EPIC
Impact Report:
Year One
Background

In 2017 Your Way Home commissioned an Eviction Prevention Research Study with the consulting firm, Barbara Poppe & Associates. This study was Your Way Home’s first endeavor to better understand how to more effectively prevent homelessness from occurring in our community.

This study resulted in the "Unlocking Doors to Homelessness Prevention" report. The report offers insight to other communities that are also ready to start addressing homelessness prevention as an extension of their homeless crisis response systems; provides useful tips for evaluating local systems and data; and highlights the innovative programs and services that so many other communities are already undertaking.

Under the leadership of Your Way Home Montgomery County, in partnership and with funding from HealthSpark Foundation, Montgomery Bar Foundation, and other anonymous donors, two new efforts were piloted to begin addressing prevention needs in Montgomery County. The first of these pilots was a court-based eviction prevention program, EPIC (the Eviction Prevention and Intervention Coalition).

Program Overview: The Eviction Prevention and Intervention Coalition (EPIC) is a pilot project designed to stabilize vulnerable families and individuals in Montgomery County who are facing eviction by providing them with free legal and social services support on the day of their eviction hearing. Additionally, the program provides financial assistance to prevent evictions, and connection to the long-term financial and social supports needed to prevent future housing instability.

Pilot Program Eligibility: Montgomery County residents who have received an eviction notice and whose hearing is held in Norristown, MDJ #38-1-16.

The program offers:
- Pro bono legal consultation and representation in court.
- Case management for up to 30 days.
- Financial Assistance (maximum $1,500)

"Ending homelessness is possible. The work being pioneered in Montgomery County and the "Unlocking Doors" report identify innovative strategies for eviction and homelessness prevention strategies. With successful partnerships and strong political support it is possible to achieve our vision that no one should be without a safe, stable place to call home."

–Barbara J. Poppe, Barbara Poppe & Associates
“Within the first ten minutes of meeting with the Your Way Home people and discussing our collective missions, we knew we were on to something special. From the shared vision to the identification of dedicated and hard-working volunteers and partners, to the unprecedented speed with which the project came together...this experience has, indeed, been nothing short of EPIC. I am honored to have been a part of such a team.”

- Nancy Walsh, Special Projects Development Manager, Montgomery Bar Association

EPIC is the result of a cross-system partnership between the following organizations:

**Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania:** Provides legal training for volunteer lawyers and social service staff.

**Montgomery Bar Association:** Serves as the volunteer recruiter and coordinator. Free, limited legal representation is provided through the coordination of Montgomery Bar Association pro bono attorneys.

**Montgomery Bar Foundation:** Serves as a champion, partner, and pilot project funder.

**Montgomery County Courts:** Provides support with court administration.

**The Montgomery County Foundation, Inc.:** Coordination of social services and Fiscal Sponsor for EPIC grants.

**Montgomery County Office of Housing & Community Development:** Provides general program management, administration, and funding.

**PA-504 Continuum of Care / Your Way Home Public-Private Partnership:** Provides additional community input, resources, and support.

**Pottstown Cluster of Religious Communities:** Provides case management and mediation to EPIC clients.

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The Honorable Margaret Hunsicker

Judge Hunsicker has been a Magisterial District Judge in Norristown for 13 years, having first been elected in 2006. The Judge agreed to be the test site for the EPIC pilot in order to increase access to justice for vulnerable tenants facing eviction.

Judge Hunsicker was the recipient of the 2018 Champion for Change award for her work with EPIC.
Volunteer Outcomes

"EPIC is a unique opportunity for the lawyers in Montgomery County to give back through pro bono legal support. The program is truly a collaborative effort. Our lawyers, at the Montgomery Bar Association, are constantly searching for ways to use their legal expertise to help those most vulnerable in the County. EPIC gives them the opportunity to do this in a big way."

-Mary C. Pugh, Esq., President, Montgomery Bar Association

"The EPIC program shines as a key example of the power of collaboration. Take away any component and the program is greatly diminished. Kismet may have brought Emma Hertz of Your Way Home and Nancy Walsh of the Montgomery Bar Association to make initial contact a year ago-- but it is the dedication and ongoing energy of the diverse voices in the EPIC Committee that will keep the program moving forward in seeking to decrease evictions in all at-risk areas of Montgomery County."

- Barbara M. Smith, Montgomery Bar Foundation Secretary, and Montgomery Bar Association Director

20 Pro Bono Attorneys

267 Volunteer Hours

$46,725 Volunteer Hour Cost Conversion at $175 per hour

*Volunteers covered 89 shifts at approximately 3 hours per shift, or 267 hours total, at a rate of $175 per hour.
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Impact

Evictions Prevented\(^1\) 85%

Demographics\(^2\)

Black/African American: 68%
Women: 75%

Why are people being evicted?\(^3\)

- 33% other
- 28% financial issues
- 26% job loss
- 13% habitability issues

Total Financial Assistance

$60,935

2018: 81 households were served with case management, legal, and financial services.

(1) 81 households were served through the EPIC program in 2018. 3 households were offered continuances; their outcomes were delayed and could not be included in. 66 of 78 (85%) households had positive outcomes.
   - 50 had their eviction delayed by “pay and stay” or another payment arrangement
   - 10 reached other arrangements
   - 3 received no financial assistance, but tenant had defense to present in court
   - 2 had their evictions thrown out with no money due
   - 2 had their evictions dismissed with a payment plan
   - 2 had already left but did not have an eviction added to their record
   - Negative/other outcomes: 7 were evicted, 5 outcomes are unknown

(2) 68% of participants were Black or African American, 26% were white, and 6% either identified multiple racial identities or declined to respond. 75% of participants were women. Over half (52%) of all participants were Black or African American women, which was the largest race/gender category.

10% of participants identified as Hispanic/Latinx ethnicity. This is twice the general population of Montgomery County (estimated at 5.2% in 2018), but far smaller than the estimated Hispanic/Latinx population of Norristown (28.3% in 2010).

(3) Other includes: problems with landlords other than habitability, illness (personal or family), incomplete survey data.
Final Thoughts

"This work has allowed me to help tenants help themselves. It has also helped me to reconnect a bridge between tenant and landlord. In some circumstances it has helped tenants in difficult situations find their voices with legal support."

-Becka Hoover, Housing Stability Coach, Pottstown Cluster of Religious Communities

"Evictions often lead to job loss and poverty. Once evicted, most households are forced to find more expensive and lower quality housing due to the negative impact that an eviction has on one’s credit and rental history. Evictions disproportionately affect women, households with children, and African Americans. We know the only way to create equitable access to services is to apply justice and a bit of good judgment to a system that is out of balance. The Eviction Prevention and Intervention Coalition, has introduced this balance and because of these tremendous strides in the right direction, there is no turning back, only moving forward."

-Carolyn Mayinja, Senior Program Manager, Your Way Home