

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TEAM

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CREATING PREVENTION AND DIVERSION PROGRAMS

Recommended Action:

Data from communities throughout the country shows that many people entering the homeless system of care come from unstably housed situations. This is especially prevalent among families with children. Sacramento's Continuum of Care reports that 41% of families entering shelters were not literally homeless but unstably housed prior to entering a homeless family shelter.

We seek the creation of a program to specifically target households before they enter the homeless system of care, with the goal of helping the household to retain their current housing or find alternative housing and prevent them from becoming homeless.

Background:

In order to "right size" a homeless system of care, communities must consider the needs of those currently experiencing homelessness as well as those who may become homeless in the future. A goal of a well-functioning homeless system should be to create systems and processes to keep people *out* of the homeless system altogether. Once a person or family enters the homeless system of care, he or she is more likely to return and more likely to struggle long term with housing stability, employment and self-sufficiency. In fact, a past history of homelessness is one of the primary indicators of a households' likelihood to become homeless again and to require intensive services and supports. Keeping households out of the homeless system of care can be a strategy to reduce the overall population experiencing homelessness.

In many communities, programs in the homeless system, especially those serving families, have essentially re-created a variety of community social services (mental health, substance abuse treatment, job training, etc.) within the shelter or housing program. In doing this, those in need of supportive services or short term crisis intervention are forced into homelessness as the pathway to connect with supportive services. Diversion and prevention programs aim to separate these essential services from homeless shelters, and to augment them with short term housing assistance. In some cases, the household can be assisted in place through payment of rent arrears or by providing landlord-tenant mediation support. In others, the household may be better off moved to a safer and/or more affordable location.

With the current focus from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on funding permanent supportive housing, securing funding to close the “funnel” into the homeless system of care can be difficult. Traditional housing programs also cannot provide this type of assistance. Promising models in other communities, including the Homebase program out of New York City, have successfully reduced entry into homeless shelters by 10 percent by creating flexible, client-centered supports located in areas with known concentrations of poverty and where people frequently enter the homeless system from.

Program Design:

We would recommend creation of a pilot program to divert family households from the crisis homeless system with financial support and case management. The pilot program should include the following components:

1. Planning and Design to Match Community Specific Needs
2. Partnership with Existing Community-Based Non-Profits
3. Targeting Outreach and Community Engagement
4. Light Touch Services and Support
5. Data Collection & Analysis