



# The Lodge

Annual Update 2021-2022



Department of  
Behavioral Health

## Introduction

The Lodge is an innovation project launched in Fresno County two years ago with the goal to explore, identify, and understand engagement for individuals who are homeless or at-risk for homelessness, who have limited engagement with care, and are in the pre-contemplation state of change.

The Lodge is a model which seeks to engage persons who are unhoused and who have a Serious Mental Illness (SMI), which may include co-occurring disorders, to get them into some type of temporary lodging, address their basic needs and work to engage them in care. The Lodge project is working to engage populations that the State's CARE Court will seek to engage; however, The Lodge does not utilize the civil court system, "bump" anyone else seeking care, and is driven by a commitment to voluntary, rather than court-ordered care.

The Lodge project is exploring a change to an existing practice in the field of mental health, including but not limited to: application to a different population; by using Peer Support Specialists trained in motivational interviewing; and other evidence-based practices to understand its effectiveness in engaging a specific population (individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, with an emerging or chronic mental illness, and who are not engaged in the mental health system due to being in the pre-contemplative stage of change).

The project was approved by the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission in May 2020. The service agreement for the Lodge was approved in October 2020, and the Lodge began welcoming individuals in March of 2021.

The Lodge is going into its final year of direct services under the agreement in place with RH Community Builders.

## Background

The Lodge is a \$4,200,000 three-year Innovation Project, which seeks to understand effective methods of engagement for individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, with an emerging or chronic mental illness, and who are not engaged in the mental health system due to

being in the pre-contemplative stage of change. The program examines whether meeting an individual's basic, intrinsic needs can improve engagement in care, and whether peers with similar experience can be effective facilitators of that engagement.

- RH Community Builders was identified as the intended awardee through a request for proposal (RFP) process in February of 2020, pending approval of the project by the MHSOAC.
- This project was approved by the California Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC) in May of 2020.
- An agreement for \$4,679,216 was executed with RH Community Builders in October of 2020 with individuals being served in March of 2021. Of this amount, \$3,822,396 was funded by MHSOAC Innovation funding and the remaining \$856,820 was funded by Medi-Cal FFP.
- An agreement for \$150,000 was executed in March of 2021 with the California State University Fresno Foundation's Social Research Institute for the purpose of program evaluation over three years. This project is led by a team of professionals and academic researchers who have worked with similar populations and social challenges.

RH Community Builder operates a number of housing related services (including emergency housing during COVID-19), and so they are keenly aware of the challenges inherent in providing housing programs for individuals experiencing homelessness and/or mental health challenges. RH Community Builders owns the space where the Lodge is being operated and thus has allowed for physical adaptations as needed to support those accessing the Lodge, including separation of space by gender, by those who identify as transgender, or need to be in less communal space.

The Lodge utilizes Stages of Change and Motivational Interviewing, an evidenced-based practice, as an indicator of readiness for change and assists individuals in moving toward the next steps of change. As best practice, The Lodge utilizes a housing first model based on harm reduction. The Lodge seeks to remove barriers to make it possible for individuals to have equitable access to care and services. The philosophy focuses that safe and stable housing will be the entry point to

services, not the reward for entry into services. The staff are trained in Motivational Interviewing, harm reduction, and operate from a trauma informed perspective.

## Project Activities

The Lodge is able to serve up to 30 persons at any given time. The location of the Lodge is on a direct public transportation route and has living and recreational space, including space for individuals to safely keep their pets on the premises.

The Lodge's team has worked to accommodate the needs of its lodgers, including private space for those who are gender non-binary or identify as transgender.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2021/22 the Lodge provided services to 377 unduplicated individuals.

