

Strategies to End Family Homelessness

MISSION STATEMENT

To prioritize families with children*, in the homeless services delivery system through the development of a Countywide plan using a “housing first” framework for:

- the development and implementation of affordable housing options, and
- an improved service delivery system for families who are homeless, formerly homeless, or at imminent risk of homelessness.

The plan will focus on strategies to:

- develop more short-term and permanent housing opportunities,
- improve the service delivery systems for families,
- help families and their children attain and maintain improved social, economic, educational, health, and mental health well-being,
- prevent future homelessness, and
- identify and respond to areas for legislative support.

*a family with children is defined as an adult or adults with a child or children under the age of 18 or a woman who is pregnant.

OVERVIEW

The Working Group on Homeless Families has identified a variety of both short-term and long-term strategies to end family homelessness in Los Angeles County within the next ten years. Working Group members have many years of experience in the field and have pooled that experience to help develop a framework for future activity that both builds upon existing systems and funding sources and also improves those systems through new funding, re-allocation of existing funding, and the development of new programs. Additionally, great effort was made to identify “gaps” in the service delivery system – including within mainstream programs that impact the lives of families who are homeless, formerly homeless and at-risk of imminent homelessness, including pregnant women.

Many of the strategies are proposed within a “housing first” context, an approach to ending homelessness that was pioneered in Los Angeles in 1988. Within a “housing first” context, the focus is upon getting families very quickly back into permanent housing and linking them with appropriate mainstream services - reducing their homelessness to an absolute minimum. Additionally, the Working Group is promoting the U.S. Department of Education’s inclusive definition of homeless families.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness recommends a “housing first” approach for most homeless families. The components of such a plan are:

- Housing relocation services: to clear barriers such as poor tenant history, poor credit history, etc.; identify landlords; negotiate with landlords; etc.
- Case management services: to ensure families are receiving public benefits; to identify service needs; to connect tenants with community-based services.
- Follow-Up: To work with tenants after they are in housing to avert crises that threaten housing stability and to problem-solve.

During the time period that the Working Group on Homeless Families was developing its goals and strategies, the Shelter Partnership surveyed all of the emergency shelter and transitional housing agencies serving families in Los Angeles County (June 2005). (Domestic violence programs were not surveyed.) The preliminary findings of the survey informed this plan’s recommendations. Some of the key preliminary findings include:

- Respondents provide a total of 2,423 beds for family members on any given night. These programs are able to serve a total of 817 families at one time. This capacity is insufficient to adequately house Los Angeles’ homeless family population – eighty-five percent (85%) of the programs reported that they regularly turn away families due to a lack of available beds.

- One-third (33%) of the families became homeless as a direct result of an eviction. Another 22% became homeless after being asked to leave by friends or family.
- Nearly half (46%) of the families in emergency shelters lived in a hotel/motel immediately prior to entering the program. One-third (33%) of families in transitional housing lived with friends or relatives before entering the program.
- Emergency shelter and transitional housing programs reported that almost one-half (48%) of heads of the household clients have a substance use disorder, a mental illness, or co-occurring disorders.

In surveying the 80 school districts in Los Angeles County, we find that they have enrolled and served approximately 25,000 homeless students. Of this number, only 1,016 were residing in shelters and therefore the remaining were missed in the County count. Approximately 12,000 students are part of families identified as living doubled up, 1,112 were in hotels or motels, and where an additional 9,145 students slept was not known. Parents will do everything possible to keep their children safe and off the streets. It is clear to us that unless the U.S. Department of Education definition of who is homeless is used, we miss being able to count and appropriately serve a critical part of our population. Also critical is that case management looks at each individual member of the family. If we truly are going to break the cycle of homelessness, we must assure that school age children are enrolled in school, younger children are in pre-school programs and parents are in appropriate education or job training programs

The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, otherwise known in California as the CalWORKs program, provides needy families with time limited cash assistance and employment services, as well as specialized and nonspecialized supportive services. Generally, CalWORKs eligible families also qualify for Food Stamps and Medi-Cal assistance. Homeless assistance is also available to CalWORKs families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Although existing CalWORKs homeless assistance programs/services provide certain safeguards, there are opportunities to more effectively intervene and address factors contributing to homelessness, particularly among CalWORKs families. Much more should be done at a State level to better align and strengthen existing state and local programs and service delivery processes that impact families at risk of homelessness. To that end, this proposal includes strategies to enhance the CalWORKs Homeless and Housing Assistance program by closing gaps in current law. Additionally, changes in State law will enable CalWORKs families to attain stabilization that will lead to increased income and improved economic well-being.

