

AN OVERVIEW OF HOMELESS PROGRAMS IN THE CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City and County of San Francisco Department of Human Services (DHS) offers an array of housing services for homeless families. This case study surveys the variety of programs and services that constitute San Francisco's continuum of care for homeless families. Services fall into the following broad categories:

- Eviction Prevention
- Centralized Intake System for Emergency Shelter
- Emergency Shelter Programs
- Transitional Housing Programs
- Long Term Housing Programs
- Supportive Services

The strengths of the San Francisco model include a high level of collaboration between DHS and others, such as community-based organizations; HUD, the Housing Authority, and other DHS programs. Other strengths include a high level of city/county commitment as evidenced by the amount of financial support provided to homeless programs and finally, a variety of innovative service delivery models, including the establishment of a web-site as well as a centralized intake system for emergency shelter.

Weaknesses of the San Francisco model are also explored. While I did not describe all of the problems that exist, such as the lack of affordable housing, the inability for services to follow the family out of the county, and the over reliance on both

HUD and county funds for services, each issue has the potential to negatively impact the quality and range of the programs offered.

Finally, armed with new knowledge, I offer some recommendations for the Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD). Some of my recommendations are relatively straightforward and require little more than communication and collaboration with our existing Homeless programs. Others suggest that the issue of homelessness needs to become a priority for the department and hence requires a commitment of funding, as well as the addition of a Housing Liaison position to EHSD staff.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years there have been numerous occasions when the lack of adequate housing resources have had a significant impact on a family's ability to reunify with their child(ren). While homelessness in and of itself is not a form of child abuse/neglect, returning a child to a family that lacks a stable living environment is fraught with risk and often not in the best interest of the child(ren). Families who are involved with the child welfare system often experience chronic homelessness, and many also suffer from alcohol/drug addiction, mental health problems, and a lack of employment. Youth who have grown up in the county's foster care system also frequently face issues of homelessness upon emancipation from the foster care system. Clearly, strategies need to be developed to better address this significant barrier to both reunification and self-sufficiency. Moreover, as noted below, the issue of homelessness amongst some of our most vulnerable individuals is further exacerbated by the serious lack of affordable, low-cost housing.

Homelessness among families and children is a clear sign of our society's failure to meet one of the most basic of human needs—shelter. According to the 1999 Homebase publication, *Ending Family Homelessness*, homelessness is caused by failure in three areas: housing, services, and incomes from jobs or benefits. Studies have shown that the prevention of homelessness depends on both the community and the support of family and friends. When those support systems either fail to meet the needs of the family or simply do not exist, someone or

something must help fill the gap for those families. Some interesting statistics about California's housing:

- California has one of the lowest home ownership rates in the nation at less than 56% compared to the national average of 85%
- The San Francisco Bay Area suffers from a significant "jobs-housing imbalance," as housing production has not kept pace with new job creation
- Last year (1999) marked the ninth consecutive year of housing production at roughly 50% of what is needed.
- The San Francisco Bay Area is already one of the nation's most expensive housing markets, is expected to have a cumulative housing deficit of 324,000 units by 2010.
- In California 2.3 million people pay more than 30% of their income towards housing
- Only 12% of the people receiving TANF benefits receive public housing assistance compared to 43% in Massachusetts

THE SAN FRANCISCO MODEL

In the Bay Area, the City and County of San Francisco, Department of Human Services, Housing and Homeless Programs offers a comprehensive array of housing programs, ranging from eviction prevention to subsidized permanent housing, for those individuals and families experiencing homelessness. This document will provide a brief survey of the continuum of housing resources and services designed to meet the needs of homeless families. A similar system of care also exists for those single individuals who face issues of homelessness.

Eviction Prevention

It is a commonly held belief that whenever possible it is more advantageous and effective to provide services that can help to prevent a homeless situation from occurring in the first place. San Francisco's continuum of care for families begins with a program that focuses on eviction prevention. Family Eviction Prevention Consortium (FEPCO) is a collaborative group of service organizations that include Catholic Charities, St. Peter's Housing Committee, Eviction Defense Collaborative and Volunteer Legal Services Program, and it offers an array of services designed to assist in the prevention of homelessness. Services include: 1) assistance/advocacy with repair problems, 2) illegal rent increases and other housing issues, 3) the provision of actual financial assistance to help pay back rent, 4) help in responding to an eviction lawsuit or notice, 5) case management, 6) referrals to other community resources. A particular strength of this program is the strong level of collaboration that exists between the participating agencies. This collaboration was recently enhanced by the development of a web page that allows for an on-line intake system. The on-line intake system enables families to access services at any point and from any of the participating agencies. Once the on-line intake is completed an email is sent to the agency most equipped to handle the family's current service needs. The receiving agency can then bring up the family's intake information and immediately begin to serve them. Nearly 306 families have been helped this fiscal year. This program is funded through county general funds.

