

Gage East Supportive Housing Project

*Developmental
Evaluation Report*

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The Future Services Institute is an initiative of the Public and Nonprofit Leadership Center at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, the University of Minnesota. Through applied research and evaluation, leadership development, and hosting innovation labs, we focus on advancing human services into the 21st Century.



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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the developmental evaluation of Gage East conducted from July 2016-June 2017 during its initial implementation. As such, it describes what evaluators could see as project partners sought to build sustainable relationships and respond to the emergent issues of start-up.

Gage East started as an ambitious project in Olmsted County, Minnesota, a community that wanted to make a significant impact on the challenges of affordable housing and homelessness. It brought together diverse program partners and wanted to engage in evaluation to ensure that they both meet the needs of its residents and achieve desirable outcomes.

The Future Services Institute (FSI) at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota was engaged as an evaluation and learning partner for Gage East. The evaluation team proposed a developmental evaluation in the project's first year, to enable rapid cycle learning among the project partners and provide space to brainstorm solutions to operational issues that arose. The evaluation team also developed a performance measurement system to enable Olmsted County Community Services to track resident outcomes in the years ahead.

The evaluation team adopted a two-pronged approach for the developmental evaluation.

1. Assessed the growth and evolution of the service collaboration among project partners in relation to key factors, such as alignment of aims, trust, power, roles and responsibilities, and effective processes.

Over the course of one year, the collaboration and, by extension project partners, showed significant progress in relation to clarity around roles and membership structure. The evaluation team believes the shift happened because of the formation of a Steering Committee to help shepherd discussion of operational challenges and development of solutions. It served as a space to share project successes and setbacks including those involving communication and role clarification among the members. Clarity around roles and responsibilities evolved further as families moved into Gage East and project partners worked closely to meet resident needs. With some recent changes in leadership, it is important that relationships between project partners be maintained.

2. Explored the day-to-day experiences at Gage East, documenting both how residents experienced living there and how frontline staff altered service provision in light of emerging resident needs.

While initial discussions with residents highlighted concerns about other residents conflicts, a majority of those interviewed in May 2017 described how things had improved; it was now more calm, with less drama and infighting. However, residents continued to perceive the place as a "jail" or a "facility" expressing frustrations with the rules that governed the building. Residents on the family side of the building were particularly unhappy about the use of drugs and crime that they perceived as emanating from the youth side. They believed it compromised the safety in the building and impacted their experience of living at Gage East.

Staff indicated experiencing several successes over the course of one year- 'leasing up' the building to witnessing increasing participation in the TOTS program. The service provision got deeper and wider over time, a number of services such as mental health counseling, parent education classes, workforce counseling were added in response to resident needs. Yet staff consistently reported challenging issues involving different working styles of partner agencies, staff turnover, and continued low participation of residents in community activities organized within Gage East.

Over the course of the year, the evaluation team also worked closely with Olmsted County Community Services staff to build an initial Performance Measurement system for Gage East. The Phase One Plan and Manual developed in collaboration with Olmsted County Continuous Improvement will allow data to be gathered from different databases and enable reporting on resident outcomes such as housing stability, healthcare coverage, resident wellbeing and overall program satisfaction.

However, it is worth noting that the approach was scaled back from what was originally envisioned and does not include in its scope the ability to track other important outcomes such as resident progress on education and employment or children's social-emotional and cognitive development. The evaluation team has provided a roadmap to make improvements in this system and add measures that are crucial to determining the overall success or failure of the intervention.

While the project has made significant strides over the past one year, residents continue to articulate some unmet needs like transportation as well as resources for basic needs like food. Further, the staff has expressed the need to resolve challenges around ensuring consistency in implementation of rules and policies. The coexistence of families and high-risk youth has also posed challenges to the overall program model. Project partners also continue to grapple with striking a balance between giving residents a "home" and ensuring the safety of the building and its residents via rule enforcement.

In helping Gage East and project partners take the next step, the evaluation team has recommended additional developmental evaluation activities to support program development. It has also recommended conducting in the future a true outcomes evaluation to determine the effectiveness (or non-effectiveness) of this intervention.

Overview of Gage East Project

Leaders in Rochester, Minnesota observed a growing problem of homelessness and the lack of affordable housing in Rochester. In April 2012, Center City Housing Corporation, in partnership with the Corporation for Supportive Housing, conducted a needs assessment which documented between 200 to 300 families, as well as and 60 to 100 unaccompanied youth (under the age of 25) to be homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness each year in Rochester and Olmsted County. The report also noted that 314 children in Olmsted County schools were identified as homeless during the 2010-2011 school year.

Gage East was born to respond to this need. Through implementing a Housing First – Harm reduction model, local leaders believed that housing youth and families would provide stability, enabling them to address their other challenges. The Housing First-Harm Reduction approach sees housing as a right; providing housing and stability to families and youth at risk is the first step towards addressing other issues involving substance abuse, violence and neglect, or mental health. Olmsted County Community Services partnered with Center City Housing Corporation to develop the Gage East facility, and other service providers such as Family Services Rochester, Families First of Minnesota, Workforce Development Inc. agreed to provide services on site. The project opened its doors to residents in September 2016.

As a permanent supportive housing project, families and youth are able to access supportive services such as case management, mental health counseling, and early childhood education while they are housed at Gage East. After they become residents, families may choose to live at Gage East for as long as they want; youth, however, have to exit once they turn 22.

This report describes what developed during the initial implementation of Gage East. It focuses on the ways project partners responded to the emergent issues of start-up and laid the foundation for sustainable operations and relationships that will serve in the future. It summarizes seven status reports provided throughout the year, as well as any supplemental information gathered by the evaluation team through site visits.