While family homelessness is often the result of interwoven systemic and personal problems, the primary cause of homelessness among families is the growing gap between housing costs and income. The emergency shelter system is able to accommodate only a small fraction of the growing number of homeless families in need. Families are forced to live in their cars, in garages, in other places unfit for human habitation or to move from place to place with their children, staying intermittently with friends and families. Even a short period of homelessness can lead to depression, mental illness and child neglect, yet increasing numbers of families are homeless for months and sometimes years at a time.

The goals and accompanying strategies presented here are intended to recognize and respond to the social and cultural reality and needs of homeless families. As such, they are meant to provide pathways to real, workable solutions that will help to alleviate family homelessness in Los Angeles County over the next decade.

MAJOR GOALS AND STRATEGIES

GOAL 1: DEFINITIONS OF HOMELESSNESS

Standardize definitions of family homelessness to meet the needs of all families who do not have a permanent place to live.

RATIONALE

Federal and county definitions of homeless families categorize some families at the expense of others. Such inclusion, or exclusion, determines eligibility for services. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) definition of homelessness is too narrow in its scope, and those who do not fall within HUD's guidelines are ineligible for services. That definition excludes the thousands of families across the country who occupy temporary living situations, including often substandard motels, hotels, and privately operated "pay shelters." A recent survey of all of the emergency shelter and transitional housing agencies serving families in Los Angeles County revealed that motel/hotel occupancy and "doubling up" are common among homeless families; nearly half (46%) of the families in emergency shelters lived in a hotel/motel immediately prior to entering the program; and one-third (33%) of families in transitional housing lived temporarily with friends or relatives before entering the program. As the Child Welfare League of America states, while being on the streets or in a shelter may gain a family eligibility for HUD programs, such existence threatens the stability of the family and undermines its ability to remain intact (Child Welfare League of America, *Keeping Families Together and Safe: A Primer on the Child Protection – Housing Connection*, 2005). Many homeless parents avoid shelters because they do not want to be separated from older children, particularly male youth; in some situations, they feel threatened with the possible removal of all children in the family by child welfare intervention services.

HUD's definition, and most other definitions, of the chronically homeless also create problems for homeless families. Based on this definition, families cannot be chronically homeless. The chronically homeless are defined exclusively as unaccompanied individuals with disabilities who have been homeless for 12 consecutive months or who have experienced four episodes of homelessness in the last 3 years. These individuals must also be living in a place not meant for human habitation or in a shelter; "couch surfing" and hotel/motel occupancy are entirely ignored by this definition.

STRATEGIES

1. For the County of Los Angeles and all 88 cities within the County, adopt the definition of homeless families from the US Department of Education's homeless definition.
2. For the County of Los Angeles and all 88 cities within the County, adopt a new definition for chronically homeless families that differentiates families from chronically homeless individuals.
3. For the County of Los Angeles and all 88 cities within the County, expand the definition of homelessness within CalWORKs to include families at imminent risk of eviction so that homeless assistance is available to that population, as well.
4. For the County of Los Angeles and all 88 cities within the County, expand the definition of families to include those individuals with full custody of children transitioning from the jail system.

GOAL 2: LEGISLATION/LEGISLATIVE

Develop, expand, and support legislation that would prevent or end family homelessness.

RATIONALE

The devolution of welfare policy and responsibility forces state and local jurisdictions to creatively construct policy responses in order to serve the needs of homeless and at-risk homeless families. Currently, welfare-to-work initiatives for homeless families are hindered by those families' lack of access to safe, decent, and affordable permanent housing. Without stable housing, the ability of these parents to participate in mandatory work activities and to increase family income is severely diminished. The gap between family income and housing costs is a structural barrier to family well-being and self-sufficiency. In Los Angeles County, the Maximum Aid Payment for a family of four is \$897, while the Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$1,149. Without policy changes that focus on increasing homeless families' access to permanent housing, Los Angeles County will struggle to meet toughening work participation requirements and the number of homeless families will increase.

STRATEGIES

1. At the state and local level, including the 88 cities within the County, integrate the "housing first" methodology into the homeless service delivery system, to promote early relocation of homeless families into permanent housing, shortening the time they spend in homelessness (rapid re-housing).
2. At the local level, protect and expand the Section 8 program in the County of Los Angeles, including the 88 cities within the County.
3. At the state and local level, including the 88 cities within the County, develop and prioritize new housing voucher programs utilizing TANF maintenance of effort (MOE) funds, General Funds, HOME