Centralized Intake for Families

A centralized, coordinated shelter intake system for homeless families known as Connecting Point is run by Compass Community Services¹. Despite the sizeable array of placement options in San Francisco County, at the time of my visit there was a list of eighty-five families awaiting emergency shelter. In addition to the centralized intake and placement of families, Connecting Point has full time intake counselors who complete an assessment on each family contacting the shelter hotline. Upon intake and assessment families are assigned case managers who are available to meet with families once per week and can provide emergency food, bus tokens, motel vouchers and so forth. At a minimum, families are required to call and check in once per week while they remain on the waiting list.

Connecting Point also gathers data that provides the county with a profile of the families seeking shelter in San Francisco. Last year over 3000 families were served. This program is funded with HUD McKinney dollars (30%) and County General funds (70%).

Emergency Shelter for Families

San Francisco County Department of Human Services contracts with a number of community-based organizations in the provision of emergency shelter services to homeless families and pregnant women. Generally families are permitted a ninety (90) day stay, with the possibility of three, thirty day extensions, for a maximum stay of up to six

¹Connecting Point coordinates the County's Family Shelter Consortium, a collaboration of community based organizations offering emergency shelter services to families, providing weekly meetings where providers assess the needs of those families on the waiting list and move to the most appropriate shelter opening as soon as possible.

months. Accommodations range from congregate dorms where children under the age of five share a twin bed with their parent (Hamilton Family Center) to more spacious settings where families are provided with private rooms that can sleep anywhere from three to five individuals (St. Joseph's Village). All sites provide an array of case management services, children's services and housing services, including support groups, substance abuse counseling, immunization programs, tutoring, computer labs, pre-employment classes, and three meals per day. Hamilton Family Center also maintains four beds that are available for emergency families with no other housing options. These beds are available for one night only after 5pm to families. Shelters are funded through a combination of HUD-McKinney dollars, county general funds, as well as some private foundations.

Transitional Housing

Three transitional housing sites serve those families who are not "housing ready". Families can reside in a transitional housing site for up to two years allowing them to stabilize and hopefully break their cycle of homelessness. Residents in transitional housing are required to utilize on-site supportive services that include case management, education/employment services, children's programs, tutoring, and housing placement assistance. Forty-seven families were served in FY 98-99, and one site just recently opened. Funding is primarily county dollars.

Shelter Plus Care

Currently San Francisco County has three Shelter Plus Care (S+C) programs in operation. S+C programs are designed to provide supportive services to homeless families with disabilities to help them

access and retain safe, secure permanent housing. Per HUD definition, populations given special consideration include those homeless persons who are either seriously mentally ill, have chronic problems with alcohol and/or drugs, or have AIDS and related diseases. Catholic Charities operates two of the S+C programs. One of the programs is a "scattered site" model in which Catholic Charities leases thirty-eight individual units of housing and in turn sub-leases them to eligible S+C families.

The other program is located on Treasure Island. The Treasure Island site currently has the capacity to house twenty-nine families. An additional thirty-four units will be available by the end of this fiscal year. GLIDE Extended Family Programs operate the third S+C site. The Cecil Williams GLIDE Community House has fifty-two units of housing. All furnished with basic necessities, such as beds, linens, and dishes. Residents in S+C pay 30% of their adjusted gross income for rent. As mentioned earlier, a variety of supportive services are available to those families placed in S+C. Services can begin thirty-sixty days prior to the scheduled move-in date and can continue as long as the family resides in S+C.

Unlike transitional housing, families are not required to utilize services. Services include peer advocacy/case management, assistance with move-in needs, a variety of educational workshops ranging from budgeting to meal preparation, child care, and drug and alcohol groups. This is truly the Cadillac of programs and as such is quite expensive to operate. For example, the County paid approximately \$20,000 per unit for renovation costs at the Treasure Island site.

Historically these programs have been funded through a combination of HUD-McKinney funds

and sizeable county general funds. Given the long-term nature of these programs, foundation money has not been considered an option. The Housing Authority is also a collaborator in the S+C programs. All S+C sites must be approved by the Housing Authority and are required to meet the same requirements as Section 8 facilities. San Francisco County offers decentralized intake for S+C and has established memos of cooperation with a number of agencies throughout the community. Participating agencies must agree to make monthly contact with the families they assist in the application process for the period of time they are on the waiting list. Ultimately, this allows families increased access to the S+C system but unfortunately there is currently a two-year waiting list for the program.

Supportive Services

Additionally, San Francisco County funds a variety of supportive services that are available to homeless families. Services include assistance in locating permanent housing, transportation, advocacy, funds for move-in costs, budgeting workshops, post-housing placement assistance.

