 191,055	\$ 17,992	\$ 173,063
25 %	13	\$ 477,637	\$ 44,980	\$ 432,657
50 %	26	\$ 955,274	\$ 89,960	\$ 865,313
75 %	39	\$ 1,432,911	\$ 134,940	\$ 1,297,970
100 %	52	\$ 1,910,547	\$ 179,921	\$ 1,730,627

Table 2 shows estimated savings from the SMOC 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.⁹

In addition to representing savings from the avoided cost of the Emergency Assistance Program, RAFT also provides critical stability for families facing challenging circumstances beyond their control, like Emmanuel (not his real name) and his family.

"I have worked my entire life. I have been able to provide a decent life for my wife and two teenage children. But I had recently been diagnosed with cancer, and I was no longer in the initial stages of the disease. I continued to work as a limo driver and pick up shifts after every chemo session. I am Haitian, my family is Haitian, and in our culture, the men are providers, no matter what. When I went into SMOC, I was already behind on my rent by \$12,000. My landlords and property managers tried everything they could to help me, because they knew my situation. My rent at that time was \$2,500 a month, and I had been able to afford it for years before I became ill. I had found a new unit, more affordable than where I was and my previous landlords agreed to make a payment arrangement for my outstanding rent arrearage but I still needed emergency financial help to move into the new place. I was desperate, but I never lost faith that we would get through this. With the assistance provided by RAFT, my family and I were able to start over, in a new place, where with my income and my wife's income combined we would cover the rent and our bills. My oldest daughter didn't have to drop out of college; she is still pursuing her dreams. We were given a second chance, a second chance that I will never forget and that I am forever grateful for. I pray that SMOC, HCEC and those people that helped me get back on my feet, continue to bless others the same way I was blessed by them."

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 Lo-Ammi Rocha, (508) 872-4853 x2298; LRocha@smoc.org.

REPORT FOOTNOTES

- ¹ All data on RAFT provided by SMOC and Tracker Systems, the Commonwealth's software vendor for the program.
- ² U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2013-2017, 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 2018. 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, 2013-2017, 5-year estimates.
- ⁶ 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.
- ⁷ Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Housing and Community Development, DHCD EA Monthly Report, Statewide Summary, June 2018.
- ⁸ This is a rough estimate of the number of EA-eligible households, assuming average family size of 3 and subtracting the number of households that would be categorically ineligible for Emergency Assistance.
- ⁹ 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.