

# Families Moving Forward (FMF) in San Francisco County: Improving Outcomes for Child Welfare Families Who Face Homelessness

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The San Francisco County Human Services Agency (SF-HSA) found that homeless child welfare clients are at higher risk for poor outcomes as compared to housed child welfare families; outcomes including higher rates of removal and significant barriers to reunification. In addition, co-occurring risk factors, such as substance abuse and mental health challenges, increase the vulnerability of this population. SF-HSA was awarded a \$4.2 million grant to be utilized over a 5-year period. The Families Moving Forward program (FMF), launched October 2014, supports rapid housing and intensive case management for homeless child welfare families by

utilizing a well-coordinated multidisciplinary team. An extensive data analysis of participant outcomes compared to control group outcomes will be done. Anecdotally, although locating affordable housing has been challenging at times, the coordination of services has been enhanced.

San Mateo County, like San Francisco County, is an expensive county and many families are at risk of homelessness and child welfare involvement. The momentum of the San Mateo County's focus on homelessness, coordination of services across disciplines, and the utilization of data to improve services support the implementation of a program like FMF.

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## Introduction

Homelessness is at epidemic rates throughout the Bay Area. As the economy has struggled to recover, so have families. The number of families facing homelessness has increased over time in San Mateo County (San Mateo County Homeless Census and Survey, 2013). A sub-population of the homeless population that is not always considered is the concentration of families who are involved in the child welfare system. San Francisco County researched trends with its homeless child welfare clients and found that there were usually co-occurring risk factors, such as mental health issues, substance abuse, and domestic violence (Rapid Support and Housing for Families, 2013). In addition, homeless families experienced higher Child Protective Services removal rates than housed families. Further, as compared to housed children, homeless children are four times more likely to be developmentally delayed and three times more likely to suffer from emotional disorders (Rapport, S. & Bauters, J., 2015). San Francisco County recognized the need for a service intervention to target this especially vulnerable population and designed the Families Moving Forward (FMF) program.

## Background of San Mateo County's Interest

San Mateo County and San Francisco County are both expensive counties to live in. The 2013 census data indicates that the median value of owner-occupied housing units between 2009-2013 was \$722,200

in San Mateo County and \$744,600 in San Francisco. The median rent in San Mateo County is \$3,032/month and \$3,995/month in San Francisco (Zillow.com, 2015). San Francisco County's general population in 2013 was a little over 800,000 and the total sheltered and unsheltered homeless count was 6,436 individuals. This shows a decrease of 19 homeless individuals between 2011 and 2013 (San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey, 2013).

While San Francisco County has larger general and homeless populations, homelessness in San Mateo County has risen, as evidenced by a 6% increase in the number of homeless individuals between 2011 and 2013 (San Mateo County Homeless Census and Survey, 2013).

Additionally, the lack of affordable housing in San Mateo County is at crisis levels and was a focal point for the Board of Supervisors leading to the development of the January 2013 Affordable Housing White Paper. In 2013, the Board of Supervisors initiated the \$13 million Affordable Housing Fund to expand affordable housing in San Mateo County. \$5 million was used for expanding and renovating 330 emergency shelter and transitional beds, with the remainder designated for the construction of 325 affordable housing units. The Affordable Housing White Paper also recommended prevention strategies, such as a countywide tenant's rights education and assistance program. Prevention strategies can protect current tenants from being unfairly evicted and rendered homeless. San Mateo County's interest

in the FMF program was multi-layered. The agency was interested in learning how the FMF program maximized services in an expensive county, how participants were identified and served, and whether or not a program like FMF could be viable in San Mateo County. San Mateo County was especially interested in FMF as the agency has functioned under the ideology that protective factors can mitigate risk factors, thereby improving positive outcomes of families.