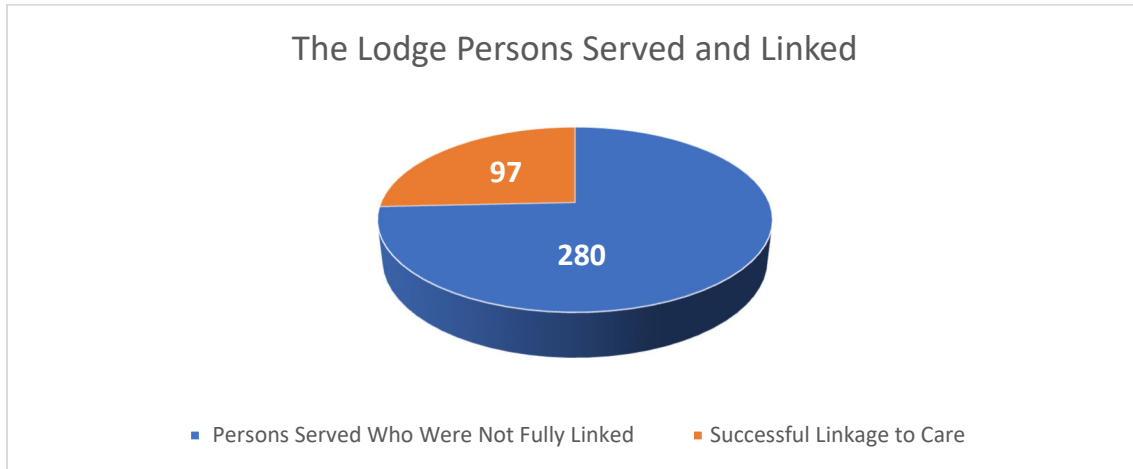
Some program outcomes were measured by examining reduction in emergency room/department visits, reduction in hospitalization, and successful linkages to mental health and/or substance use disorder programs.

The program reported that it provided 1,905 services during that time period. Those services range from assessment, linkages, and psychoeducation.

The Lodge provided linkages and referrals to services based on the individual served preference and/or choice of providers. Staff at the Lodge prioritize linkages to community partners that reduce any barriers in accessing ongoing services after their stay at The Lodge. The Lodge engaged with community partners including but not limited to: the Fresno County Department of Behavioral Health, WestCare, TURN Behavioral Health, Poverello House, Turning Point of Central California, Blue Sky Health and Wellness Center, various Federally Qualified Health Care Centers, local landlords (for housing) and/or local room and boards to increase access to community services and resources.

The program reported on individuals served who were successfully engaged in outpatient mental health or substance use treatment. Of the 377 persons that were served, 97 (25%) successfully engaged in mental health or substance use treatment services and care. It should be noted that

the 377 persons were persons not currently in any care/services when entering the Lodge and were in the pre-contemplation stage of change.



The primary criteria for a “successful” linkage is defined as linkage to behavioral health services (mental health and/or SUD treatment). Other linkages such as medical or housing are also part of the linkage, but the primary focus has been to connect individuals in need of care to appropriate services. A list of every type of linkage was not developed but can be tracked in the future.

The program also tracked the number of unique visits to the Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU) for each person served while in the program with a goal to reduce those visits. The goal was a 75% reduction of CSU visits by the persons served. The program had only 26 visits to the CSU and therefore reduced the number of CSU visits by those while at the Lodge by 93%.

During FY 2021/22, of the 377 individuals served, there were 46 visits to local emergency departments while at the Lodge. This was measured to be a reduction of 50% in emergency department visits based on individual’s served self-reports upon entry to The Lodge.

Once an individual has moved from the “pre-contemplative” stage and determined that they are interested in seeking mental-health services, a mental-health assessment was conducted by the Lodge within 48 hours. 100% of individuals accepted to the Lodge were offered a mental health assessment once they expressed interest in seeking mental health services. The staff uses motivational interviewing to encourage participation in a mental health assessment for

placement, linkage, and advocacy in participating in ongoing services given their voice and choice of services.

In the past year, 100% of the respondents served at the Lodge reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the services in their exit survey.

The Lodge did not have any family members of persons served who decided to take part in the exit survey; however, out of the individuals served during this reporting period, 15% of the persons served had family member involvement during services. This was compared to the goal of having family members of those involved provide input on how they perceived the Lodges' role in assisting the person served access care.

The program has been able to identify a few challenges in the past year. One challenge was that the program was not able to fill the vacancy of a Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN). One of the challenges was to have an LVN work in the program at the time, the information suggested they would need that supervision to be on-site. This was an additional position that had not been identified nor budgeted. Additionally, RH Community Builders was unable to leverage personnel from other programs to provide the clinical supervision for the LVN.

They also reported that while they would like to have the medical component, to date they had not found as much demand or use for the LVN. However, having a medical practitioner in the milieu may help with some engagement via medical engagement, which could be nurtured to also address social emotional support.