- Funds, CDBG Funds, and other sources of funding, including the reallocation of existing funding.
4. At the state level, allow Counties to use CalWORKs single Allocation funding to provide rental subsidies to CalWORKs families who have also received CalWORKs Permanent Housing Assistance.
 5. At the state level, increase CalWORKs Temporary Shelter Assistance from \$40 per night for a family of four plus \$10 per additional person up to a maximum of \$80 per night, to \$65 per night for a family of four and \$15 for each additional person, up to a total of \$125 per night.
 6. At the state level, raise the eligibility threshold and payment level for CalWORKs Permanent Housing Assistance by amending current State law from 80% of Maximum Aid Payment (MAP) to 80% of total household income. Since many more CalWORKs families are employed today than prior to welfare reform, the total income for many CalWORKs families is greater than MAP. Therefore, it is more appropriate to tie the maximum rent to total income, rather than to MAP.
 7. Revise the definition of "homeless" in State law to include families who have received an eviction notice or three-day notice to pay or quit because of nonpayment of rent due to a verified financial hardship, such as, the loss of a job or sudden illness in the family, and demonstrate that they are experiencing a financial crisis that would result in homelessness if homeless assistance is not provided.
 8. At the state level, increase TANF benefits by at least 5% annually each year for the next five years, to better reflect Fair Market Rents for housing statewide.
 9. At the state level, evaluate and protect the TANF Maintenance of Efforts (MOE) funds to ensure priority application to programs serving CalWORKs eligible homeless families, including rental subsidies.
 10. At the state level, preserve and expand the CalWORKs housing assistance programs.
 11. At the state and local level, including the 88 cities within the County, develop eviction and prevention programs for homeless families, including families in CalWORKs.
 12. At the state and local level, support legislation that increases the availability of affordable housing units to homeless families.
 13. At the state and local level, ensure that all new housing developments include a percentage of affordable housing prioritized for homeless families within Los Angeles County and its 88 cities.
 14. Develop and ensure the implementation of a "fair share" approach for the development and delivery of resources countywide to homeless families, formerly homeless families, and families at imminent risk of homelessness, including the participation of the 88 cities within the County.
 15. At the state and local level, require all public and private programs that receive government funding to have an appropriate short-term and/or permanent housing discharge plan for families

and pregnant women.

GOAL 3: COORDINATION

Improve the service delivery system for homeless families through service integration and better coordination and access to appropriate resources, services, education, and housing (including temporary and permanent housing).

RATIONALE

The multiple needs of homeless families necessitate service integration and improved coordination both within the homeless services delivery system and also between that system and related systems. However, the human services delivery system in Los Angeles County can be best characterized as fragmented. Because public and private agencies do not coordinate their services, families are often cycled from one provider to another, for months and sometimes years at a time, with some homeless families eventually becoming chronically homeless. The relationship between family homelessness and various issues, including domestic violence, child welfare, TANF assistance, health and mental health problems, and substance use, requires the coordination of the homeless services delivery system with related systems. Helping homeless families to access a full array of appropriate services and resources that are responsive to their needs will help to decrease the incidence and duration of family homelessness in Los Angeles County.

STRATEGIES

1. Integrate the “housing first” (rapid re-housing) methodology into the homeless services system, to promote early relocation of homeless families into permanent housing, shortening the time they spend homeless.
2. Develop strategies for County health and human services departments and community-based organizations to ensure that comprehensive and appropriate services are delivered to homeless families, formerly homeless families, and families at imminent risk of homelessness.
3. Reconvene the Los Angeles Countywide Coordinating Council for Homeless Families in order to address challenges, problem-solve, and help to fill gaps in services for families, children, and youth. This would be a non-governmental entity comprised of representatives of government agencies and/or health and human services departments, educational entities and regional and/or countywide nonprofit agencies with programs serving homeless families, children and youth.
4. Establish CARE Centers for Homeless Families (Comprehensive Assessment, Referral, and Engagement), at least one in each service planning area (SPA), as a point of contact (triage) to ensure that appropriate and comprehensive services based on a “housing first” approach are delivered to homeless families, formerly homeless families, and families at imminent risk of homelessness (could be within existing homeless access centers).

5. Develop a centralized system, in collaboration with CARE Centers for Homeless Families, with service coordinators who track, monitor and facilitate seamless and coordinated delivery of appropriate services to homeless families, formerly homeless families, and families at imminent risk of homelessness. This case management could be provided by either community-based or government agencies, or where it does not exist, by the local CARE Center itself.
6. Create funding for and expand substantially the number of “Homeless Liaisons” in each public school district within Los Angeles County to ensure that children and youth are attending school and families are linked to appropriate services.
7. Increase and ensure the continued funding of designated “Homeless Case Managers” at each Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) CalWORKs office to facilitate the delivery of appropriate services and resources to homeless families.
8. Hire a specialist on family homelessness within the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA).
9. Hire a specialist on family homelessness within the Chief Administrative Office of Los Angeles County and within the Mayor’s Office of the City of Los Angeles to represent the 88 cities of the County.
10. Establish a Homeless Unit within Los Angeles County to support the Homeless Coordinators from each County health and human services department and oversee their interdepartmental efforts.
11. Improve the integration and coordination of the domestic violence services delivery system and the homeless services delivery system.
12. Improve the integration and coordination of the substance abuse rehabilitation services delivery system and the homeless services delivery system.
13. Improve the integration and coordination of the Los Angeles County DCFS and other child welfare services delivery systems and the homeless services delivery system.
14. Improve the integration and coordination of the Los Angeles County DPSS services delivery systems and the homeless services delivery system.
15. Improve the integration and coordination of the Los Angeles County DMH services delivery systems and the homeless services delivery system.
16. Improve the integration and coordination of the Los Angeles County DHS services delivery systems and the homeless services delivery system.
17. Improve the integration and coordination of the criminal justice services delivery system and the homeless services delivery system.

