

# HomeHelpNH.org

COUNSELING FOR AT-RISK HOMEOWNERS

## 2015 YEAR-END AND PROGRAM REVIEW

New Hampshire Housing  
March 23, 2016





## **2015 YEAR-END AND PROGRAM REVIEW**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

This constitutes the 2015 year-end report and the final program report for the HomeHelpNH initiative as funded by the State of New Hampshire through the Department of Justice and the Banking Department. This program was created with the support of Governor John Lynch, the Executive Council and the Joint Legislative Fiscal Committee. Once created, the program continued to receive support from Governor Maggie Hassan, the Executive Council, the Department of Justice and the Banking Department.

The program was administered by New Hampshire Housing pursuant to a three-year contract with the Department of Justice and the Banking Department with \$3.5 million from the National Mortgage Servicing Settlement. This contract ended January 31, 2016, which marks the official end of the HomeHelpNH as funded by the State of New Hampshire.

Thankfully, foreclosure counseling will continue for an additional year because of support from: 1) the mortgage lender community; 2) the banking community; 3) the Department of Justice and the Banking Department (via the remaining HomeHelpNH funds previously granted to New Hampshire Housing); and 4) New Hampshire Housing. These funders have generously provided funds because they understand that professional foreclosure counseling can help at-risk homeowners objectively evaluate their housing options, including options that can avoid foreclosure.

HomeHelpNH was a unique and effective use of the National Mortgage Servicing Settlement. With the support of the Governor's Office, the Executive Council and the Legislature, statewide foreclosing counseling worked collaboratively with 2-1-1 NH (intake and referral) and with the Foreclosure Relief Project (legal services provide through New Hampshire Bar Association, New Hampshire Legal Assistance and Legal Advice and Referral Center). As this part of the initiative concludes, New Hampshire can be proud that HomeHelpNH provided counseling services to over 2,500 Granite Staters, helping them address a challenging situation with professional advice.

This report provides an overview of the program and detailed data on performance.

## PROGRAM BACKGROUND

HomeHelpNH, as funded by the State of New Hampshire, was a three-year (2013 - 2015) statewide foreclosure counseling initiative created by the State of New Hampshire and administered by New Hampshire Housing Finance Authority.

- The program was authorized by the Governor and Executive Council, August 2012, and was approved by the Joint Legislative Fiscal Committee, September 2012. It is a cooperative effort of the New Hampshire Department of Justice, the New Hampshire Banking Department, and New Hampshire Housing.
- Funding for the initiative came from the National Mortgage Servicing Settlement with \$3.5 million allocated to foreclosure counseling.
- HomeHelpNH provided a statewide network of counselors able to assist with pre- and post-foreclosure counseling services without any charge to the homeowner. These counselors provided homeowners at risk of losing their homes with information and assistance about their housing options, including any available alternatives to foreclosure.
- Counselors provided face-to-face and telephonic counseling, including reviewing of mortgage documents, studying budget options, and exploring mortgage modification alternatives.
- HomeHelpNH was part of a larger effort, which included funding for legal services through the New Hampshire Foreclosure Relief Project, a partnership between the New Hampshire Bar Association, New Hampshire Legal Assistance, and the Legal Advice and Referral Center. These services helped qualified at-risk homeowners receive free or low-cost legal services.
- To help with intake and referral, homeowners at risk of foreclosure could call 2-1-1 NH from anywhere in the state or go to HomeHelpNH.org to receive referrals for counseling.

**New Hampshire Housing's Role.** New Hampshire Housing provided grant management and oversight for HomeHelpNH by:

- Creating an effective, coordinated, statewide network of housing counseling agencies qualified to provide broad-based, objective pre- and post-foreclosure intervention and counseling;
- Working to ensure the counseling effort was coordinated with legal services and intake services; and
- Coordinating and performing statewide outreach for the initiative.

**Foreclosure Counseling Grantees.** Counseling services were provided to at-risk homeowners by regionally-based housing nonprofits. In addition to providing foreclosure counseling services, grantees were required to work in coordination with other grantees and with other aspects of the State's foreclosure intervention strategies, such as the New Hampshire Foreclosure Relief Project.

The agencies involved during the three-year funding period, were:

- AHEAD, based in Littleton;
- Catch Housing, based in Concord;
- Community Home Solutions, based in Seabrook;
- Laconia Area Community Land Trust, based in Laconia;
- NeighborWorks Southern New Hampshire, based in Manchester and Nashua;
- Southwestern Community Services, based in Keene;
- The Housing Partnership, based in Portsmouth; and
- The Way Home, based in Manchester.

**HomeHelpNH Intake Services.** At-risk homeowners were referred to counselors by one intake service provider. 2-1-1 NH provided the counseling network with a statewide toll-free intake and referral hotline for at-risk homeowners, which helped with outreach (giving homeowners a simple point of contact) and with referring homeowners based on available counseling resources. The intake services: 1) provided live telephone intake; 2) obtained basic information from callers; and 3) referred callers to a specific counseling agency.

**Outreach.** Robust and coordinated outreach contributed to HomeHelpNH's success. Over the three-year grant period, it is estimated that paid advertising has generated over 20 million total media impressions, including over 5,000 radio ad spots, 459 television spots, and 186 print ads.

New Hampshire Housing coordinated and managed this effective statewide outreach. The outreach included print collateral and posters that were distributed to towns, public officials, and community resource centers. Additionally, every homeowner who received a foreclosure notice during the grant period was also sent information about HomeHelpNH.