Need and Purpose of Evaluation

Olmsted County Community Services is recognized as a state leader in effective and innovative human service delivery. As they were developing the Gage East vision, it was clear there were many new strands woven into the fabric of the project: Center City had never before developed housing for youth; this array of service partners had never worked together; there was broad

This report summarizes the developmental evaluation conducted from July 2016-June 2017. An accompanying guide, “Initial Manual for Agency Data Collection & Collation” lays out the agreed upon performance measures. It will enable project partners to begin to gather administrative and survey data to describe participant characteristics in the year ahead. This manual is understood to be a starting point – it provides some baseline information that partners desire and can be further enhanced as all become more acquainted with gathering and using such information.

community interest in the start-up. By spring 2016, it was clear that some investment to support the operational development of the program partnership was necessary, particularly to enable communication between all of the interested parties and ensure services were aligning with resident needs.

The Future Services Institute at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota was engaged to carry out the evaluation. They proposed multiple stages for the evaluation. The first phase focused upon a developmental evaluation to enable rapid cycle learning and further development of the Housing First – Harm Reduction model at Gage East. The second phase would provide more conventional program assessment through performance measures, laying the foundation for a more conventional outcome evaluation in the future.

Developmental Evaluation and Program Development

Developmental evaluation is a form of evaluation that helps to sustain innovation and development of new ideas and interventions being carried out in a complex dynamic environment.¹ While Center City had experience supporting different supportive housing projects, including one in Rochester, the target population at Gage East was new. They also had not worked with such an array of program partners. This meant that project partners had to be innovative and adaptable while keeping their focus on meeting the multiple needs of new residents.

To implement the program vision, agencies needed to come to a shared understanding of their priorities; Gage East staff needed to have a common understanding of what services are being provided to residents and in what ways. Finally, residents had to agree that the services being offered were in alignment with their needs.

Evaluation questions, methodology, and timeline

During one of the initial meetings with the FSI evaluation team, it was decided that an operational Steering Committee (*see box 1 for details on Steering Committee membership*) should guide and inform the developing project and the developmental evaluation.

The following evaluation questions emerged from the consultation process with the Steering Committee (*see Table 1 for more details*):

1. How might the partners improve operational alignment during project launch?
2. What services are being provided to residents? What is being learned during those experiences about residents' capabilities and needs?
3. Does service provision (including housing) align with client needs and expectations? How do clients experience services?

The evaluation team decided to answer these evaluation questions by conducting semi-structured interviews with the Steering Committee members, Gage East staff, and residents.

¹ Developmental Evaluation was created by Michael Quinn Patton (2010) and enhanced by other evaluators to be used in such settings (Patton, McKegg and Wehipaihana, 2015; Hargreaves, 2014).

Other methods to gather data such as observations of Steering Committee meetings, document review were also employed to supplement the interviews.

In total, the evaluation team conducted four rounds of interviews with the Steering Committee and three rounds of interviews with the staff and residents (November 2016, February 2017, May 2017)².

The semi-structured interviews lasted about 30 minutes each. Interviews with staff and residents were conducted on-site whereas those with Steering Committee members were conducted over the phone. Across all the data collection cycles, the evaluation team conducted 22 in-person interviews with residents (in addition to informal conversations with about 11 residents for the first round), 22 in-person interviews with staff and 16 phone interviews with members of the Steering Committee. Detailed notes were taken to capture this information. They were analyzed to describe current conditions in an objective manner and summarized in short, easy-to-read 2-4 page documents called “status reports” (in total, 7 reports were provided to the Steering Committee on the following dates: September 20, 2016; October 13, 2016; November 17, 2016; December 23, 2016; February 8, 2017; April 5, 2017, and June 27, 2017). This allowed the leadership and staff to quickly glean important findings and inform the ongoing development of the project.

Box 1: Gage East Steering Committee*

Angela Lettner

CS Supervisor, Community Corrections, Olmsted County

Jodi Wentland (until April 2017)

Director, Child and Family Services, Olmsted County

Nancy Cashman

Supportive Housing Director, Center City Housing Corp.

Sarah Oachs

Continuous Improvement and Analysis Manager, Olmsted County

Johnna O'Neill (until March 2017)

Gage East Site Director, Center City Housing Corp.

Stephanie Burton

Program Supervisor, Family Services Rochester

Kelli DeCook

Program Director, Family Services Rochester (FSR)

*The Steering Committee evolved over the course of one year due to leadership and staff turnover. In the late spring, Amy Shillabeer replaced Jodi Wentland and Stephanie Ferguson replaced Johnna O'Neill.

² The evaluation team designed a World Café style discussion for the first round of interviews (Nov 2016) with residents. However, when the team arrived at Gage East, it became clear that the situation was not conducive for this type of discussion. The team adapted their approach and held informal conversations with about 11-12 residents.

Table 1: Developmental Evaluation Questions and Plan

Evaluation Questions	Required information & sources	Scope & method	What will this allow the evaluation to say?
<p><i>How might the partners improve operational alignment during project launch (first six months, July - December)?</i></p>	<p>Steering Committee reports on the successes and challenges in the project so far as well as suggestions to improve operational alignment</p>	<p>Observation of Steering Committee meetings</p> <p>Simple Event Record</p> <p>Interviews with steering committee members</p>	<p>This will provide tracking of operational challenges they encounter, allow them to pinpoint the nature of the challenges, action steps, and what resulted.</p> <p>This will allow us to track issues and help the steering committee to resolve them.</p>
<p><i>What services are being provided to residents? What is being learned during those experiences about residents' capabilities and needs?</i></p>	<p>Frontline staff reports on the services being delivered as well as challenges they have encountered and overcome</p>	<p>Interviews/surveys with on-site staff</p> <p>Simple Event Record</p> <p>Agency Documents/ Administrative Data</p>	<p>This will help to identify operational challenges as well as document learning for future programming.</p>
<p><i>Does service provision (including housing) align with client needs and expectations? How do clients experience services?</i></p>	<p>Resident reports on their satisfaction with the range of services offered as well as service delivery</p>	<p>Resident focus groups/surveys</p>	<p>This will help to document the nature of the need and adequacy of the response and will help in better aligning the services and their delivery in a way that meets client needs.</p>

Summary of What Has Developed During Year One

The evaluation team engaged in documenting findings at two different levels—at the level of the collaboration (how the different partners were working together) and at the level of involved individuals, explicitly residents and staff. Through multiple site visits and data collection cycles, the team has observed the evolution of the project closely.