GOAL 4: OUTREACH

Develop early intervention strategies to prevent and end family homelessness.

RATIONALE

In L.A. County, the majority of homeless families do not reside at shelters or within transitional living programs, owing to their preference for alternative accommodations and to the lack of shelter and transitional beds. The majority of families “double up” with friends or relatives or stay in substandard, unsafe hotels/motels and “pay shelters.” Recent findings (June 2005) from a survey of all of the emergency shelter and transitional housing agencies serving families in Los Angeles County (excluding domestic violence shelters) reveal that the supply of beds is woefully inadequate to meet current demand. Respondents provide a total of 2,423 beds for family members on any given night, which translates into service availability for a maximum of only 817 families at one time; eighty-five percent (85%) of the programs report that they regularly turn away families due to a lack of available beds. Living in unstable and often unsafe environments, including shelters and hotels/motels, poses serious health and developmental risks for families, and children and youth in particular. Due to housing disruptions and exposure to environmental risk factors, including drugs and alcohol, homeless children are at heightened risk for developmental delays, behavioral problems, and poor health.

STRATEGIES

1. Develop protocols and strategies to facilitate early identification of families who are homeless and/or at imminent risk of homelessness (including pregnant women) and provide appropriate services and referrals.
2. Enforce local and County building and safety codes in “pay shelters” and substandard motels/hotels utilized by homeless families, including families living in vehicles, on the streets, and other places not meant for human habitation.
3. Identify, intervene, and coordinate the relocation of homeless families from unsafe and unsanitary temporary housing, including “pay shelters”, substandard motels/hotels, vehicles, the streets, and other places not mean for human habitation, to appropriate short-term housing or permanent housing.
4. Develop protocols and strategies to immediately screen, assess, and provide for the needs of children and youth in homeless families identified through outreach efforts.
5. Develop guidelines within government-funded programs to prevent placement of homeless families into substandard motels/hotels and unsafe and unsanitary “pay shelters” by nonprofit and government service providers.

GOAL 5: CASE MANAGEMENT AND STABILIZATION

Ensure that all families who are homeless, formerly homeless, or at imminent risk of homelessness are provided timely and appropriate case management and support leading to stabilization in permanent housing.

RATIONALE

The income, mental health, interpersonal, and other housing barriers of homeless families and those at risk of homelessness clash with a fragmented homeless services delivery system. Vulnerable families in need of help face the unenviable task of navigating the maze of services and organizations that comprise this delivery system. They also face the daunting task of navigating between this and other systems, including child welfare, mental health, and criminal justice. These families should not have to face these challenges alone. Case managers, acting as “systems navigators”, are needed to facilitate access to supportive services for these families. Families need case management not only prior to searching for housing and but also after they have found and moved into permanent housing. Stabilizing in housing is aided by case management services of varying duration and level, depending on the needs of individual families. The intensive, short-term (6-12 months) case management provided by housing first programs after a family moves into permanent housing has proven to be a critical component that helps formerly homeless families to maintain housing stability. For example, in one study of 200 families who participated in Beyond Shelter’s Housing First Program, almost 90% of the families had maintained residential stability two to seven years after they had graduated from the program.

STRATEGIES

1. For families at imminent risk of homelessness with low, moderate, or intensive service needs, develop funding and protocols for short-term case management support services through CARE Centers for Homeless Families (Comprehensive Assessment, Referral, and Engagement) and/or other homeless resources, to prevent them from becoming homeless.
2. For homeless families, develop funding and protocols ensuring short-term or long-term case management support through CARE Centers for Homeless Families and/or other social service delivery systems.
3. For newly housed families (formerly homeless) with low or moderate intensity service needs, develop funding and strategies to facilitate six months or more of case management support to promote stabilization in permanent housing and prevent recidivism.
4. For newly housed families (formerly homeless) with high intensity service needs, develop funding and strategies to facilitate at least one year of case management support to promote stabilization and prevent recidivism.

5. Identify new funding and/or reallocate existing funding to enable service providers to provide short-term case management to newly housed families in order to promote stabilization and prevent recidivism.
6. Case management provided to families who are homeless, formerly homeless, or at imminent risk of homelessness should also include school-enrollment for children 6-18 years of age and preschool programs. for younger children.