This coordinated effort included working with a professional marketing firm, the counselors, the New Hampshire Foreclosure Relief Project, the Department of Justice and the Banking Department to ensure that outreach maximized exposure to at-risk homeowners and that the outreach message was on target and effective.

**2015 Year-End Highlights (January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2015).** During the 2015 calendar year, HomeHelpNH counselors reached 746 at-risk homeowners. Of the 746 households counseled in calendar year 2015, 375 households reached a final resolution with the help of a HomeHelpNH counselor. Of those that reached a final resolution, 95% of those were able to avoid foreclosure.

2015 foreclosure counseling grantees were:

- AHEAD, based in Littleton, with additional offices in Conway;
- Community Home Solutions, based in Seabrook;
- HOMEteam, based in Manchester with additional offices in Concord, Laconia and Nashua;
- Southwestern Community Services, based in Keene; and
- The Way Home, based in Manchester.

**Three-Year Program Outcomes (January 1, 2013, to December 31, 2015).** Since launching the HomeHelpNH initiative in January of 2013, the program has seen a number of positive outcomes. These combined successes include:

- 2,569 homeowners assisted by HomeHelpNH counselors since program inception.
- Approximately 94% of those that reached a final resolution with a counselors help were able to avoid foreclosure.
- Over 4,000 intake calls from at-risk homeowners into the 2-1-1 NH intake referral system since program's inception.
- Estimated over 20 million in total media impressions generated through the paid media outreach plan.

## **PROGRAM CONCLUSION:**

HomeHelpNH helped New Hampshire homeowners who were faced with the risk of foreclosure. This would not have been possible without the State's commitment of funds to this three-year effort and without the leadership, hard work and dedication of the organizations and individuals that participated in HomeHelpNH. When HomeHelpNH began, it was decided to keep the at-risk homeowner at the center of all decisions. By keeping the homeowner at the center of the initiative, all of the diverse agencies that were involved were able to put their needs aside and were able to focus on the homeowner. This resulted in a cooperative effort that made HomeHelpNH effective in its mission and objectives.

Through the efforts of the State of New Hampshire, the Department of Justice, the Banking Department, the counseling agencies, the New Hampshire Foreclosure Relief Project, 2-1-1 NH and New Hampshire Housing, over 2,500 at-risk homeowners had access to unique advice and counsel when faced with financial hardship. HomeHelpNH also provided community leaders and public officials with a legitimate, effective resource to assist struggling members of their community.

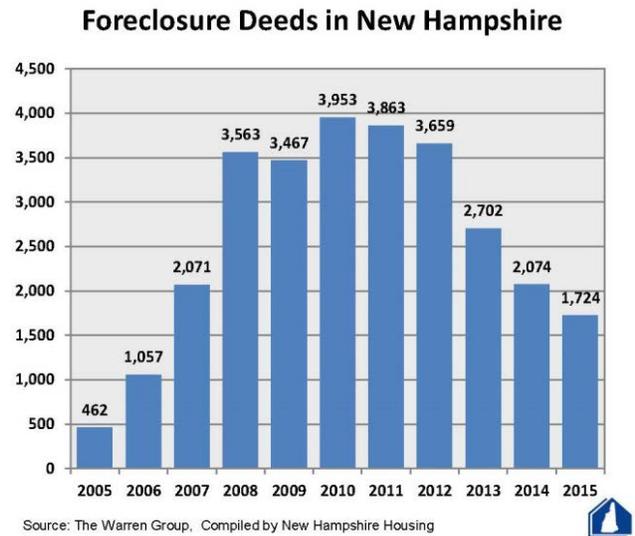
HomeHelpNH's success can be attributed to its unique approach that provided for the statewide coordinated effort of: 1) dedicated housing counseling agencies; 2) an integrated phone intake and referral service; and 3) effective outreach and management. By dedicating the National Mortgage Servicing Settlement funds to counseling for at-risk homeowners, New Hampshire helped lessen the impact of the great recession felt by many New Hampshire families and communities. New Hampshire can be proud of this work.

For more details, please review the following report.

## Foreclosure Trends

During the great recession, New Hampshire's mortgage foreclosure crisis peaked in 2010 with 3,953 foreclosures. The high foreclosure rate was mostly attributed to job market instability caused by the recession.

This meant that with higher unemployment rates, New Hampshire saw higher loan delinquencies and higher foreclosure rates. Additionally, at-risk homeowners saw their property values decrease due to the great recession. The combination of individual and market challenges left at-risk homeowners with limited options, resulting in a high rate of foreclosure in New Hampshire. In addition, because of the mortgage market decline, lending institutions tightened credit guidelines while the federal government enacted new mortgage lending rules.