Development of the Programmatic Collaboration

The growth of the collaborative directly influenced how project decisions were made and implemented. The evaluation team believed that documenting this might also provide some learning for the project partners as they work on similar projects in the future. More importantly, it identified areas that required intervention in order to build effective service delivery for the people living at Gage East.

Over the year, we observed the **growth of the collaboration** in relation to the following factors.³

Is there agreement on aims? During Gage East’s initial planning phase, general agreements were made about the permanent supportive housing approach. However, at the beginning of its implementation, the evaluation team noted that partners lacked clarity on how the actual Housing First-Harm Reduction model would influence the youth, families and children being served by the project. Over time, the group developed agreement on the usefulness of systematic review of progress through evaluation (which was not shared by all project partners in the beginning), the need for staff to work together as a team, and recognition of the challenges inherent in working with residents who had experienced such trauma in their lives. These agreements were shaped by meetings between the project’s leadership (outside of the Steering Committee); shared experiences working with actual families; and collective problem solving about their needs.

How is power shared among the different partners? To strengthen a sense of ownership towards the project, it was important that power was shared equally among the different partners. The evaluation team initially observed a power imbalance, probably driven by the different roles each partner was playing in project start-up. However, over time, as interpersonal relationships strengthened and shared commitments to focus on the needs of the residents were affirmed, this changed. Yet this dimension of the partnership is worth attending to in the years ahead; recent changes in two significant leadership positions on the project highlight the significance of personal relationships in greasing the wheels of day to-day operations at Gage East.

Are there issues of trust? At the project’s inception, the evaluation team sensed a lack of trust both towards the evaluation team/process and among the different partners. Over time, the value of evaluation became more apparent. Steering Committee members also recognized the expertise contributed by the different agencies and their staff. However, the trust varied as the project moved through multiple cycles of successes and setbacks. The evaluation team believes

³ Studies of collaboration note a number of factors important to sustaining effective inter-organizational relationships. We highlight here the key elements from the work of British scholars Chris Huxham and Siv Vangen S. (2005) *Managing to Collaborate*. New York: Routledge.

the level of trust is heavily dependent upon the particular people stepping in and out of project leadership.

Is there clarity about roles and membership structure? This had the most significant implication for the functioning of the collaborative. The evaluation team noted a positive trajectory over the course of one year developed through engagement with the Steering Committee and around respective roles in responding to the needs of families and youth housed at Gage East.

Are there people, structures, or processes that make things happen? The evaluation team noted that the Steering Committee provided a platform to discuss common operational issues and brainstorm solutions. It also provided a space to build relationships, share criticisms and celebrate successes. The group's ability to be creative about leveraging partnerships (such as the County government's relationship with the local police) also helped to resolve some of the operational challenges and build a stronger collaborative.

Resident experience living at Gage East

The evaluation team conducted three rounds of data collection with residents, beginning in November 2016. While each yielded descriptive information shared through the ongoing status reports, here we summarize the emerging themes until May 2017.

Over the one-year period, there were some *positive developments* for residents. Many families were grateful they had a place to stay. People also noted the apartments were nice and spacious.

At the last visit in May, we explicitly identified residents who had lived there longer than three months and asked them to comment on how the place had changed. A majority of the respondents discussed how things had gotten better overall. As they reflected upon it, the place was calmer and there was less drama and infighting.

"It's calmer. I don't have to worry about my family being here or my kids being out."

The video commissioned by the Future Services Institute team highlights these types of achievements. For instance, Sarah Hays (resident) discusses how she was previously homeless and struggling with substance abuse and how now because of Gage East she doesn't have to worry about a place to sleep.

However, the more nuanced elements of program delivery do not seem to have fully developed to meet the needs of residents and frontline staff.

There are a number of issues that were articulated early on as *concerns* and have remained on top of their minds. The consistent complaint was rule enforcement at the site and how it made them feel. They repeatedly noted specific practices such as the visitor policy, having to be buzzed in each time, and not being allowed to sit in the lobby for more than 10 minutes. They compared their experience to that of living in a "jail" or "facility." Residents also complained about the drama and infighting among residents themselves. The drama and infighting also

influenced how and to what extent they engaged with other residents living at Gage East. Another area of concern raised repeatedly by residents on the family side revolved around inappropriate youth behaviors that hampered their overall experience at Gage East. They thought the youth behaviors were intrusive and led to safety and security concerns within the building. Some residents also discussed how some staff exhibited favoritism hampering their experience. However, this changed as a new Site Director stepped into the role.

These concerns initially muted residents' account of the value of Gage East in their lives. However, from the beginning, most residents saw value and spoke positively about the support and services offered by case managers. Residents also spoke positively about how Gage East had provided them with access to basic needs such as laundry, diapers, toilet paper as well as services that had long term implications for their families (e.g. mental health counseling, workforce development and access to educational opportunities). Many families also appreciated the TOTS room as it allowed them to take care of their other needs-run errands or find employment.

"It's nice to have a social worker on hand. We just have child welfare. If we need diapers, the social worker helps with that. If we have questions about the paperwork, they help with that."

In our third and final round of data collection, we asked residents how Gage East had influenced their lives. A vast majority responded positively discussing how it had given them a place to stay and how it had allowed them to take care of their multiple needs.

"It changed me and my kids a lot. The staff are very helpful with the things I need. My daughter's bus comes. They help me with the appointments. It has been good here for my daughters and me because I am safe inside my house. I am grateful for this place. I am ready for the next step."

