

MEMORANDUM

To: Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness and Housing
From: HomeBase
Date: November 18, 2005
Re: Preventing and Ending Homelessness for Families – What’s New? – Part II

I. Family Homelessness

Introduction/Setting the Context

At our last meeting, we spent a short time reviewing a long memo on “Preventing and Ending Homelessness for Families – What’s New?” [The memo is on HomeBase’s website (www.homebaseccc.org) as part of the September, 2005, RSC meeting materials.] Folks at the September meeting said that they would like to revisit the topic at the November, 2005 RSC meeting.

The memo noted that nationally, once homeless families enter the homeless system of services and housing, their stay will be relatively brief. The majority (60%) of families that become homeless finds housing within six months and does not become homeless again.¹ For these families, homelessness has probably been preceded by an economic or domestic crisis that caused them to lose or leave their housing. However, in localities with few affordable housing units available and a weaker public support system, the search for inexpensive housing takes longer, and shelter and transitional housing provide a temporary place to stay while these families get their affairs in order. Not surprisingly, data also shows that the receipt of a housing subsidy greatly increases their chances of long term stability once they return to housing.²

There is, however, a group of families that remains homeless longer, or that becomes homeless repeatedly, even if the families have a housing subsidy. These families have preliminarily been described by Dr. Dennis Culhane at the University of Pennsylvania as exhibiting certain risk factors such as parent foster care history and previous experience of homelessness.³ They may also have characteristics that impede their ability to find housing, such as large family size (affordable apartments with more than three bedrooms are extremely scarce, necessitating longer stays in shelter). Such families may require a special set of housing and/or service supports.

¹ Burt, M. R., Aron, L. Y., Douglas, T., Valente, J., Lee, E., & Iwen, B. (1999). *Homelessness: programs and the people they serve. Findings of the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients. Technical report.* Washington, DC: U.S. Interagency Council on the Homeless. [Available online at: <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/homelessness.pdf>]

² Shinn, M., Weitzman, B. C., Stojanovic, D., Knickman, J. R., Jimenez, L., Duchon, L., James, S. & Krantz, D. H. (1998). Predictors of homelessness among families in New York City: from shelter request to housing stability. *American Journal of Public Health, 88*(11): 1651-1657; and Bassuk, E. L., Buckner, J. C., Weinreb, L. F., Browne, A., Bassuk, S. S., Dawson, R., & Perloff, J. N. (1997). Homelessness in female-headed families: families: childhood and adult risk and protective factors. *American Journal of Public Health, 87*(2): 241-248.

³ Culhane, D. (2004). *Family homelessness: Where to from here?* Presentation by Dr. Dennis Culhane, University of Pennsylvania Professor of Social Welfare Policy, delivered October 14, 2004 to the National Alliance to End Homelessness Conference on Ending Family Homelessness. [PowerPoint available online at <http://www.endhomelessness.org/back/FamilyHomelessness.pdf>]

We started identifying best practices in ending family homelessness, focusing on three issues:

1. **Prevention**, to avert homelessness and shelter stays that are costly to families and to the public. RSC members are well-versed in the services needed to prevent homelessness: financial assistance, case management, health care, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, domestic violence support, landlord-tenancy advocacy . . . but where will the money come from to really improve prevention outcomes? We profiled Minnesota's Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program which provides state funds, including TANF block grant dollars, that can be used innovatively by counties and community nonprofit organizations to help families remain in their homes, re-house those who become homeless and shorten the length of time families spend in shelters. Last year, the Illinois State Legislature established a Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program modeled after the Minnesota legislation. A profile of another practice with some promising results, New York's Homebase program, is attached.

2. **Mainstream system involvement**, with TANF, Public Housing Authorities and Child Welfare Agencies utilizing their resources to subsidize permanent housing and provide supports to assist their clients in maintaining permanent housing. The memo listed a number of specific things each of these agencies could do.

3. **Providing permanent housing through a Housing First approach**, and profiled some practices communities were using to secure housing units: With a metropolitan housing vacancy rate under 1%, county and contracting agencies in Hennepin County, Minnesota, are attempting to find innovative ways to seek and retain affordable housing. Such efforts to expand the supply of housing for very low income and homeless people include:

- ◆ Intervening to keep housing units affordable when housing developments for low-income people are sold to a new owner.
- ◆ Providing dedicated staff time to locating potential housing units and developing an on-going relationship with landlords and responsible landlord association groups in their area.
- ◆ Paying double security deposits for those with poor rental history.
- ◆ Providing landlords up front Unlawful Detainer/Eviction costs deposits so the landlord will not absorb all of the risk.
- ◆ Co-signing leases.
- ◆ Paying holding fees, a new fee to keep an apartment available while the landlord considers the application of the "troubled" tenant, sometimes refundable, sometimes not.
- ◆ Remaining responsive and committed to provide on-going case management intervention with the client and assist the landlord in resolving issues that places the client's housing in jeopardy.

We also looked at a Boston program which coordinated housing searches to avoid case managers replicating efforts in trying to secure units for their clients.

