

Mecklenburg County Community Support Services

OVERVIEW: THREE-YEAR EVALUATION OF THE MECKFUSE PROGRAM (FALL 2017)

Mecklenburg County recently released results from an independent evaluation of MeckFUSE, a program that provides permanent housing for 50 high-risk and high-needs individuals with behavioral health issues who have an extensive history of cycling between jail, shelters, and other public systems. FUSE stands for Frequent Users Systems Engagement.

Professor Shelley Listwan of the Department of Criminal Justice & Criminology at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte prepared the evaluation for the Mecklenburg County Community Support Services Department. The three-year process and outcomes evaluation demonstrated improved housing stability, reduced rates of jail and shelter utilization, and reduced hospital charges. Overall, MeckFUSE was successful in reducing system utilization costs among participants.

The evaluation, which followed program participants for two years and used a quasi-experimental matched comparison group design, is noteworthy because there are few studies that follow participants longer-term. One such study reviewed New York City's FUSE program. Together, the studies make a strong case for continuing to serve frequent users of high cost systems, and to providing housing and supportive services with no pre-conditions for entry into the program.

Key findings of the MeckFUSE evaluation include:

- Nearly all (98%) of MeckFUSE participants had an adult conviction record with a mean of approximately 13 adult convictions.
- Over 90% of participants reported spending more than 12 months in a homeless shelter or other place not meant for habitation. Of those, the mean time of homelessness was approximately 11 years.
- MeckFUSE participants demonstrated a 90% two-year housing retention rate.
- MeckFUSE participants demonstrated significant reductions in shelter usage (87%), ambulance service charges (24%), and hospital charges (43%).
- Housed participants were arrested significantly less than a comparison group (4.5 vs. 9.3 arrests) and had much longer average times to re-arrest post-housing.
- A majority of participants indicated that MeckFUSE had significantly improved their lives and relationships with their families. For example, 57% of the participants indicated that the program helped them improve relationships with their children.

Mecklenburg County plans to continue the MeckFUSE program, operated through a contract with Urban Ministry Center, an interfaith community agency working to end homelessness. Monitoring of arrests and trips to the emergency room will continue, too.

To view a [PDF of the full evaluation](#), visit <https://www.mecknc.gov/CommunitySupportServices/HomelessServices/Pages/MeckFUSE-Evaluation.aspx>