Most participants remain for the 45-day allowable term, a few have been extended, and some depart earlier with a successful linkage or voluntarily opt to depart. The Lodge reported that their average length of stay is about 14 days. That is in part because there are a number of individuals who enter the Lodge and remain for only a few days before leaving, and that has an impact on the average length of stay. The program reported that the individuals who have the most success and are able to obtain the most successful linkages are those who remain at the Lodge for more than 30 days. The team at the Lodge believes extending the length of stay in the program could result in both better or more effective engagement for several reasons. The increased time

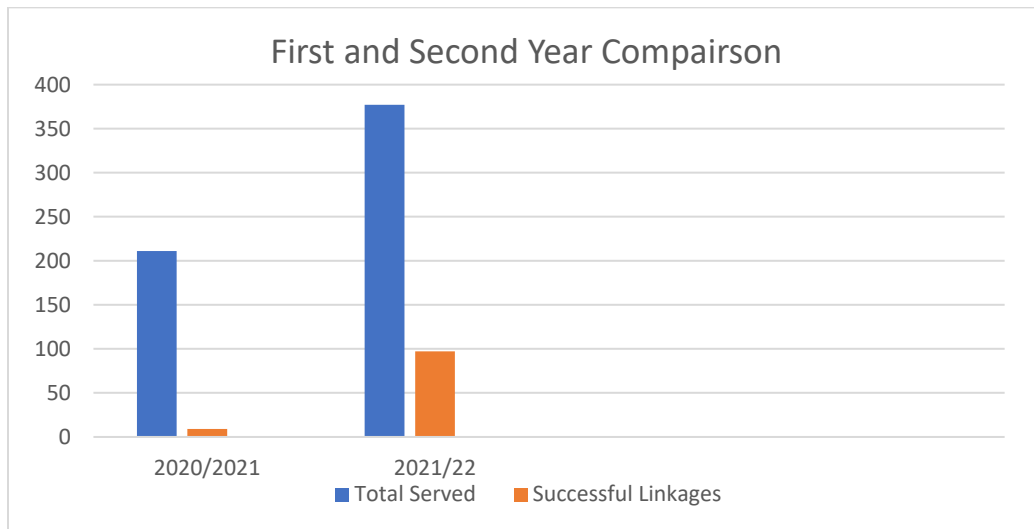
available would allow for more time to develop relationships and assist participants in moving through the stages of change. Additional time could also allow for better coordination and identify more linkages that the person could utilize. The project evaluation and data collection will be useful in helping assess the length of time that correlates with successful linkages. This is an area that is still being studied.

Aside from challenges in hiring and supporting the LVN positions, the Lodge has remained continuously staffed, and when the program has experienced any vacancies, it has been successful in filling those positions almost immediately.

The program has not had challenges with the retention of its personnel; however, it noted from when the proposal was submitted and positions developed to now the cost of living that has increased and they are exploring ways to support the personnel in meeting the increasing cost of living in Fresno.

The project has started to bill Medi-Cal. The project billed approximately \$12,000. The Medi-Cal services that were billed were primarily related to rehabilitation, followed by case management, mental health services, and then assessments.

The Lodge receives referrals from a closed system. This is intended to ensure the pilot and research are referring and servicing a population with specific needs. To ensure the program does not reject persons in need and is able to assess the impact of the model, milieu, and interventions, it is important for the pilot to work with the specific target population. The referrals to the Lodge come from the Emergency Departments, the Department of Behavioral Health, Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT), and the Crisis Stabilization Unit.



The Lodge has faced some challenges for linkages based on the capacity for some services/resources, and due to the fact that the timeline allowed for persons served to fully obtain and engage in mental health and substance use disorder programs is too short for some. The Lodge has not been able to ensure that 85% of total individuals fully obtain and engage in mental health and substance use disorder programs within the 45-day timeframe. The program has experienced success in persons served obtaining and engaging in services but not to the 85% efficiency rate goal.

In the future, additional capacity of housing and services within the system of care may improve access within 45-days. The program may also look to extend the length of stay from 45-days to something higher that will allow for greater transition into care services. The Lodge is intended to be a short-term stay to assist persons to transition from being unhoused into services and programs which can provide those focused supports and help achieve recovery.