GOAL 6: PREVENTION

Reduce the number of families becoming homeless through early identification and appropriate intervention and response.

RATIONALE

The exorbitant cost of housing is putting more and more families in Los Angeles County at imminent risk of homelessness. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition's report Out of Reach, 2005, a minimum wage earner in the county can afford to pay no more than \$351 in monthly rent. That earner must work an astounding 135 hours per week in order to afford a two-bedroom unit at Fair Market Rent (FMR) (i.e., \$1,189). For CalWORKs families, these rents are literally out of reach: the Maximum Aid Payment for a family of four in the county is \$897. That payment won't even cover the FMR (\$952) for a one-bedroom unit. Two-bedroom units are even further out of reach for CalWORKs and other low-income families. A full-time worker must earn \$22.87 an hour in order to afford a two-bedroom unit at the area's Fair Market Rent. Most families who are at risk of homelessness and those who are striving to exit homelessness do not and/or will not earn this type of income. Due primarily to the lack of affordable housing and the emphasis of the economy on low-wage service sector work, the numbers of low-income families at risk of homelessness are going to increase. Without more programs to prevent eviction, many of these families will be priced out of the housing market and will find themselves homeless.

STRATEGIES

1. Increase access to and create new sources of funding for eviction prevention programs, including the development of new programs and higher income limits for homeless CalWORKs families.
2. Develop an eviction prevention program for CalWORKs families at imminent risk of homelessness.
3. Develop protocols in Los Angeles County, including the 88 cities within the County, to ensure that health and human services agencies, schools and community-based agencies or organizations identify and implement appropriate intervention strategies for families at imminent risk of homelessness, including referrals to CARE Centers for Homeless Families (Comprehensive

Assessment, Referral, and Engagement).

4. Ensure that families at imminent risk of homelessness are referred to CARE Centers for Homeless Families for appropriate assistance, including rent-to-prevent eviction, legal advocacy, and other appropriate services to prevent them from becoming homeless.
5. Develop funding and protocols that facilitate the provision of case management support for newly housed (formerly homeless) families with low, moderate or high intensity service needs, including families identified as chronically homeless, to promote stabilization in permanent housing and prevent recidivism.

GOAL 7: SHORT-TERM HOUSING

Identify and increase the availability of short-term housing options countywide to complement the existing emergency shelter system.

RATIONALE

The current homeless services system primarily funded through the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development tends to keep families in emergency and temporary housing for extended periods of time. Due to the fact that homeless families have many barriers to attaining permanent housing, including poor credit, lack of employment, and the lack of affordable housing in Los Angeles County, many families cycle from emergency shelter to emergency shelter for months and often years at a time. Additionally, many families are forced to seek assistance from emergency shelter providers great distances from their former neighborhoods, which include children's schools of origin and other vital support systems. In so doing, these families are forced to leave behind natural supports (e.g., friends, family) and community ties (e.g., schools, jobs, places of religious worship) that can assist them in their return to social and economic stability.

Even when shelter beds are available, not all families have equal access to those beds. Shelter rules promote preferential admission practices. In particular, families with teenage boys are left with two options: split up, with the boy going elsewhere, or find alternative sleeping accommodations. Pregnant women and women with newborn babies are routinely denied entrance into emergency shelters and transitional housing. As a result, both the health and safety of parents and that of their unborn babies and newborn infants are jeopardized. In addition, families with high intensity service needs are routinely terminated from emergency shelter before

being assisted into permanent housing or referred into “housing first” programs. One of the primary reasons homeless families are evicted from short-term/emergency shelter is for non-compliance with inflexible and sometimes impractical rules. While rules may be a necessary component of any program, the rigidity of such rules severely limits the opportunities of many homeless families to eventually move out of homelessness and into permanent housing. This includes families who have experienced multiple episodes of homelessness and/or long-term homelessness; families in which the head-of-household is abusing drugs; and families in which the head-of-household has undiagnosed or untreated psychiatric disabilities.

STRATEGIES

1. Develop countywide protocols and strategies to enable homeless families to receive homeless services within their home communities.
2. Implement a coordinated and comprehensive system of “scattered site” emergency shelter/short-term housing throughout Los Angeles County through the utilization of voucher funding and the “master-leasing” of furnished apartments and extended stay hotel/motel units.
3. Within a “housing first” context, institute rapid re-housing protocols and procedures countywide within existing continuums of care, including strategies to encourage early relocation from short-term housing into permanent housing.
4. Develop protocols and strategies in emergency shelters, “scattered site” motel/hotel rooms utilized as emergency shelter, and apartments that are “master-leased” as short-term housing, to allow male youth over age 12 to remain with their families.
5. Develop protocols and strategies that provide high tolerance and low barrier short-term housing/emergency shelter countywide with flexible entrance requirements for families with special needs/barriers.
6. Develop protocols and strategies that enable pregnant women within 90 days of delivery to access appropriate short-term housing (such as extended day motels/hotels and furnished apartments that are “master-leased”), including for 90 days after giving birth.