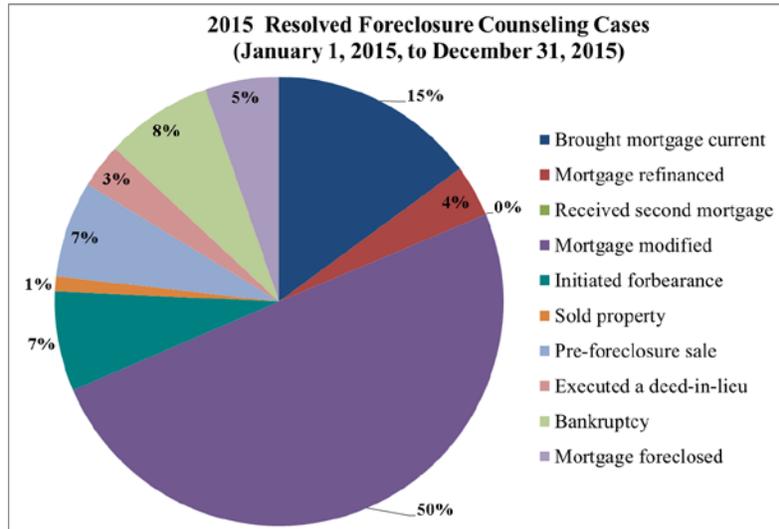
Throughout this period, a number of federal interventions and lender-driven modification programs were created to help stem the tide of foreclosures and assist homeowners. Unfortunately, through miscommunication, predatory business practices and unwise homeowner decisions, many at-risk homeowners sought help from entities that were either not working in their best interest, or were ill equipped to handle these complex situations and volume of calls. This left many at-risk homeowners with no sense of options, feeling hopeless and powerless.

Fortunately, with the guidance of Governor John Lynch, and later Governor Maggie Hassan, in cooperation with the Executive Council, the Joint Legislative Fiscal Committee and with the oversight and leadership of the New Hampshire Department of Justice and the New Hampshire Banking department, New Hampshire dedicated significant funds from the National Mortgage Servicing Settlement to help at-risk homeowners understand their options during such difficult times.

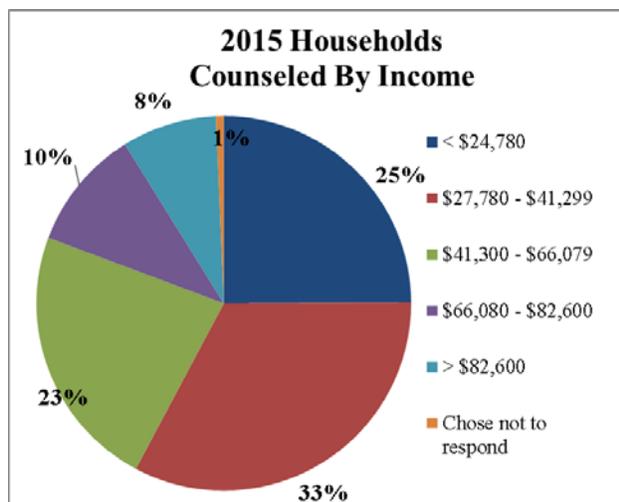
HomeHelpNH counselors and the legal services of the New Hampshire Foreclosure Relief Project, in combination with the referral services of 2-1-1 NH, began providing foreclosure services in early 2013.

# 2015 Year Review

In 2015, the final year of the initiative, HomeHelpNH counselors achieved 85% of their stated goals for the year by counseling 746 households. This is impressive given that in the second quarter of 2015, staffing issues resulted in the Housing Partnership ending its participation in HomeHelpNH. Thankfully, Community Home Solutions, also located on the Seacoast, worked with the Housing Partnership and HomeHelpNH to meet the needs of Seacoast residents. In addition, during the final quarter of 2015 paid outreach was significantly reduced as the program was coming to an end.



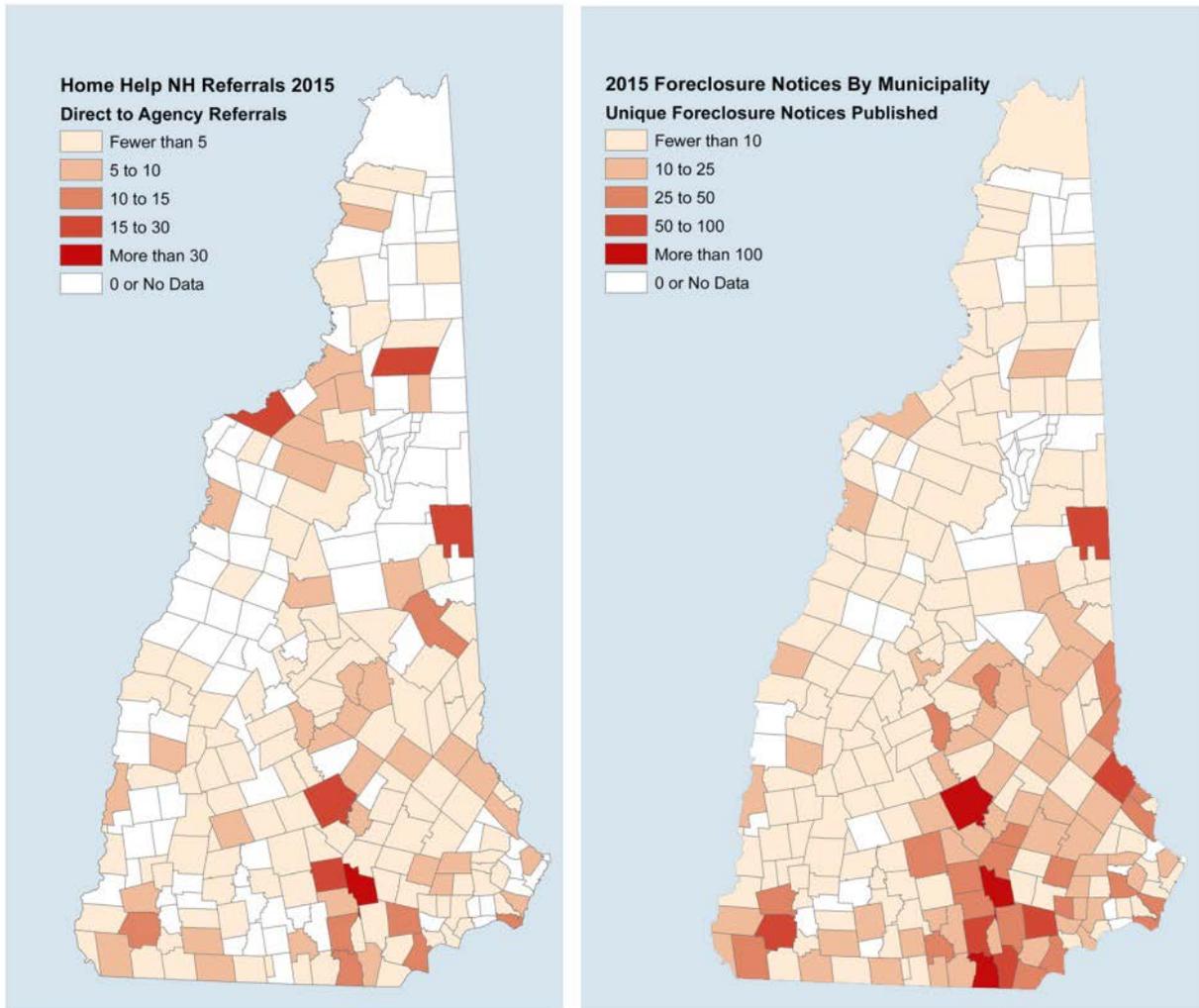
Of the 746 households counseled in 2015, counselors were able to assist 375 of those homeowners reach a final resolution to their housing situation. Of the resolved outcomes, 95% of those households were able to avoid foreclosure with the help of a counselor. This data nearly mirrored the initiative’s total resolved outcomes for the entire program period. The remaining households counseled in 2015 (371 households) are still either receiving counseling, were referred to another agency or withdrew from counseling.