### **History of San Francisco County's Families Moving Forward Program**

The San Francisco Human Services Agency (SF-HSA) mined child welfare data with a focus on homeless families and found the following:

- 70% of the parents had documented mental health challenges.
- 55% of the parents suffered from substance abuse.
- 49% of the parents had domestic violence issues.
- 40% of the families had a combination of substance abuse and mental health challenges; 42% had a combination of mental health challenges and domestic violence; 25% faced all three challenges.
- Families were not identified early and were at risk for poor outcomes, including but not limited to, impaired parent and child socio-emotional functioning and decreased educational performance of the child.
- Between 2008 and 2012, more than 50% of children in homeless families being investigated for maltreatment were removed as compared to only 13% of children in non-homeless families.
- 63% of the homeless families had no contact with Family and Children Services (FCS), prior to becoming homeless.

The agency also looked at shelter data from 2012 and found that 11% of the families residing in San Francisco shelters had open child welfare cases. SF-HSA noted that the underlying vulnerabilities of families were heightened when facing homelessness. While homelessness alone was not a reason to

remove a child, it did create a formidable barrier to reunification. Families who did not have stable housing also had problems accessing and participating in supportive services, thereby perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage.

SF-HSA became aware of the federal Children's Bureau Discretionary Grant known as "Partnerships to Demonstrate the Effectiveness of Supportive Housing for Families in the Child Welfare System."

The grant required grantees to utilize a system's change to serve populations with extremely challenging issues. The agency utilized the analysis of data derived from the Structured Decision Making tool, used by FCS, to delve into the characteristics of families who experienced significant barriers to service. As a result, FCS clients who were homeless with co-occurring risk factors were selected as the target population. SF-HSA applied for and was awarded the \$4.2 million grant to be utilized over a five-year period. The grant was used for expenses such as personnel costs and services of partnering agencies providing assistance to FMF clients. A pilot was initiated June 2013. The Families Moving Forward program, initially named the Rapid Support and Housing for Families (RHSHF) program, was launched October 2014. The premise of the program was based on "housing first" and the early identification of at-risk families. The goals of the program included, but were not limited to: (1) decreasing re-abuse, (2) reducing the time to reunify families, (3) decreasing entry into out of home care, (4) serving approximately 30 families per year, (5) increasing housing stability, (6) improving the social and emotional functioning of the family, and (7) increasing income through employment, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and other sources.

### **Key Elements**

#### **PARTNERSHIPS AND ROLES**

The agency strategized service delivery by capitalizing on existing positive partnerships with the following agencies:

- San Francisco Housing Authority

- Homeless Prenatal Program
- University of California San Francisco (UCSF) Infant Prenatal Program
- San Francisco Department of Health
- Public Consulting Group
- San Francisco homeless shelters

The Housing Authority agreed to provide additional housing vouchers for five years. The Homeless Prenatal Program (HPP) is one of the most popular community based organizations with the highest engagement and provides intensive case management in addition to FCS social worker case management. Participants are assigned a HPP Clinical Case Manager who provides weekly case management that includes housing assistance, wellness services, transportation, and a mental health team. The HPP Clinical Case Manager also facilitates monthly meetings with the partners. Clients can continue to receive case management after the child welfare case closes. The UCSF program provides in-home psychotherapy to families with children 0-5, while the San Francisco Department of Health administers mental health screenings and treatment. Lastly, the Public Consulting Group (PCG) screens families

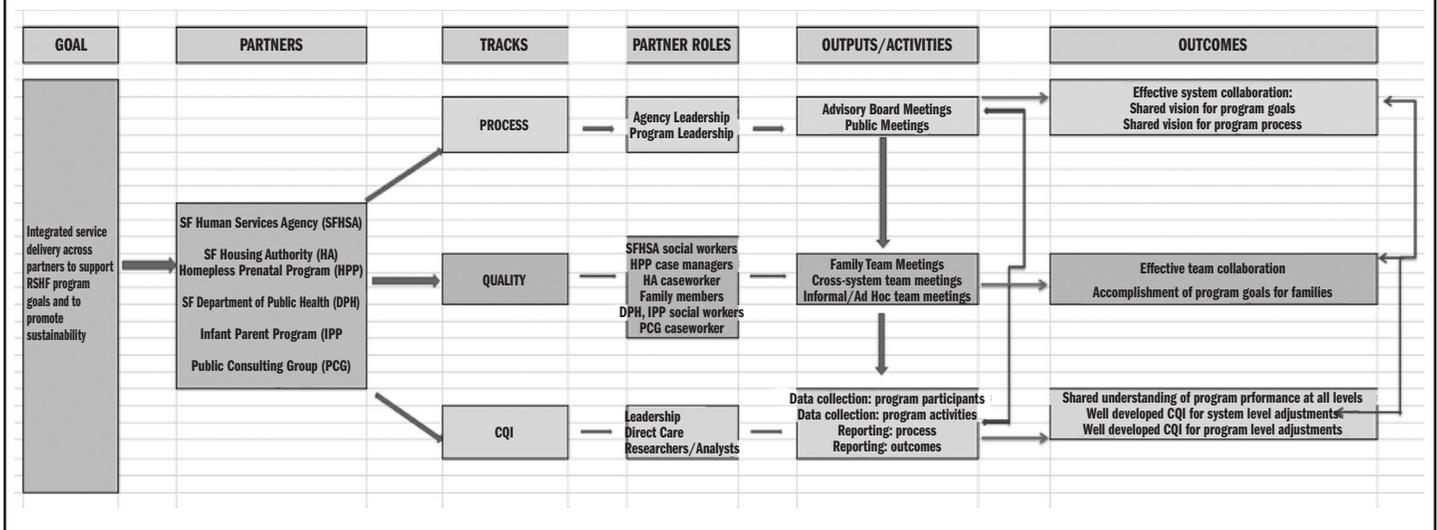
for SSI and other income eligibility. The Systems Change Logic Model is included as *Figure 1*.

**RESOURCES**

The SF-HSA Housing and Homeless Division oversees shelter placements, ten new housing units, twenty deep rent subsidies in the amount of \$1,700/month, and thirty time-limited shallow rent subsidies in the amount of \$800/month. The San Francisco Housing Authority oversees one-hundred Section 8 vouchers obtained through a Family Unification grant provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Additionally, the San Francisco Housing Authority provides twenty traditional Section 8 vouchers per year, as they become available after turnover.

The deep rent subsidies, as well as rent deposit assistance, are the result of SF-HSA annually allotting more than \$500,000 of realignment funding to prevent families from remaining homeless while waiting for a voucher. When either a voucher or permanent supportive housing option is available, the family no longer receives a deep rental subsidy. Then the slot opens for the next family that needs a deep rent subsidy, which is not uncommon in an expensive city such as San Francisco. In addition to disbursing

**FIGURE 1**  
**San Francisco County FMF Systems Change Logic Model**



rental subsidies to the landlords, HPP also actively recruits landlords to build housing capacity. A liaison is also involved and assists in coordinating communication between the Housing Authority and child welfare agencies.

#### **INTAKE PROCEDURE**

Emergency Response Social Workers complete a Structured Decision Making (SDM) assessment. At this time, an assessment as to whether or not the family is homeless and eligible to participate in FMF is completed. This determination is based on a broader San Francisco City/County definition of homelessness as opposed to the HUD definition. Families are deemed homeless if they are “individuals or families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and who have a primary nighttime residence in one or more of the following” types of arrangements: homeless shelter, outdoors, a vehicle, overcrowded space, doubled up with families/friends, living in a Single Room Occupancy hotel room, or are formerly homeless. A social work supervisor reviews the assessment to confirm that the family is eligible in that they are both homeless and have additional risk factors, such as substance abuse, mental health challenges, criminal history, or a medically fragile child. Eligible families are entered into a randomized lottery; families who win the lottery participate in FMF, while the other families are assigned to a control group that receives traditional services. Within five days, a multi-disciplinary team meeting is convened by a SF-HSA bachelor’s level social worker that includes the client, the Emergency Response social worker, and the HPP Clinical Case Manager. During the meeting, the family’s child welfare case plan and the FMF program are discussed. Eligible families who elect to participate are enrolled in FMF. An intake is later conducted by the HPP Clinical Case Manager to assess housing needs and determine if the family will receive (1) a deep rental subsidy, (2) a shallow rental subsidy, or (3) Local Operating Subsidy Program (LSOP).

#### **Outcomes and Next Steps**

SF-HSA will have Chapin Hall analyze data in September 2015 and again in September 2016, as two cohorts of participants will have completed the program by that time. Final results are projected to be completed in 2017. The data will include outcomes for both the program participants as well as the control group. Anecdotally, there have been challenges finding landlords to participate since they can generally command higher rental rates from their units given current market demand. As a result, some clients must re-locate to other counties to obtain affordable housing. However, reported successes include an enhanced coordination of services, as supported by the multi-disciplinary meetings, and the benefits families received from partnering agencies, such as dyadic therapy with the UCSF Infant Prenatal Program.

SF-HSA is currently working on a sustainability plan to support the program beyond the grant period and plans to publish a document outlining lessons that were learned as a result of implementing Families Moving Forward.

#### **Recommendations for San Mateo County**

##### **INCREASE COLLABORATION**

San Mateo County Children and Family Services (CFS) can begin the process of considering practice based in a “housing first” ideology by meeting with CFS program managers to discuss the viability of implementing a program like FMF and to explore targeting vulnerable families at the Emergency Response stage.

There are various departments who work with the same clients; however, there is not always regular communication and collaboration between them. Consideration should be given to increasing collaboration by meeting with the goal of effectively serving shared clients. For example, developing a task force including the Center on Homelessness, Department of Housing, and Children and Family Services is one step in exploring how the FMF program concepts

could be adopted in San Mateo County. Once the partnership is launched via the task force, bi-monthly or quarterly meetings can be continued as a way to maintain the partnership. Another option is to enhance existing meetings by inviting the appropriate partners, thereby eliminating the need to increase the number of meetings that staff attends.

#### **INCREASE/RE-DIRECT FUNDING**

In order to direct more services toward serving homeless child welfare clients, the county could utilize realignment funds or seek out other flexible funding sources to support a robust level of services for this extremely vulnerable population. Prevention services have the potential to be cost-effective in that they decrease the risk of clients utilizing emergency services with short-term effects or coming in contact with additional systems, which can be costly.

The Corporation for Supportive Housing and Housing California are currently proposing that a \$10 million State General Fund allocation be provided to child welfare agencies in order to address homelessness. If approved, this funding source could be instrumental in San Mateo County implementing a program similar to FMF.

#### **Conclusion**

There is currently an active focus on homelessness in San Mateo County. The Board of Supervisors has expressed a prioritization of affordable housing, which is a preventative measure. The Human Services Agency Director is also interested in addressing homelessness in the county and has planned an upcoming executive team meeting regarding homelessness. The 2015 San Mateo County Homeless Census and Survey results will be released shortly, and there is a plan to later look at data regarding shared clients that are homeless and involved with child welfare. In addition, a former child welfare social worker was appointed as the program manager for the Center on Homelessness. A program manager in this position who is familiar with child welfare may further develop a bridge and better enhance services for shared clients. Counties as a whole are

moving out of silos in the age of Katie A. and other initiatives that emphasize a multi-disciplinary strategy to leverage resources and decrease the duplication of services. This momentum is an opportunity to consider implementing a program like Families Moving Forward.

*"It's always about timing. If it's too soon, no one understands. If it's too late, everyone's forgotten."* —Anna Wintour

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