Today's Focus: San Francisco Mayor Newsom's plans to implement new efforts to help homeless families living in San Francisco

Since we last met, San Francisco Mayor Newsom announced a plan "to launch a broad homeless family system redesign that is supported by empirical data and research, by best practices from across the nation, and by our own critical examination of San Francisco's system."

The process for determining the redesign is that the San Francisco Human Services Agency will establish a working group of stakeholders to explore transforming the current emergency system for homeless families into a “Housing First” model. This will involve an examination of all funding for prevention, housing assistance, shelter, after care, supportive services and transitional housing to develop a comprehensive City-wide “Housing First” model for families.

The system will be reoriented as a largely proactive model: keeping people in housing and/or expediting the few that end up homeless back into housing. This will involve a large, “but not lengthy,” community discussion that should be coordinated with the new Local Homeless Board (the Continuum of Care’s “lead entity”].

As part of our ongoing look at ending family homelessness, we thought it might be interesting for the RSC to consider suggested elements of Mayor Newsom’s vision in light of RSC members’ own experiences and knowledge about what works. It is intended that this shared analysis be helpful to San Francisco stakeholders who will participate in San Francisco’s process, as well as to others in bringing refined ideas back to their own communities.

Overview of the Vision

The Mayor has identified the current homeless family system of care as being emergency driven and weighted too much toward applying support and resources once a family enters into crisis. This often results in the growth of high cost/short-term systems (e.g. emergency shelters, transitional housing) and a lack of focus on developing permanent solutions to family homelessness.

Mayor Newsom believes that many families can avoid the emergency services system if provided with eviction prevention assistance and rental housing subsidies while in their most recent place of residence prior to becoming homeless.

He says San Francisco needs to be mindful that permanent affordable housing targeted to very low income families must be a key element of the solution.

Planning Process Structure (The following is verbatim from the Mayor’s Press Release)

The planning process will be structured within the following framework:

As we look at each component, consider:

Is this a strategy which will meet the objective?

How should the strategy be refined for improvement?

What additional information needs to be garnered to assess the workability/success of the component?

Assessment Team: Properly Defining the Problem

The front end of the system should include an assessment team that is contacted by a family or social worker once their housing is in jeopardy. That team would conduct a site visit and determine the intervention necessary in order to keep the family stable and housed. Only in instances of domestic violence or other equally dire situations, would a family be assisted with

leaving housing and entering an emergency shelter.

Eviction Prevention, Move-In Assistance, and Rental Subsidies: Cost Effective Solutions to Most Family Homelessness

Current eviction prevention programs should be restructured so that they are more comprehensive and flexible in order to provide the assistance necessary to keep families housed indefinitely. That may include an ongoing rental subsidy in addition to the eviction prevention payment for months or years. These programs should also have the flexibility to provide move-in assistance for homeless families or when an eviction cannot be prevented.

Emergency Shelter: Only in Dire Emergency Situations or When Fleeing a Violent Household

The emergency shelter system should only be available to families as a last resort or dire emergency including fleeing a violent home situation. Families would be assisted with securing housing as quickly as possible, and services in the shelter would be geared accordingly.

Transitional Housing: Targeted to the Most Needy

Service enriched transitional housing programs should be reoriented as low-threshold programs for families with barriers: history of eviction, trauma, substance abuse, mental illness, etc. These resources would be limited to the few families that need a longer-term intervention prior to exit to permanent housing.

Permanent Housing: The Other Solution

Permanent affordable housing should be made available via direct referral for families exiting the homeless system of care. This would include housing under the purview of the Housing Authority, Redevelopment Agency and Mayor's Office of Housing. Focus of available housing should be on affordability and access as opposed to service levels.

II. TANF Reauthorization

Set to Expire December 31, 2005; Extension through March, 2006 Possible

The Senate voted September 29, 2005, to extend the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program for three months and provide funding for six months of medical assistance to families making the transition from welfare to work. Under current law (PL 109-68), the TANF program will expire Dec. 31. The bill, which would create the 12th extension of TANF, would continue the welfare program until March 31, 2006. The House has not yet voted.

New House Proposal

Meantime, the House included in its initially unsuccessful budget reconciliation plan language to reauthorize the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. Under the bill, the provisions in the TANF program would increase the number of hours families must be engaged in work to receive cash assistance and the proportion of

state caseloads that are fully meeting the work requirements, which analysts report will increase the burden on state child care budgets. The TANF provision would also limit access to rehabilitative services for parents with disabilities (including substance abuse and mental health disabilities) that rely on cash assistance. The House Republican leaders had to pull their budget reconciliation plan from the floor for the week because they didn't have the votes to pass.

However, a slightly modified version was introduced Wednesday.

The California Budget Project's brief on the House's TANF Reauthorization provisions is attached.

III. Next RSC Meeting

On the topic of family homelessness, what is of interest for our next RSC meeting?

For further information, please contact Karen Gruneisen, Managing Attorney, via email at karen@homebaseccc.org or by phone at 415-788-7961, ext. 311.