Based on client data for 2015, 81% of the clients served were low income, making less than \$66,079 (at or below 80% of the New Hampshire statewide median income of \$82,600).

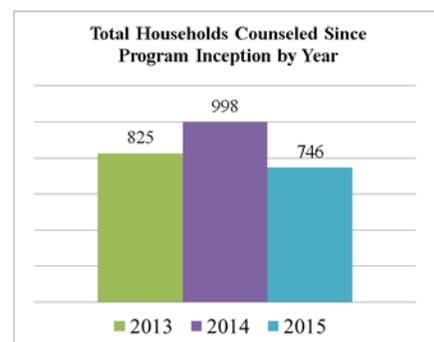
10% of the households served were considered moderate income and 8% of those served were above New Hampshire statewide median income of \$82,600.

By tracking where counseled homeowners reside and comparing that data to foreclosure notices recorded in 2015, the initiative was able to demonstrate that counseling services reached those areas of state with the greatest need for foreclosure counseling. This is consistent with the goals of the outreach plan.



By the end of 2015 and the program end of the three-year initiative (2013-2015), HomeHelpNH grantees were able to reach a total of 2,569 at-risk homeowners. In addition to reaching the initiative’s original goals as stated in the Request for Proposal of:

- Providing broad-based objective pre-foreclosure intervention and counseling; and
- Post-foreclosure counseling.



While meeting the program’s priorities of:

1. Providing clearly defined goals and objectives that were measurable and reportable;
2. Ensuring statewide geographical coverage; and
3. Successfully working in coordination with other grantees and with other aspects of the State’s foreclosure intervention strategies.

## Program Results 2013-2015

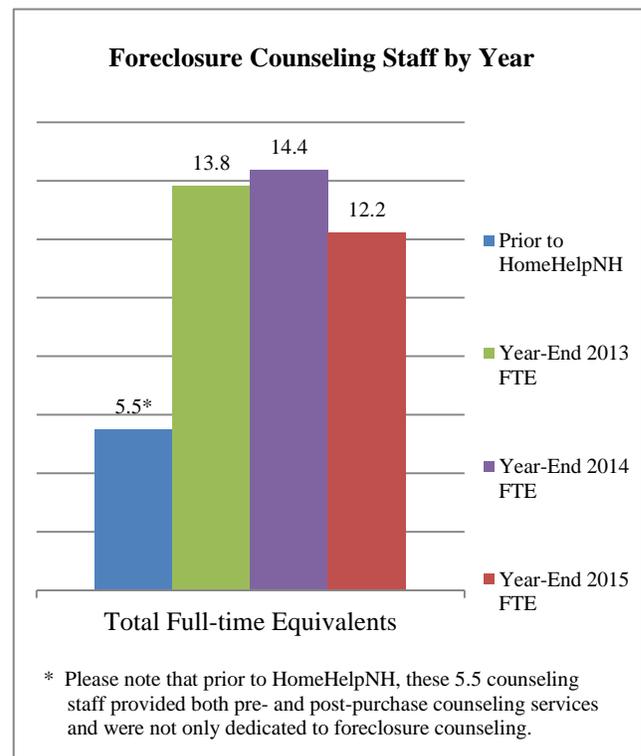
With the assistance of the National Mortgage Servicing Settlement funds, New Hampshire was able to grow the number of homeownership counselors available to help at-risk homeowners from an initial counseling staff of five to a peak of 14 dedicated foreclosure counseling staff by 2014.

The grantees were able to provide a network of statewide assistance, whether in-person counseling or an alternative format such as phone or internet counseling.

These high quality local services were performed by certified foreclosure counselors and HUD-approved nonprofit counseling agencies.

The grantees involved during the three-year funding period were:

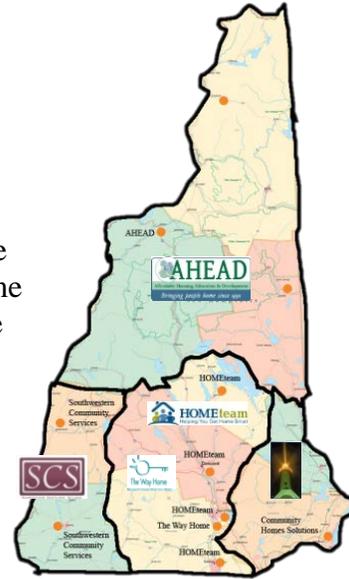
- AHEAD, based in Littleton;
- Catch Housing, based in Concord
- Community Home Solutions, based in Seabrook;
- Laconia Area Community Land Trust, based in Laconia;
- NeighborWorks Southern New Hampshire, based in Manchester and Nashua;



- Southwestern Community Services, based in Keene;
- The Housing Partnership, based in Portsmouth; and
- The Way Home, based in Manchester.

During the final year (2015), five of the original eight grantees were still part of the HomeHelpNH initiative: AHEAD, Community Home Solutions, HOMEteam, Southwestern Community Service, and The Way Home.

It is important to note that three of the original organizations (CATCH Housing, Laconia Area Community Land Trust and NeighborWorks Southern New Hampshire) consolidated foreclosure counseling staff and services into HOMEteam. This allowed HOMEteam to acquire trained staff, utilizing the existing infrastructure, while continuing to serve the original areas of need for those organizations. HOMEteam's expanded coverage area consists of Hillsborough, Merrimack and Belknap Counties.



## Grantee Performance

With the combined efforts of these dedicated counseling agencies, the coordination of the New Hampshire Foreclosure Relief Project and professional in-take services of 2-1-1 NH, HomeHelpNH assisted 2569 households during the total grant funded period.

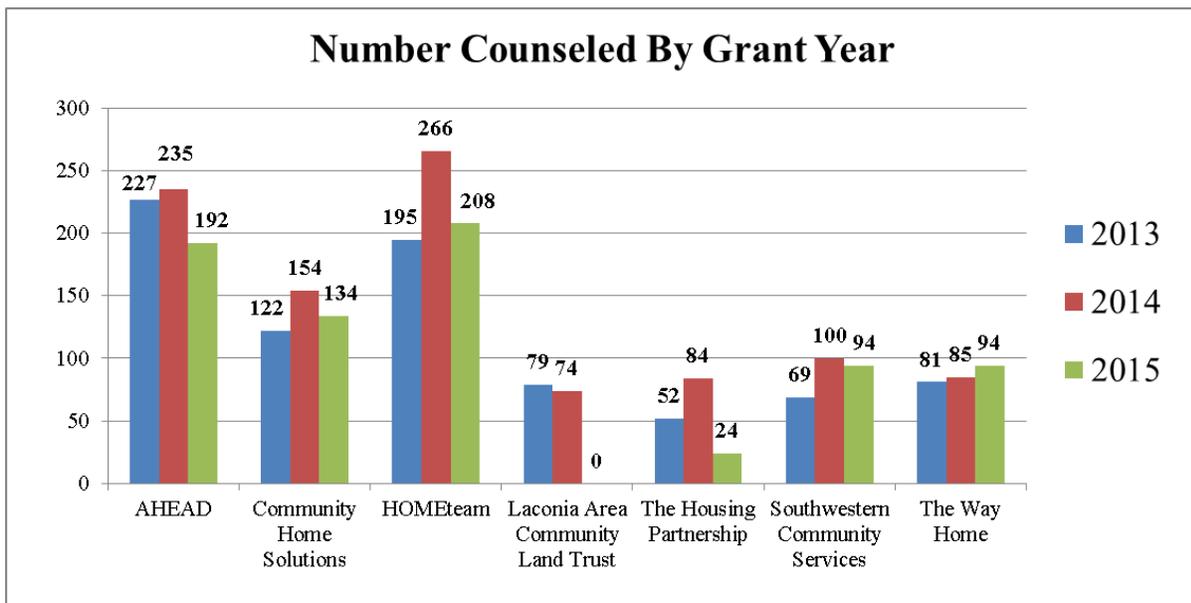
As a whole, the counseling agencies were able to reach 99% of their collective proposed counseling goals for the combined three-year initiative.

AGENCY	Total Proposed During 3-Year Funding Period	Total Actually Served During 3-Year Funding Period	Percentage of Goal Reached During 3-Year Funding Period
AHEAD	800	654	82%
Community Home Solutions	355	410	115%
Laconia Area Community Land Trust	120	153	128%
HOMEteam	600	669	112%
Southwestern Community Services	210	263	125%
The Housing Partnership	235	160	68%
The Way Home	275	260	95%
<b>Total Served:</b>	2595	2569	99%

Based on data provided, each entity reasonably met their individually proposed counseling goals during the grant funded period. In fact a number of the grantees, Community Home Solutions, Laconia Area Community Land Trust, HOMEteam and Southwestern Community Services exceeded their stated counseling goals. The agencies that counseled the highest number of households were AHEAD and HOMEteam.

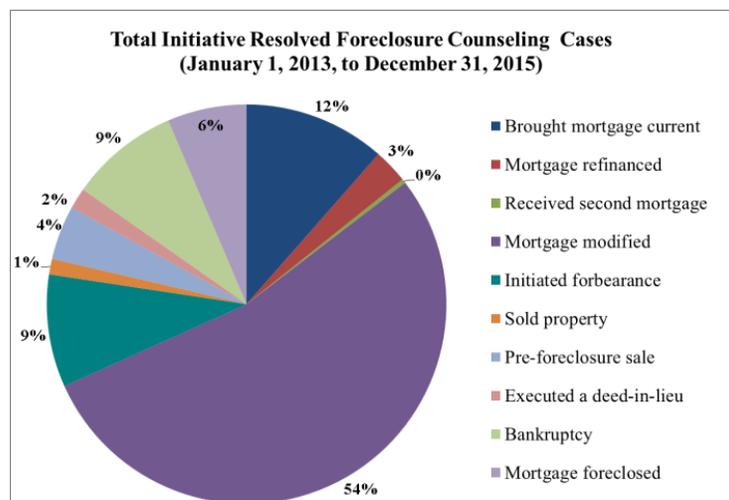
AHEAD’s large client volume was due to: 1) the size of their service area: Grafton, Carroll, and Coos counties; and 2) the supplemental outreach to reach households in these rural areas. In addition, AHEAD served as the statewide resource for telephone counseling capacity overflow when other partner agencies were unable to meet the needs of their local counseling volume.

HOMEtEam, through their collaboration of CATCH Housing, the Laconia Area Community Land Trust and NeighborWorks Southern New Hampshire, saw the highest volume of counseling as a result of the high concentration of at-risk homeowners within their combined service areas of Hillsborough, Merrimack and Belknap counties.



Of the total households counseled during the three-year grant period, there were a total of 1,185 resolved cases. Of those resolved cases, counselors were able to assist 94% of them in avoiding foreclosure.

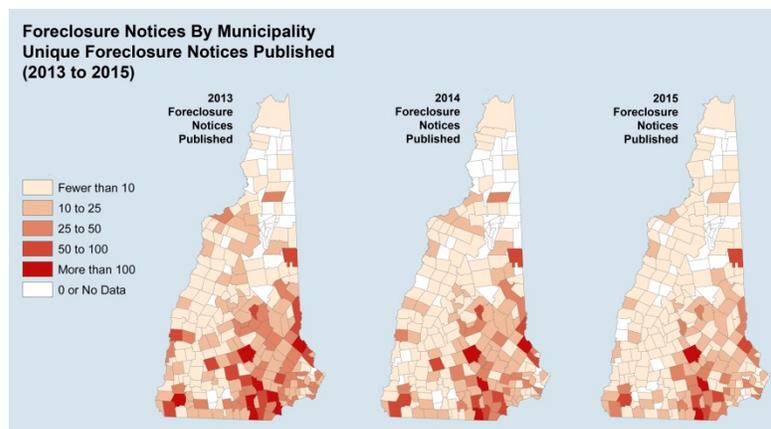
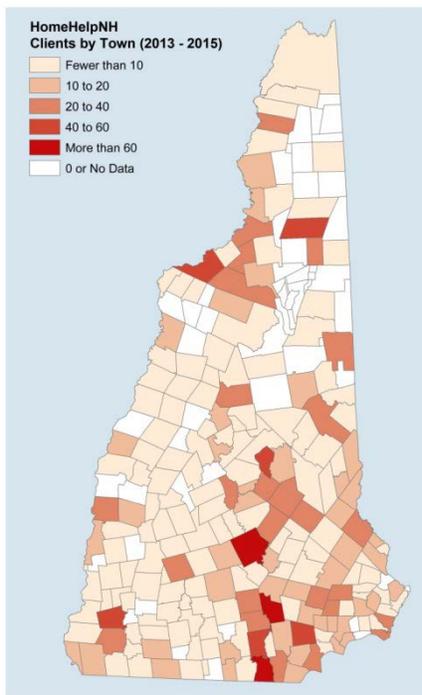
It is important to note, that within those resolved cases, HomeHelpNH counselors helped 636 (54% of the resolved cases)



at-risk households modify their mortgage, thereby utilizing one important tool in helping to stem the number of foreclosures experienced in the granite state during the three year grant period.

“I was in a very difficult position which I didn’t understand what to do. Maria was helpful in understanding my options and helped explain questions I had, that no one would answer.” Robert, Goffstown, NH

As stated before, however, not everyone that was assisted by a HomeHelpNH counselor was able to stay in their home. Out of the 636 resolved cases, there were other outcomes such as a pre-foreclosure sale, deed-in-lieu or bankruptcy. In many instances homeowners chose an option that did not allow them to stay in their home, which may have been the best option. By working with a professional counselor, these families were able to manage their lives and transition into a safe housing environment, with compassion and dignity.



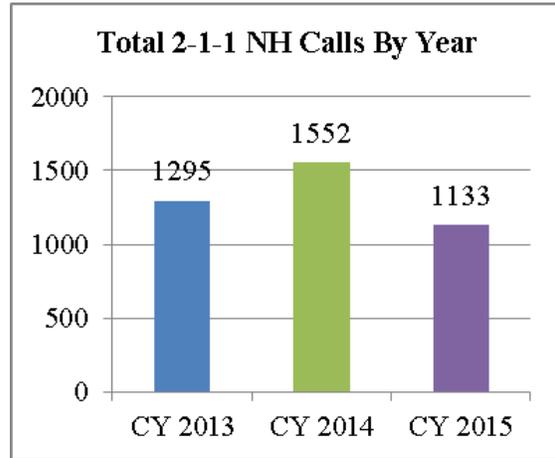
As expected, foreclosure notices were higher in the areas of the state with the highest rates of owner-occupied housing. Hillsborough, Rockingham and Merrimack counties show the highest rates of unique foreclosure notices by municipality.