Staff experiences

The evaluation team also conducted three rounds of data-collection with frontline staff during site visits at Gage East, again starting in November. We asked them to discuss the success and challenges they were experiencing as part of the project as well as how they had seen the service provision evolve over time. Again, while initial responses were provided in status reports throughout the year, we want to highlight the overall trends.

Successes: Initially, most of the information about accomplishments focused upon instrumental achievements, things that were important to accomplish to successfully launch the Gage East facility (e.g. moving in the full number of families and youth that could be accommodated). Leaders repeatedly discussed how they had housed the most challenging to house youth and families in the community. They had worked around the different funding streams to complete

one lease up cycle. In April 2017, 109 people in total were living at Gage East. Staff and leaders also discussed how the staff had displayed commitment towards the project and its residents despite the numerous challenges they faced. Over time, staff also experienced successes around improved communication and collaboration between the different agencies (which was not the case when the project began) and increased participation of residents in services such as case management and the TOTS program.

Challenges: One of the biggest challenges faced by staff at the project's inception revolved around the clarity of roles. Differences also existed in how they handled issues pertaining to residents. While one partner believed in proactive planning, another advocated for a more reactive approach. This created a rift in the staff and impacted their ability to work together as a team in the initial stages of the project. Gradually, the team engaged in educating each other about their approaches building trust and a shared understanding of how things could be best resolved. The staff also faced challenges in addressing the violence and disruptions that took place within the building. They also struggled to handle mental health issues presented by some families and youth. Over time, however, staff was trained in de-escalation. To address resident needs, mental health counseling was also added to the service mix.

However, staff continue to grapple with the absence of predetermined guidelines to guide the actions they take while resolving resident issues. They continue to experience a lack of clarity around how certain rules and policies ought to be implemented (e.g. if residents do not pay their rent on time staff are not aware of what the cutoff is-when they are supposed to act and how. While there were talks about developing a manual to ease this process, it still hasn't come to fruition). Staff turnover has also resulted in significant challenges for the team with consequences such as increased caseload and the inability to do long term planning with residents.

Service provision: The project started with a smaller service mix mostly dominated by case management and the TOTS program. As resident needs became more apparent, the team added services such as a transportation van, mental health counseling and workforce counseling.

Over time, the service mix got wider and deeper-the team partnered with Rochester Public Schools to provide access to Alternative Learning Centers and structured play for 4-5 year olds. Workforce Development Inc. is also in the building and provides workforce counseling for the youth. Other things that are in the pipeline include a life skills group through Lutheran Social Services-LINK and free meals provided through the Gage School. Another programming element that has taken shape recently are the community meetings which allow residents to voice their needs and concerns. There is also growing optimism about the Empowerment Center and the services that would come along with it.

Ideas for Ongoing Program Improvement

Throughout its engagement with the project, evaluators asked *residents and staff* about their ideas to enhance the resident experience at Gage East. From articulating how they experience living at Gage East to discussing what they need to thrive in this community, a number of ideas emerged signaling ways to improve the resident experience.

1. Residents repeatedly discussed (and staff affirmed) their need for more transportation options. While the van has alleviated some of the needs, it has its limitations –it operates between 8-5pm when the lead staff is available. Further, there are no public transportation options available on Sundays.
2. Residents have also consistently articulated their need for emergency food options.
3. While most residents are grateful that TOTS exists, they signaled the need for longer TOTS hours.
 - One of the staff pointed out that TOTS functions as a respite/ drop-in room and is not allowed to operate for more than 3-4 hours. It is also not big enough to be licensed to allow for longer hours. This may be resolved once the Empowerment Center is operational in the fall. However, the evaluation team thinks it might be prudent to explain this constraint to the residents.
4. While Gage East helps residents with their housing needs, they struggle with meeting even the most basic needs such as food and laundry money. Gage East staff has been creative and accessed resources such as the Olmsted County “cage”, church and other community resources to address these needs. However, the available resources meet a very small portion of the demand.

Frontline staff who work closely with these residents reinforced much of what the residents discussed. They also shared their own ideas to enhance resident experience and service delivery.

1. Residents have expressed discontent around the inconsistent implementation of rules and policies by staff. The staff themselves have expressed concerns around not knowing the boundaries and cutoffs around certain rules and policies (e.g the cutoff for late rent payment or corrective action following a violation of the visitor protocol).
 - The staff had started discussions around co-creating a manual that outlines action steps to resolve issues pertaining to residents. While some situations may demand innovative solutions, the staff thinks that a manual/handbook would serve as a good reference point. Another parallel solution involved establishing open communication with the residents to explain why certain rules exist.
2. The recently instituted community meeting has served as an important platform to hear about residents’ needs and concerns. Residents who were previously less involved have shown increased participation in these meetings. Staff recommend holding these meetings regularly to allow residents to articulate their needs and concerns.
 - These meetings could also be used to generate program ideas or gain resident feedback on activities that are ongoing.
3. Staff turnover has been a challenge from the beginning. Initially, it was difficult to hire and retain staff for the front desk. This resulted in case managers being pulled away from their primary responsibilities to manage some of the resident assistant tasks. With the building fully occupied, the case managers (especially on the family side) are concerned that they do not have time to do long term planning with all the families. They

also think that some families are not reaching out to them because of their limited availability.

Evaluators' Reflections and Important Decision Points

The Housing First model is based on the premise that housing is a fundamental right. It focuses on placing people in low-barrier housing wherein entry is not contingent upon achieving sobriety or accepting treatment for substance abuse. Harm reduction is an important complement to the Housing First model, which involves providing on demand strategies such as allowing people to consume alcohol (as long as it is not disruptive to others) and supervised injection, among other strategies. Recently, there is growing concern among researchers and practitioners that the harm reduction component is not being implemented with fidelity and that programs are only focusing on implementing "housing first."⁴

Assessing the adoption of the harm reduction philosophy was not the center point of the Gage East developmental evaluation. However, during our site visits, families expressed some discontent around crime and drug use that they perceived as mostly concentrated in the youth side of the facility. However, staff added that they saw similar patterns of drug use on the family side. This causes us to wonder more about the design and implementation of the Housing First-Harm Reduction model. Further, at a project-based Housing First site, individuals do not have the choice to choose between different housing options that have a range of tolerance for substance abuse.⁵ With limited permanent supportive housing options in Rochester, residents (especially those in recovery) have limited options. Thus, in the short term, it might be prudent for project partners to reconsider what might be done to more deeply implement the harm reduction model within Gage East.