### Next Steps

*Psychiatric Advanced Directives* - The Lodge and its participants are planned to be a population that can be supported with the development of Psychiatric Advance Directive (PADs). PADs are a part of a different MHSA INN plan in progress. As part of that plan, it is the intent of Fresno County to work with the Lodge for PADs. Initially, it would seek to train the Peers at the Lodge to assist the persons served by the lodge to create their own PAD. It is hoped that the development of a



PAD will serve as an empowerment tool for individuals served by The Lodge that increases the control of their own wellness and leads to further engagement of services. It is also a part of an empowerment tool for those who have not been involved in care.

*PADs* - The PADs project is working on statewide development of a PADs form and a centralized cloud-based storage application. These processes will likely not be implemented before the end of this INN project, but ensuring participants have an opportunity to develop a PAD may increase their engagement, and/or assist them in avoiding future emergency room visits or hospitalization.

*Peer Certification* - The Department will work to inform RH Community Builders of trainings, as well as scholarship and other opportunities for the project's peer staff to become certified. It is the goal that in the future more programs within the system of care will employ Certified Peers, and to reach that goal more opportunities to develop peers will be made including things like training and certification opportunities.

*Referrals* - In the coming year, the Department will work with the Lodge to explore opportunities to accept referrals from other justice sources for individuals that meet the project's parameters. These may include referrals for some individuals under supervision by the probation department, as well as those released from jail. The Department and the Lodge will look at possible expansion of the target population for after the pilot term if the program is continued. Lastly, the Lodge could be a viable option to engage persons who are unhoused and not engaged in care that may enter CARE Court. The Lodge was developed to examine some models or approaches to engage persons whom the State's new CARE Court program seeks to serve. Thus, the Lodge could provide needed temporary lodging and engagement until such time as an individual can successfully be linked to services in our system of care.

*Data collection and reporting* - A potential goal for the program which can be measured and used to assess its effectiveness could be tracking the percentage of persons served by the Lodge who are receiving entitlement benefits, such as CalFresh, General Relief, and SSI from intake to discharge. The program's desired outcome would be to increase the percentage of individuals

who are receiving at least one entitlement program benefit during their stay, which can increase their resources and opportunity for a successful outcome.

## Sustainability

The program, at this time, and with only one full year of data, has limited the ability to assess the effectiveness of the model, or the understanding of which aspects of the program may be effective in resulting in a 25% successful completion.

In order to focus on sustainability, the Department needs to be able to evaluate the program based on data, which is very limited at this juncture. Thus, instead of making a decision on whether to sunset or continue the program at the end of FY 2022-2023, the Department will be exploring the opportunity to extend the Lodge from a three-year plan to a five-year plan with the necessary budget to fund the services (both the Lodge and evaluation) for an additional two years. The additional two years will provide evaluators with over three full years of data to properly assess the model and the components and make informed decisions on continued sustainability.

The additional two years may also allow for consideration of CalAIM to support services and increase the potential for additional funding and expansion. The future certification of Peers and their ability to bill for work and services will be a source of revenue. The coming of CalAIM (payment reform) will also increase opportunities for them to be reimbursed for some of the services that are currently rendered but not reimbursable yet.

## Evaluation

At the time of this Annual Update Report, the most recent evaluation had not yet been completed and thus was unavailable for inclusion in this report.

The Department will continue to review the evaluation data carefully in an attempt to assess the following: does the program's model prove to be effective in engaging the target population? Do the program's interventions prove to be effective in improving engagement into care with the target populations? Lastly, the department will seek to understand if the overall program has

been effective. Extending the program by two additional years would be beneficial to the Department's efforts to answer these questions.

The outcome of the evaluation can help inform the Department if it will focus on adoption of a specific model, intervention to be sustained in possibly other programs, or if the program itself is effective and should be sustained.

The evaluation team at California State University-Fresno has been working closely with the provider to collect the necessary data. It is an on-going collaboration to ensure data is collected that can assist in effective evaluation of the project. Data analysis is being conducted on the program from the full year of services.

## Budget

In the past year, the cost per person served was **\$3,524.46**.

The Lodge was able to draw down some FFP (Medi-Cal) funds (\$10,000). It was limited to billing for limited clinical services such as assessments, etc. In the future, the project could bill for additional services under CalAIM, and with legislation allowing Certified Peers to bill for some services, the project could increase its FFP revenues to improve its sustainability.