GOAL 8: TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

Improve the existing transitional housing system countywide to promote and integrate the “housing first” methodology in order to move homeless families into permanent housing as quickly as possible.

RATIONALE

Due to high intensity service needs and greater housing barriers, some families need and benefit from the sequenced, not necessarily linear, progression from emergency shelter to transitional housing to permanent housing; this population most often includes families in which the head-of-household is “in recovery” from substance abuse and families in which the head-of-household is a victim of domestic violence. For the majority of homeless families, however, long stays in transitional housing are not indicated by their needs, nor should they be encouraged by inflexible contractual guidelines. There is no research that indicates that the longer a family receives support services prior to being housed, the more stable they will be once housed. Rapid re-housing is the more appropriate option for most homeless families, particularly those whose service needs range from low to moderate; however, studies have shown that homeless families with high intensity service needs are often more responsive to interventions and support once assisted in relocating to permanent, affordable housing in the community. Additionally, such an approach typically is more cost effective, according to the National Alliance to End Homelessness. A responsive, family-centered service and housing delivery system, therefore, should use transitional housing on a case-by-case basis as determined by the needs of each family who is experiencing homelessness.

STRATEGIES

1. Within a “housing first” context, develop protocols and strategies to ensure that homeless families with low and moderate intensity service needs are assisted in relocating from transitional housing to permanent housing as quickly as possible.
2. Within a “housing first” context, implement protocols that enable existing transitional housing programs to modify their contracts with LAHSA/HUD to shorten the length of stay for families with low and moderate intensity service needs in order to relocate them to permanent housing as quickly as possible.
3. Develop strategies that increase the availability of transitional housing options countywide in order to target temporary housing within their home communities for families with the greatest housing barriers.
4. Target transitional housing programs/units to families with the greatest housing barriers, including families who have timed off TANF, TANF-sanctioned, families with TANF-eligible children only, undocumented families, or families with high intensity service needs.

5. Develop protocols to enable some families to remain in “scattered site” transitional units after the “short-term” and/or transitional period terminates, through conversion of the units to subsidized or unsubsidized permanent housing (including the provision of short-term rental subsidies).

GOAL 9: PERMANENT HOUSING

Within a “housing first” context, improve and expedite the relocation of homeless families to safe, decent, and affordable permanent housing in residential neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles County.

RATIONALE

Homeless families are at a competitive disadvantage in the rental housing market. In addition to competing with the working poor for affordable units, they face major systemic and personal barriers to moving into permanent housing, including eviction histories and credit problems. According to a national survey of homeless assistance providers and clients, only 20% of families report that they receive help finding housing (*Housing and Homelessness*, National Alliance to End Homeless, 1987. *Homelessness: Programs and People They Serve. Findings of the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients. Highlights*. Interagency Council on the Homeless, December, 1999). Without assistance, it is extremely difficult for families to access the move-in funds and housing subsidies that facilitate moving back into permanent housing. Without assistance, many homeless families are unable to overcome discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, income source, and family composition. Exacerbating the problem for many families, public and private solutions to homelessness have historically focused on providing homeless families with emergency shelter and/or transitional housing, which alone neither end homelessness nor prevent a recurrence of homelessness for a significant segment of the homeless population.

STRATEGIES

1. Modify continuum of care priorities and contracts to expedite the movement of homeless families into permanent housing as quickly as possible, preferably in residential neighborhoods countywide.
2. Develop funding and protocols that facilitate the relocation of homeless families into permanent housing, including funding for “housing specialists” to help homeless families overcome barriers to attaining permanent, affordable housing.
3. Develop funding and strategies to support the hiring of (or contracting with) Housing Specialists, at a minimum one within each of the eight Service Planning Areas (SPAs).
4. Create (or contract for) a countywide Housing Resources and Relocation Program integrated and coordinated with CARE Centers for Homeless Families (Comprehensive Assessment, Referral, and Engagement), to be utilized by public and private agencies throughout Los Angeles County.

5. Develop protocols and strategies that provide access to housing relocation services for families served by CARE Centers for Homeless Families.
6. Identify or develop new funding for Housing Specialists within the continuum of care to assist families in identifying appropriate rental housing, accessing rental subsidies and move-in funds, negotiating leases, and overcoming barriers to housing associated with bad credit, eviction histories, unemployment, etc.
7. Develop collaborative efforts, including landlord incentives, with property owners/management companies who agree to lease to homeless families with housing barriers.