One of the things the evaluators had hoped to develop was an artifact (*see Appendix C for a visual depicting an ideal home*) that captures how residents imagine their ideal home - at Gage East or elsewhere. The evaluators believed this artifact could provide important insights into resident needs and inform programming. While program partners may or may not be willing to introduce the idea of a "home" at Gage East, it might be worthwhile to examine how the apartments are advertised to potential residents to ensure that their expectations are consistent with what exists on the ground. In the future, however, the evaluation team strongly recommends involving residents in developing such an artifact.

Throughout this first year of operations, it is clear there are many rules and policies (that are changeable), which accompany the funding that supports programming at Gage East. This is inherent in operating a supportive housing program that braids and blends funding. However, if not managed carefully, the daily interpretation of these rules or policies can pull program activities away from the client-centered orientation that is the bedrock of the initiative. The evaluation team recommends instituting an ongoing **Operational Leadership Team**; this team

⁴ Watson, D. P., Shuman, V., Kowalsky, J., Golembiewski, E., & Brown, M. (2017). Housing First and harm reduction: a rapid review and document analysis of the US and Canadian open-access literature. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 14(1).

⁵ Unlike scattered Housing First models, in which people do not necessarily live next to others, this application raises some understandable concerns for families not struggling with issues of substance use/abuse.

would draw membership and expertise from staff working on the frontlines as well as the senior leadership at Olmsted County Community Services, Center City Housing, Rochester Family Services, and other partners (including HRA officials). The evaluators believe (and the Steering Committee concurs) that this ongoing group would provide a rich opportunity for learning focused on how to best serve the residents given the policy environment. Bi-monthly or quarterly meetings would provide opportunities to bring questions and develop a shared interpretation of how the rules/policies should be interpreted so that program implementation and integration remains focused upon the original goals of service integration for formerly homeless families and youth.

Performance Measurement System & Map of Desired Outcomes

At the beginning, project partners had voiced the need for a system that would allow them to track progress on resident outcomes in the future. In the initial Steering Committee meetings, members shaped up an “outcome chain” to highlight what they believed the outcomes of the program to be. These included residents’ satisfaction with the service delivery, their sense of belonging towards the Gage East community, as well as changes in their emotional and social well-being. Project partners also articulated outcomes for the system as a whole –how they thought the project would influence the community and the human services system in which the project was operating. *(See Appendix A for fully developed visual models that could act as a framework for a more extensive outcome evaluation in the future).*

Broadly, project partners were interested in exploring the following evaluation questions for the second phase of the evaluation following the end of Future Services Institute’s engagement.

1. What services are being provided to residents? What is being learned during those experiences about residents’ capabilities and needs?
2. Does service provision (including housing) align with client needs and expectations?
3. To what extent are residents engaged with
 - o the Gage East community and
 - o the services provided at Gage East?
4. In what ways has the project influenced residents’ lives?
 - o Families
 - o Youth
 - o Children

The process of articulating more specifically the desired outcomes started with a session facilitated by the evaluators wherein project partners were asked what outcomes they think Gage East would achieve for its residents. The outcomes chain underwent several refinements until we had a visual representation that all partners agreed upon. We believe this process also prompted project partners to think further upstream and articulate what activities they thought would lead to these outcomes.

In defining the outcomes chain, project partners articulated outcomes such as increased housing stability, improved access to basic needs, improved access to educational and employment opportunities, improved social support, and improved self-sufficiency for families and youth.

Outcomes for children included improved physical, social-emotional and cognitive development, improved school attendance, reduced out of home placement among others.

The next step was to define the indicators and measures for each of these outcomes and identify a data source and timeline for data collection and reporting. This thinking informed the initial data management plan and manual for agency data collection to be used in fall 2017; however, concerns about feasibility scaled back the initial scope of the performance measurement system to enable project partners to develop more comfort in regularly collecting and sharing information with each other.

Instead of an outcome evaluation, the initial performance measurement system for Gage East reflects the Results Based Accountability framework used by Olmsted County Community Services in other projects (*see the Initial Agency Manual for more details*).

Future Evaluation Needs

While project partners displayed foresight in coupling program design and developmental evaluation, the Future Services Institute team has identified areas where evaluation could be further integrated or strengthened to build a sound program model for Gage East and achieve the desired outcomes for its residents in the longer term.

Ongoing Program Enhancement

Gage East is one of the first models in Rochester implementing a permanent supportive housing solution for youth that are homeless and at risk. Hence, there is a lot that is new. While research on different supportive housing models exists, youth have different programming needs, which suggests the potential importance of customized solutions for this group. Right now, the service mix on the youth side is predominantly comprised of case management and workforce counseling. Given that the target population is high risk, there appears to be a need for a more effective service mix (additional/ different set of services). The youth themselves express this need through our interviews with them.

The evaluation team suggests holding ongoing information collection activities (focus group discussions or resident interviews) to build a more robust program model and continue to better address resident needs (*see Appendix B for data collection tools used by the evaluation team during the Developmental Evaluation that could be modified for this purpose*).

Enhancing the Performance Measurement System

The Outcomes Chain co-created by the project partners and the evaluation team identified desired outcomes such as improved physical, social-emotional and cognitive development of children and improved access to employment and educational opportunities from the intervention. The Initial Manual for Agency Collection & Collation lays out measures and indicators that are feasible and important to track given the current infrastructure and capacity. However, in order to provide a complete and accurate picture, it is important that project partners develop a way to track the following additional indicators and measurements:

Immediate priorities in the next Phase of the Performance Measurement System

To provide accurate information about the results of the Gage East project, it is important to measure more comprehensively the outcomes experienced by the residents, the children, youth and families who live there.

Outcome measures for children

1. **Current state:** The only data available on children are the aggregate participation numbers in the TOTS program.

Desired state: More detailed and systematic program participation records (e.g attendance records) on each child are captured in a database to allow longer-term outcomes to be linked to program participation.

2. **Current state:** Children's social-emotional and cognitive development is being assessed via paper-based ASQ-SE screens.

Desired state: 1) Both ASQ and ASQ-SE screens (or other validated scales⁶) are used to capture children's progress on developmental milestones. 2) ASQ-SE and ASQ screen data are entered into a database that allows for systematic tracking and reporting of outcomes.

Outcome measures for youth and families

1. **Current state:** Employment is being captured indirectly through earned income. Residents' educational status is not being tracked at all.

Desired state: Both employment (including the type of employment) and education outcomes are tracked for all Gage East residents.

2. **Current state:** Residents' mental and chemical health status is only being captured as the presence or absence of disability and whether they are connected to services/treatment. Change in mental and chemical health status is not being assessed systematically.

Desired state: Mental and chemical health screens are used to assess progress on these attributes. The screens are entered into a database and are easily retrievable.

Issues needing further resolution

In the immediate term, there are also things that could be addressed with low-cost and staff attention. The evaluation team strongly suggests that in the next few months, Olmsted County staff and project partners explore the following issues:

1. The strengths and needs assessment tool (SDM assessment) used by the county tracks progress on various domains such as domestic violence, basic needs, social support etc. The data can be entered and pulled out of the Social Services Information System (SSIS). Data entry can be done at intake and reassessments done every six months to assess

⁶ Ringwalt, S. (2008). *Developmental screening and assessment instruments with an emphasis on social and emotional development for young children ages birth through five*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, FPG Child Development Institute, National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center

progress on domains. Project partners might consider administering this tool to Gage East families.

2. Currently, data on participation in Gage East activities (workforce counseling, mental health counseling, etc.) can be accessed as aggregate participation numbers from the respective agencies. However, individual level data on participation will give a clearer picture of treatment dosage for the residents.

Conducting an Actual Outcome Evaluation and Cost Study

To respond to Gage East project partners' interests in tracking resident outcomes, we adopted the Results-Based Accountability framework familiar to Olmsted County Community Services staff. While the focus of performance measurement and results based accountability is program improvement, evaluation is wider in scope. It happens at a point in time and involves more in depth data collection strategies.⁷ Most importantly, it focuses on assessing the effectiveness or non-effectiveness of the intervention. Performance measurement is often regarded as the first step towards a full-blown outcome evaluation.⁸

The evaluation literature has documented outcomes such as reduced alcohol use, housing stability and cost offsets for projects like Gage East.⁹ In the case of Gage East too, it is critical that sound evaluation design is employed to ascertain the outcomes and effectiveness of this intervention.

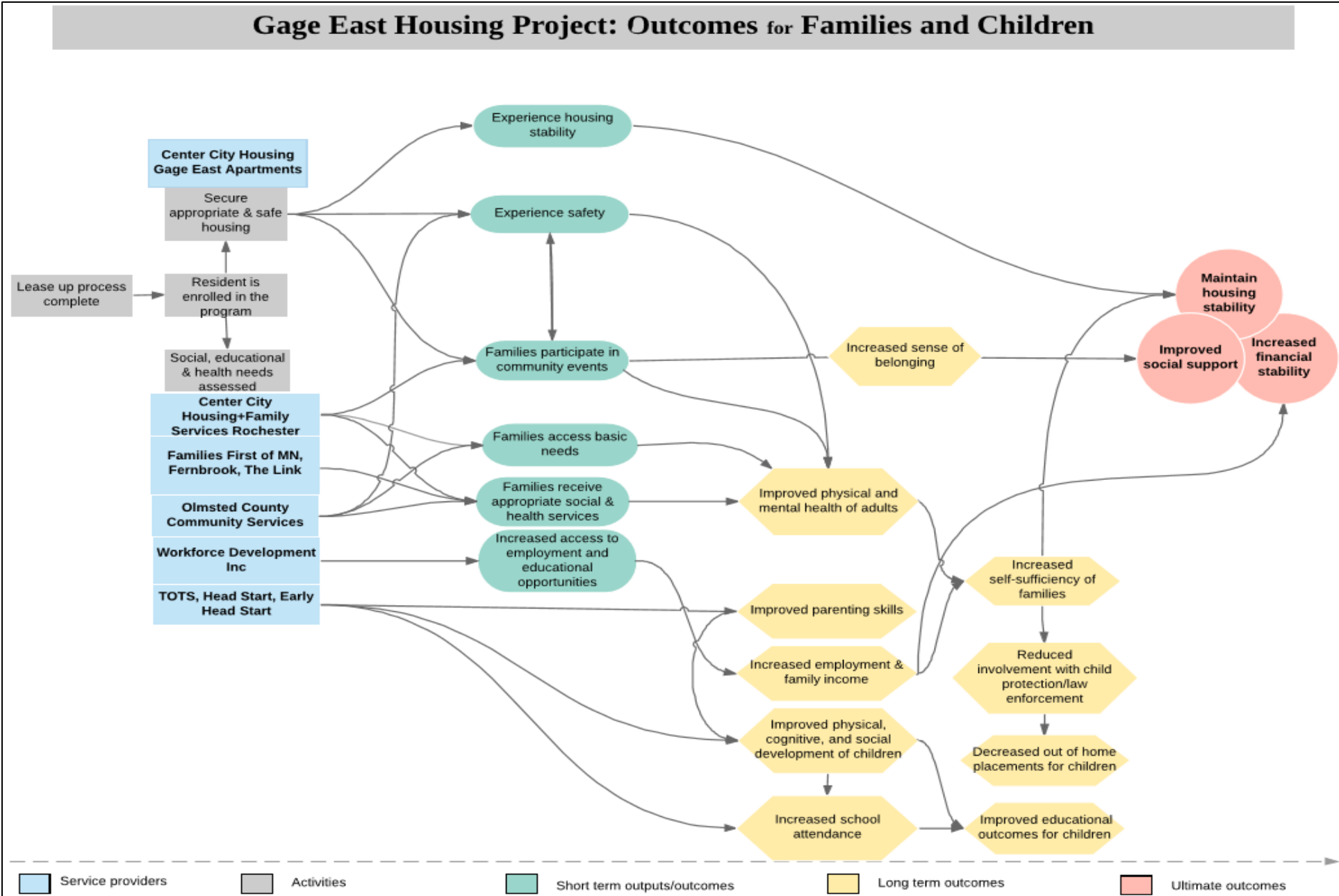
In the future, it might also be prudent to conduct a cost effectiveness study of Gage East given the investment made by the community. It would be ideal to embark upon an outcome evaluation and cost analysis after a few years of program operation.

⁷ Walker, K. E., & Moore, K. A. (2011). *Research to Results Brief: Performance Management and Evaluation: What's the Difference?*. Child Trends. Retrieved from https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Child_Trends-2011_01_19_RB_PerformMgmt.pdf.

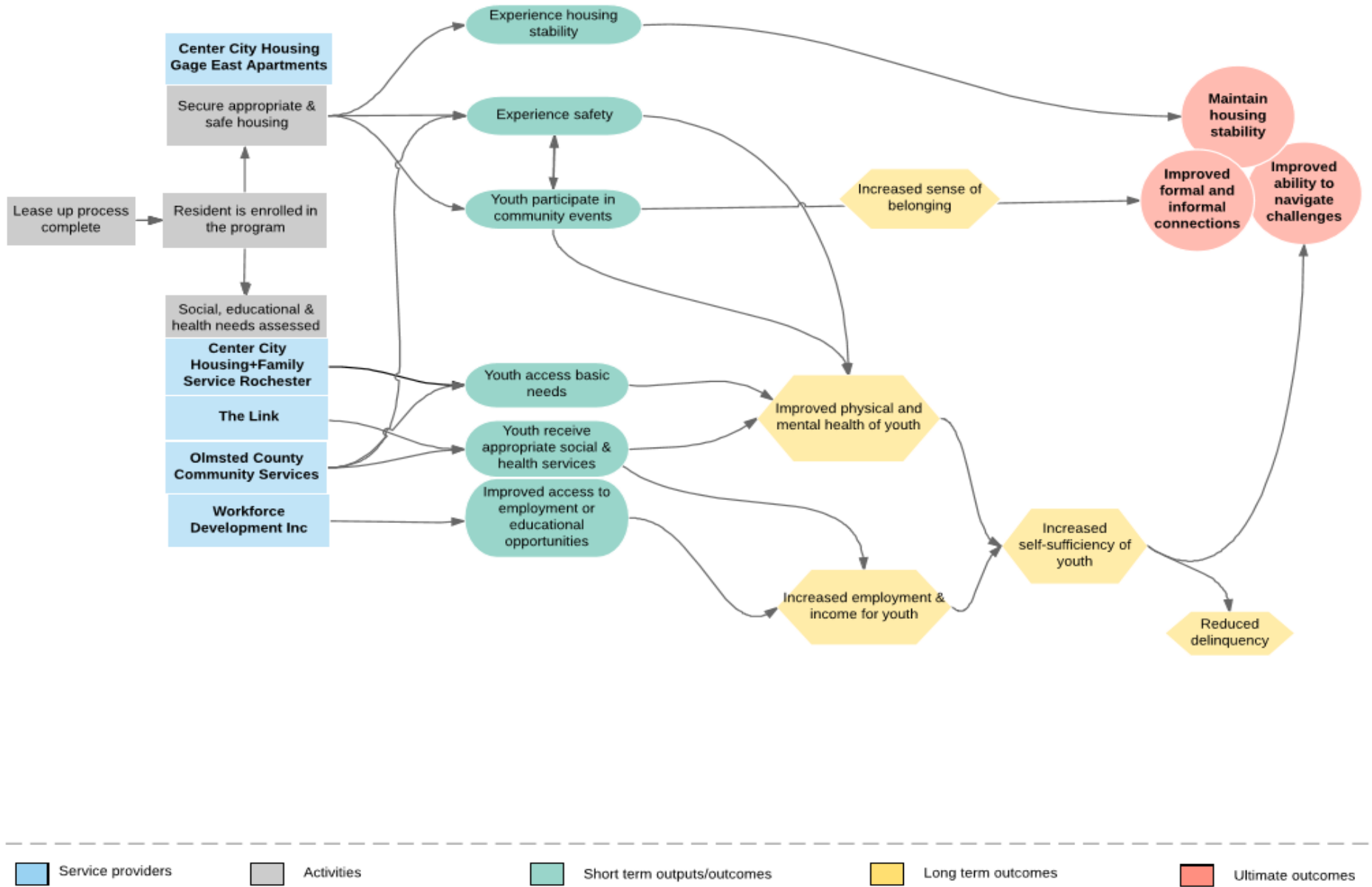
⁸ Tatian, P. (2016, March). *Performance Measurement to Evaluation*. Retrieved http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/78571/2000555-performance-measurement-to-evaluation-march-2016-update_0.pdf

⁹ Collins, S., Clifasefi, S., Dana, E., Andrasik, M., Stahl, N., Kirouac, M., . . . Malone, D. (2012). Where harm reduction meets housing first: Exploring alcohol's role in a project-based housing first setting. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 23(2), 111-119. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0955395911001332>

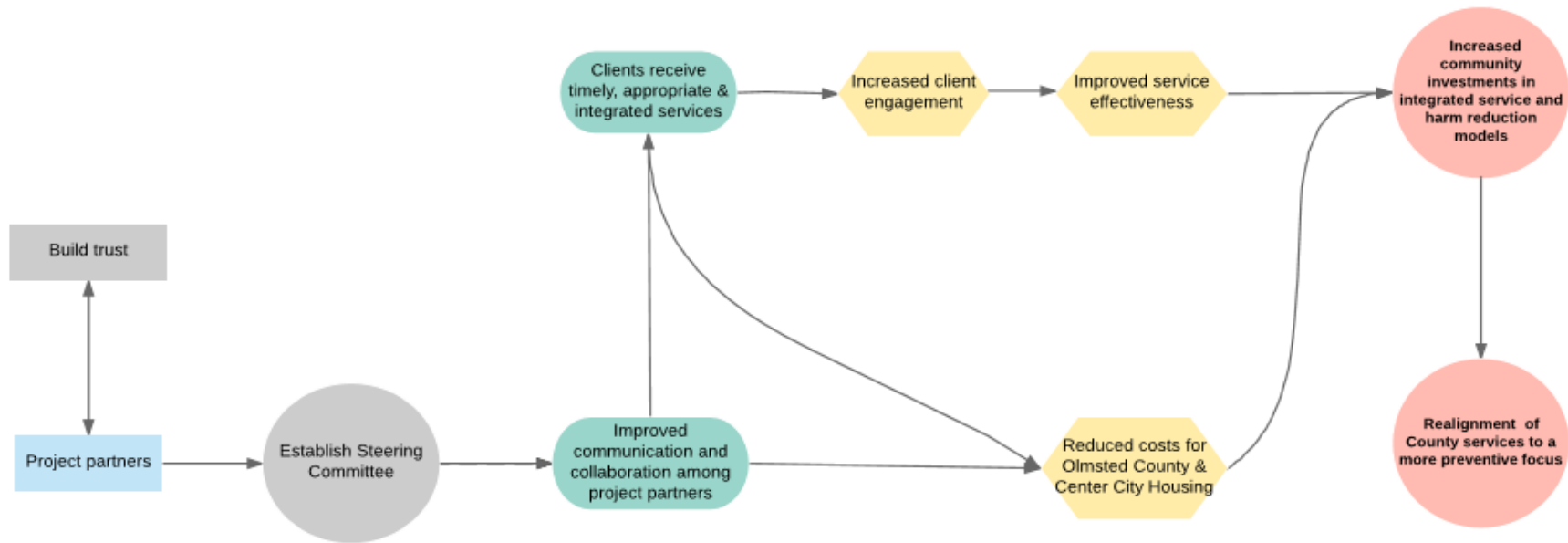
Appendix A: Visuals depicting outcomes for families, children, youth and the system



Gage East Housing Project: Outcomes for Youth



Gage East Housing Project: Outcomes for the System



Service providers
 Activities
 Short term outputs/outcomes
 Long term outcomes
 Ultimate outcomes

Appendix B: Sample data collection tools for future developmental evaluation activities

Gage East Developmental Evaluation

Interview Protocol for Gage East Residents

Name: _____ Resident type: _____Family _____Youth

Interviewed before: Yes/No

Interviewer (Initials): _____

Est. interview duration: 30 minutes

Opening:

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I am from _____ and am here to hear about your experiences with Gage East.

Please note that everything we discuss will remain confidential. Nothing you say will identify you specifically. If you do not want something you have said included, please let me know. You do not have to answer questions if you do not want to. You can stop at any time.

Do you agree to participate in this interview? [Verbal Consent]

Let me know if you have further questions before we proceed.

1. How long have you been here at Gage East?

Probe: Who else is living with you? [Try to get a sense of the participant's demographics and household composition]

2. How do you experience living here?

Probe: What are things you like? What are things you dislike? [For residents living longer than 3 months try to get a sense of how things have changed since they moved]

3. How engaged are you with the Gage East community i.e. other residents and staff? Do you want to be more engaged? What do you need to engage more often or in a better way?

4. Overall, how has Gage East influenced you and your family so far?

Probe: Think about your life when you just moved into Gage East and now. What has changed for you and your family?

Now, let's talk about your hopes and aspirations.

- 5. What would an ideal home and community look like for you? What would need to change at Gage East to achieve this ideal?**

- 6. Is there anything else we should know about your experience at this point?**

Interview Reflections:

Take a few minutes at the end of each interview to jot down the highlights, key issues/themes, etc.

Gage East Developmental Evaluation

Interview Protocol for Gage East Service Team

Position: _____ Organization: _____

Interviewer (Initials): _____

Est. interview time: 20-30 minutes

Opening:

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I am from _____.

As staff working at the frontlines, I am here to understand your experience working at Gage East.

Everything we discuss will remain confidential. Nothing you say will identify you specifically.

Let me know if you have further questions before we proceed.

1. What services do you currently help provide to residents? How has service provision changed since we last spoke?

Probe: Are additional services being offered? Why? Have certain services been discontinued? Why?

2. What additional services do the residents you work with need that are not available at Gage East?

Probe: Would it be helpful for those services to be housed at Gage East?

3. What are some successes you have experienced with the project in the past 3 months (or since you have been here)?

4. What are some challenges you currently face (or continue to face) with the project?

Probe: What have you done differently to respond to the challenges? What has the leadership done differently?

5. What ideas do you have to improve the resident experience at Gage East?

Probe: What needs to be done differently to achieve this aim?

6. What else should we know about the project at this point?

Interview Reflections:

Take a few minutes at the end of each interview to jot down the highlights, key issues/themes, etc.

Appendix C: Visual depiction of an initial idea -- an artifact that could reflect residents' voices of an ideal home (phrases were gathered from residents interviewed during this evaluation)





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