By comparing HomeHelpNH clients by town (combined 2013 to 2015) to foreclosure notices by municipality over time (2013 to 2015), you can see that during the program period the initiative was able to assist homeowners in areas of the state hardest hit with foreclosures.

In addition, by looking at the unique foreclosure notices by municipality over time (2013 to 2015), there was a decline in foreclosure notices within those hardest hit areas during the program period. One reason for this may have been the effectiveness of the HomeHelpNH initiative.

## Intake Service Activity

Intake services for the HomeHelpNH initiative were performed by 2-1-1 NH. 2-1-1 NH is an initiative of Granite United Way in partnership with Eversource. 2-1-1 NH is also funded by a number of New Hampshire organizations, including the State of New Hampshire and New Hampshire Housing.

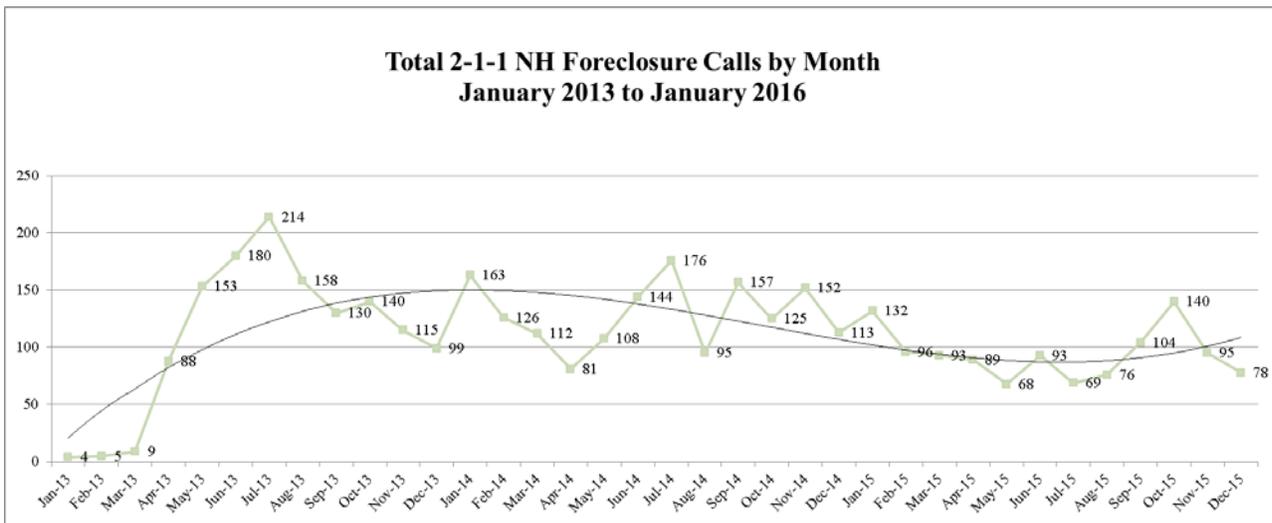


During the three-year grant funded period, 2-1-1 NH provided intake and referral services for approximately 4,000 calls.

It is important to note that 2-1-1 NH not only performed direct intake services for the initiative, but it also performed a number of additional services that assisted in the coordination of the initiative. These additional services

“Scary time, but they made it all understandable. The best word to describe it is respect. They showed us all the time.” Robin, Hudson, NH

included contacting the referral agency with the client’s information, following up with each referred client to ensure that the homeowner made contact with the agency they were referred to, and ensuring each caller referred had an opportunity to complete a satisfaction survey to help better manage the initiative. Feedback from returned 2-1-1 NH surveys indicated that the callers’ experiences with both the 2-1-1 NH referral service and the HomeHelpNH counselors were positive.



Many times homeowners calling the 2-1-1 NH system for foreclosure counseling had other financial and familial needs. 2-1-1 NH operators listened to all of the caller’s needs and then referred the caller to the appropriate resources, which in addition to foreclosure counseling services, may have included other services such as fuel assistance, food pantry programs or health related programs.

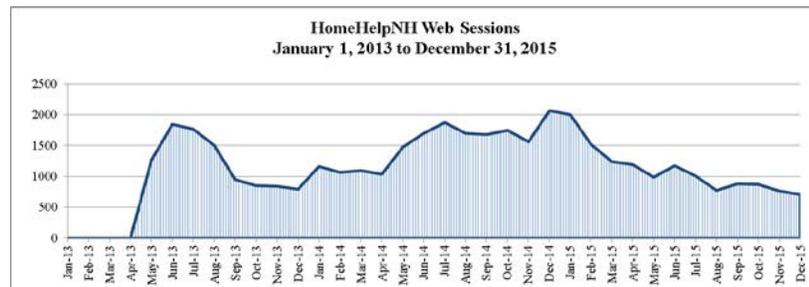
As a result, the typical foreclosure intake call took 2 -3 times longer than a standard 2-1-1 NH intake call. When combined with the additional services performed by 2-1-1 NH and the coordination needed between the callers and the grantees, 2-1-1 NH’s average number of calls per month for the HomeHelpNH initiative was around 100.

During the three year grant period, 2-1-1 NH made over 2,200 direct referrals to the HomeHelpNH grantees and the NH foreclosure Relief Project in addition to many other referrals that supported at-risk homeowners.

## Website Review

Since program inception (Jan 1, 2013 to Dec 31, 2015) there have been over 41,000 web sessions attributed to the HomeHelpNH website. Of those web sessions, 83% were initiated by new visitors. Peak website visits correlated directly with press events held by the initiative and other outreach.

In May of 2014 the HomeHelpNH website was re-launched to include both better tools for tracking website visits and tools for connecting at-risk homeowners with 2-1-1 NH and counselors. Included in the redesign of the website was a secured web form allowing at-risk homeowners to directly contact the in-take provider for a referral to a counseling agency. 2-1-1 NH maintained and serviced clients using the “contact us” web referral form. Since May of 2014, over 500 at-risk homeowners used this “contact us” tool to connect with a HomeHelpNH counselor.



With better use of web analytics tools, increased digital marketing, responsive web design elements and an event calendar, the redesigned website saw increased traffic which further contributed to the success of the initiative.

## Outreach Review

HomeHelpNH outreach was based on an original marketing plan developed by New Hampshire Housing and wedü, a Manchester based marketing firm.

Outreach for the initiative included: radio ads; print ads; digital ads; television; direct mailing to borrowers, towns, libraries and public officials; and print collateral, including posters and brochures.

The goal of the outreach was to not only make at-risk homeowners aware of the initiative but also to inform community leaders and the mortgage servicers about the initiative. The successful coordination between 2-1-1 NH, the counseling agencies and the New Hampshire Foreclosure Relief Project helped to inform the outreach initiative and allowed it to react and be updated as warranted. These outreach adjustments further contributed to the initiative's success.

Between January 1, 2013 and December 31, 2015 over 5,000 radio ads were run in support of the HomeHelpNH outreach efforts. In addition, through the placement of digital advertising over 10,000 users clicked on a HomeHelpNH ads.

To help support the rural communities, outreach also included the placement of over 180 print ads, in the North Country and western New Hampshire.

When combined, it is estimated that outreach for HomeHelpNH generated an estimated 20 million total media impressions during the 3 years of the campaign.



## Grant Budget

At program end, there was a fund balance of \$103,285.78 from the New Hampshire Department of Justice and New Hampshire Banking Department grants to New Hampshire Housing. In accordance with the original grant contracts, New Hampshire Housing received approval from both the New Hampshire Department of Justice (dated 12/22/15) and the New Hampshire Banking Department (dated 12/18/15) to apply these unspent National Mortgage Servicing Settlement funds to a future counseling initiatives.

These funds are to be combined with other targeted funds dedicated by New Hampshire Housing and a number of sponsor agencies to continue the initiative, in a more limited way, for another calendar year (2016).

Program Budget Highlights:

- 80% of program funds went directly to foreclosure counseling grantees;
- 4% spent on grant coordination including 2-1-1 NH and the redesigned HomeHelpNH.org website;
- 3% of funds were spent on administration;
- 10% spent on outreach efforts; and
- Ending balance of \$103,285.78 dedicated to support foreclosure counseling in 2016.

<b>HomeHelpNH Budget</b>					
<b>Actual as of January 31, 2016</b>					
		<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Total</b>
	Up to	\$1,166,666.67	\$1,166,666.67	\$1,166,666.66	\$3,500,000.00
Administration	5%	\$ 44,552.07	\$ 34,739.21	\$ 34,517.19	\$ 113,808.47
Outreach	10%	\$ 120,405.75	\$ 143,408.01	\$ 75,070.99	\$ 338,884.75
Coordination	5%	\$ 32,000.00	\$ 51,625.00	\$ 45,000.00	\$ 128,625.00
Grants		\$ 935,000.00	\$ 970,044.00	\$ 910,352.00	\$2,815,396.00
Total Expenses		\$1,131,957.82	\$1,199,816.22	\$1,064,940.18	\$3,396,714.22
BALANCE		\$ 34,708.85	\$ (33,149.55)	\$ 101,726.48	\$ <b>103,285.78</b>

## Conclusion

HomeHelpNH's success is because of its unique approach that provided for the statewide coordinated effort of: 1) dedicated housing counseling agencies; 2) an integrated phone intake and referral service; and 3) effective outreach and management.

Throughout this effort, however, one of the keys to the success of the initiative was that the program remained focused on one thing—ensuring that at-risk homeowners received the information, support and assistance they needed to deal effectively with their housing challenges. By keeping the homeowner at the center of the initiative, all of the diverse agencies that were involved were able to put their needs aside and were able to focus on the homeowner.

New Hampshire can be proud of its success in dedicating funds to help at-risk homeowners and can also be proud of the successful coordination between so many interested organizations. The partnership is a model of how the counseling can truly help people in immediate need.

Without the forward thinking support of the State, including Governor Lynch and Governor Hassan, Executive Councilors, and the leadership the New Hampshire's Department of Justice and the New Hampshire Banking Department, this initiative would not have been a success.

New Hampshire Housing is thankful for its continuing role in assisting the state and helping at-risk homeowners get the resources and assistance they need.

In addition, without the commitment of the dedicated homeownership foreclosure counseling agencies and their staff, this initiative would never have succeeded in helping so many New Hampshire families navigate the financial and familial challenges of foreclosure. By providing these services statewide, free of charge, HomeHelpNH has helped many New Hampshire families succeed in achieving their housing necessities.

For 2016, New Hampshire Housing will continue with foreclosure counseling, under the name "HomeHelpNH," working with public and private partners to continue to seek funding opportunities to preserve the availability of both pre- and post-purchase counseling services within our state.