GOAL 10: HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Develop funding and strategies to improve access to affordable housing throughout Los Angeles County for homeless families and families at imminent risk of homelessness.

RATIONALE

The disproportionately high cost of housing and the steady loss of affordable stock have led to a housing crisis in Los Angeles County. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition's annual report, *Out of Reach*, 2005, to afford a two-bedroom apartment at the county's Fair Market Rate of \$1,189, a parent would have to earn \$22.87 an hour, or \$47,560 per year. According to the September 2004 Draft of the Bring LA Home! Plan, between 2002 and 2006, the City of Los Angeles reported risking the loss of 2,400 rental units per year. The average income of residents in those households is \$10,000 per year. For the county as a whole, between 1996 and 2003 over 9,000 units were converted to market rates. Over the next seven years, over 40,000 units are in projects that will be eligible to exit the subsidy program.

Homeless families in Los Angeles are overwhelmingly comprised of single female-headed households, primarily dependent upon TANF and Food Stamps, either partially or wholly. The average TANF grant for a family of three (parent and two children) is \$750. Many homeless families, however, have an average grant of \$568 for a family of three, due to sanctions imposed for noncompliance with the GAIN program. Additionally, over the past two years there has been an increase in families who have reached their five-year time limits for TANF; in many such families, the adult remains unemployed and without income, while the children receive some support. It is not unusual to find homeless families in shelters and on the streets with monthly TANF grants of \$300. At the same time, research has demonstrated that access to rental subsidies promotes stability for homeless families and families at risk of homelessness, and that housing stability then enables them to more successfully participate in welfare-to-work initiatives and to obtain and maintain employment. Additionally, studies have shown that access to a "rental subsidy" or other form of affordable housing has been the primary means for families to exit homelessness successfully.

STRATEGIES

1. Expand existing and identify new sources of funding for both short-term and long-term rental subsidy programs for homeless families.
2. Protect and expand the Section 8 programs of the County, the City of Los Angeles, and the other cities within the County.
3. Develop set-asides for homeless families and ensure priority access to Section 8 rental subsidies from housing authorities throughout Los Angeles County.
4. Prioritize homeless families on waiting lists for project-based Section 8 projects and for all assisted-housing projects.
5. Identify, increase and improve utilization of Family Unification Program (FUP) Vouchers throughout Los Angeles County.
6. Implement protocols that ensure that the Housing Authorities of the City and County of Los Angeles and all housing authorities within the County of Los Angeles apply for and proactively utilize rental subsidies through the Family Unification Program Housing Choice Vouchers (FUP) program, which prioritizes families who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness in which "children are 'at risk' of foster care placement due primarily to a lack of adequate housing, and families of children currently in out-of-home care whose family reunification is prevented due to a lack of adequate housing."
7. Create protocols and incentives for developers to set aside a percentage of new units for homeless families.
8. Promote and facilitate the development of more affordable housing for families throughout Los Angeles County.
9. Enforce "fair housing" laws to end discrimination against homeless families.
10. Promote implementation of Self Sufficiency programs for families with Section 8 certificates and vouchers by Housing Authorities in the County of Los Angeles.

GOAL 11: SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Increase the availability of treatment programs and short-term and permanent housing options linked to treatment programs for families affected by alcohol and drug abuse and/or co-occurring disorders.

RATIONALE

According to 2002 client data from the Department of Public Social Services, parents of homeless families on CalWORKs reported substance abuse, domestic violence or mental health problems

three times more often than their housed counterparts (“Homeless in LA: A Working Paper for the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Los Angeles County, November 2003). Despite the high incidence of substance abuse and mental health problems among the population of homeless families, there is an insufficient number of treatment programs for these families, including ones linked to short-term and permanent housing. Homelessness, housing instability, and substance abuse jeopardize family and child well-being. These factors are strong determinants not only of child welfare system involvement but also of system retention. Typically, treatment compliance and housing stability are requirements for reunification for homeless families. Therefore, increasing the availability of treatment programs and short-term and permanent housing options linked to such programs is a vital step towards addressing parental substance abuse and/or mental health issues, preventing prolonged periods of homelessness, reducing foster care spells, and protecting child safety and well-being.

STRATEGIES

1. Develop short-term and permanent housing options, in which “harm reduction” policies enable families affected by alcohol and drug abuse to move in, with a focus on “master-leasing.”
2. Within the “harm reduction” model, develop formal/informal linkages with outpatient treatment programs for heads-of-household who are currently abusing substances and living in short-term and/or transitional housing.
3. Improve access to detoxification programs and residential substance abuse treatment programs for parents with or without children in their custody.
4. Convert some existing transitional housing facilities to substance abuse treatment facilities for homeless pregnant women and families.
5. Develop short-term and permanent housing options through the “master leasing” of furnished apartments, for homeless families in which the heads-of-household is participating in outpatient detoxification and treatment programs.