STRENGTHS OF THE SAN FRANCISCO MODEL

As was hopefully evidenced by the aforementioned overview, the City and County of San Francisco County has made a serious commitment to support homeless families in their community. Their model of service delivery offers a number of strengths:

Collaboration

There is a high level of collaboration between Housing and Homeless staff, other DHS staff other

organizations, such as HUD and, the Housing Authority, and homeless or formerly homeless persons themselves. This is evidenced by the weekly emergency shelter meetings, the liaison with HUD, the requirement that contracted agencies include homeless or formerly homeless persons on staff, and the decentralized intake process for S+C.

County Commitment

The strongest form of support comes from the commitment of county general funds, and the City and County of San Francisco has committed significant dollars to support housing programs as well as the infrastructure needed to develop and monitor them. This includes a sizeable staff in both Housing and Homeless Programs and Contracts.

Innovative Models of Service Delivery

Both County staff and CBOs have demonstrated a high level of creativity in the delivery of services. As mentioned earlier, those providers focusing on eviction prevention developed a web site. This has streamlined their intake process and increased access for families. The centralized shelter intake process is also an excellent model that has simplified the shelter intake process and improved service delivery to families. Other services, such as those focusing on preparing families to be “housing ready” appear to be both innovative and effective. Finally, the S+C program, located on Treasure Island, provides a wonderful, supportive living opportunity on what was once military property.

WEAKNESSES OF THE SAN FRANCISCO MODEL

It is difficult to criticize what I observed in San Francisco, but the following challenges will have to be addressed in the future:

Lack of Available Housing

All of the efforts made to assist the homeless are minimized by the serious lack of affordable housing in San Francisco and neighboring areas. Homelessness is a political issue that needs to be addressed on the regional, state and national level.

Inability of Services to Follow Families

Given the housing situation in the Bay Area, many families served are forced to move out of the area to locate affordable, permanent housing, and once they leave, the county no longer has the ability to fund services. As a consequence, families often are ineligible for “after care” services.

Over-Reliance on HUD and County General Funds

While it is a strength that the County was able to successfully procure HUD funding and has made a fiscal commitment to providing quality homeless programs, an over-reliance on these two funding sources leaves programs vulnerable. The County is currently facing this issue given the current reduction in HUD dollars.

Long Waiting Lists

Sadly, despite the high level of services in the County, they are still less than adequate to meet the need. As I mentioned earlier, at the time of my visit there was a list of eighty-five families waiting for emergency shelter and nearly a two-year waiting list for S+C.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

There are a number of things that Contra Costa County can learn or borrow from the City and County of San Francisco. Short-term recommendations include:

Improving Collaboration

Currently the county’s homeless programs are part of the Health Department. Establishing ongoing meetings between the Department and the county’s homeless programs would strengthen communication and awareness of each other’s needs.

Locating Potential Funding for Housing Programs

Consideration should be given to utilizing CalWorks dollars to fund programs that focus on helping families locate housing. This could include services that assist families to become “housing ready”, such as maintaining a job, budgeting, and working with credit agencies. Once housing is located, move-in assistance could be provided as well as other supportive services necessary to help stabilize the family in their new housing situation. Aside from CalWorks dollars the Department should also ensure that it is informed when Community Block Grant funds are available.

Increasing Access to Existing Housing Programs

The Department should consider the advantages and disadvantages of serving as an intake point for S+C and approach the County’s Homeless Programs (they currently administer S+C) for consideration. This model seems to have worked well in San

Francisco and could potentially work well in Contra Costa County as well.

Consideration should also be given to the following long-term goals:

Greater Commitment of County Funds

County dollars will need to be utilized if the Department elects to identify housing as one of its priorities.

Increased Outreach With Landlords, Property Owners, Etc.

Given the competitive housing market in the Bay, it is essential that we establish ongoing relationships with individuals who might have access to or knowledge of housing resources.

Survey of Land for Potential Housing Opportunities

Consider a full analysis of land and property located within the County. Is there existing property that developers may consider undesirable (near freeway or BART tracks) that could be purchased or leased at less than market value and renovated to create affordable and/or supportive housing?

Further Collaboration With the County's Homeless Programs, HUD, and the Housing Authorities

This would be best facilitated by the creation of a liaison position or potentially even giving consideration to moving Homeless Programs back under the umbrella of the Employment and Human Services Department.

CONCLUSION

I have gained great insight into the world of housing, although in some ways I feel less prepared to venture into this world than I did before I started this project. I have learned that housing and homelessness are very complex issues. The following recaps just a few of the important things that I have learned:

- Housing is more than a money issue
- Establishing relationships with landlords is essential
- The commitment and support of the community is crucial when developing affordable housing
- It is important to understand the role and functions of both property ownership and property management
- Not all homeless families are ready to move into permanent housing
- Aftercare services are needed to prevent recidivism

REFERENCES

HomeBase (1999). *Regaining Housing. Ending Family Homelessness: Policy Retreat Summary and Action Agenda*, page 9.

California Chamber of Commerce (2000), *Housing Crisis Solutions Set Forth in Bill Package: Business, Labor, Housing Advocates Voice Support*, page 10.