GOAL 12: UNDOCUMENTED FAMILIES

Increase the availability of short-term and permanent housing options for undocumented families within the homeless services delivery system.

RATIONALE

Undocumented families comprise a small yet significant proportion of the homeless population. Even though estimates are not available, their numbers certainly are growing as the gap between housing costs and family income continues to increase. This is true particularly in Los Angeles County due to the reliance of the regional formal and informal economies on low-wage immigrant

labor, documented or otherwise, and the lack of affordable rental housing. In the informal economy alone, according to a recent report (2005) from the Economic Roundtable, undocumented immigrants make up 61% percent (ie, 395,000 workers) of the labor force in the county and 65% (ie, 187,000) of the labor force in the City of Los Angeles. In addition, many families in which the head of household is unemployed or underemployed also receive TANF assistance for their children who were born in the United States. However, the total combined income for many families is still far below the cost of rental housing in Los Angeles County. Even though their housing and service needs are great, the continuum of care and mainstream systems typically overlook, neglect, and/or exclude these families.

STRATEGIES

1. Develop a planning and implementation group to address and develop appropriate housing and social services programs for undocumented homeless families within the homeless services delivery system.
2. Develop short-term rental subsidy programs for undocumented families who are ineligible for publicly funded housing subsidies.
3. For families with TANF-eligible children, develop and implement programs to include community-based organizations and other private organizations to provide supplemental income and other income to allow placing of undocumented families into temporary/permanent housing.

GOAL 13: EX-OFFENDERS

Increase the availability of short-term and permanent housing options for families with ex-offenders within the homeless services delivery system.

RATIONALE

Studies have demonstrated a relationship between incarceration and shelter use, as well as homelessness and re-incarceration. Additionally, formerly incarcerated parents are unable to reunite with their children in foster care, without safe, decent, and affordable permanent housing. Unfortunately, due to their criminal records and to the high cost of rental housing, ex-offenders are at a competitive disadvantage in the County's fierce housing market in comparison with more qualified renters who possess cleaner records, better credit, and more positive rental history. Specifically, strict regulatory guidelines, such as HUD's "One Strike and You're Out" policy, limit the accessibility and availability of public or federally-assisted housing for ex-offenders and their families. These barriers to accessing permanent housing often create barriers to family reunification and efforts of the ex-offender to stabilize in the community. In order to curb criminal recidivism, to promote family reunification, and to properly meet the resource, services, and housing needs of families with ex-offenders, the homeless delivery services system needs to proactively develop

programs as well as short-term and permanent housing resources for these families.

STRATEGIES

1. Develop a planning and implementation group to address and develop programs for families with ex-offenders within the homeless services delivery system.
2. Improve access to Section 8 vouchers for families in which the head-of-household has been discharged from prison and requires permanent, affordable housing in order to reunify with children.
3. Develop and ensure the implementation of a “fair share” approach for the development and delivery of resources countywide to ex-offenders.

GOAL 14: INCOME

Identify and develop strategies to ensure benefits and increase income for families who are homeless, formerly homeless, and at imminent risk of homelessness.

RATIONALE

Homeless families in Los Angeles are overwhelmingly comprised of single female-headed households, primarily dependent upon TANF and Food Stamps, either partially or wholly. According to a May 2005 report from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services, about 7% or 13,000 CalWORKs cases met criteria for homelessness; these numbers totaled approximately 42,800 persons. Another 12% or 21,400 CalWORKs cases were at risk of homelessness. Insufficient total income, including cash aid and earned income, makes it very difficult for currently homeless CalWORKs families to find housing and places thousands of CalWORKs families who are not homeless at risk of homelessness.

The average TANF grant for a family of three (parent and two children) is \$750. Many families, however, have an average grant of \$568 for a family of three, due to sanctions imposed for noncompliance with the GAIN program. CalWORKs sanctions negatively impact homeless families' ability to move into permanent housing and non-homeless families' ability to remain stably housed. Additionally, over the past two years there has been an increase in families who have reached their five-year time limits for TANF; in many such families, the adult remains unemployed and without income, while the children receive some support. Without stable benefits and increased income, CalWORKs families become and/or remain homeless, which compromises their ability to successfully participate in welfare-to-work initiatives and to obtain and maintain employment.

STRATEGIES

1. Based on CalWORKs sanction study findings, work with DPSS to develop strategies to reduce the number of sanctioned CalWORKs participants.
2. Develop greater integration between DPSS and the Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) to work together in identifying and developing skills training programs for CalWORKs and GR participants.
3. Identify and develop new funding streams for community-based employment programs targeting adults in families who are homeless, formerly homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness.