



Date: March 23, 2018

To: Homeless Strategy Committee

From: **FD** Paul Duncan, Associate Director of Performance Management

cc: Meg Barclay, Homelessness Coordinator, Office of the City Administrative Officer
Peter Lynn, Executive Director, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority
Chris Callandrillo, Director of Programs, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority

Subject: REPORT ON LAHSA REUNIFICATION OUTCOMES

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I am pleased to transmit the enclosed report on reunification assistance provided by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA).

The report provides an assessment of family and friend reunification programs and technical guidance provided by LAHSA for reconnecting individuals and families at-risk of or experiencing homelessness in the City of Los Angeles. Reunification is integrated into all LAHSA programs as a strategy for exiting participants into stable, safe housing.

This report summarizes reunification outcomes by program type, while also summarizing data collection practices for these programs. Since 2015, we find a significant increase in the number of individuals reconnecting with family members through street outreach and Rapid Re-Housing programs.

Moving forward, LAHSA will expand utilization of family reunification within our Prevention and Diversion programs and will continue to improve data collection and assess best practices among our providers successfully utilizing reunification resources.

I would be happy to meet with you and your staff to review the report. Please direct any questions or concerns to me at pduncan@lahsa.org or 213-683-3333.

PD:tk

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Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority

Report to the City of Los Angeles Homeless Strategy Committee:
Reunification Outcomes in Homelessness Programs

March 23, 2018

INTRODUCTION

The following report provides an overview of reunification assistance for individuals experiencing or at-risk of homelessness in the Los Angeles Continuum of Care (LA CoC). Reunification is a core component of all programs that are administered by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA). This report will identify how reunification assistance is integrated into current programs including:

- Rapid Re-Housing
- Crisis Housing
- Street Outreach

The report also details standalone reunification programs including the Youth Family Reunification program for transition age youth (TAY). In addition, the report will explore data collection on reunification outcomes and avenues for additional data collection.

BACKGROUND

Family reunification assistance is critical for supporting individuals and families at-risk or experiencing homelessness who have expressed interest in reconnecting with support networks both locally and outside of the region. According to the 2017 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, 71% of the unsheltered homeless population in the Los Angeles County Continuum of Care resided in Los Angeles County prior to becoming homeless, while 78% resided in Southern California. Two-thirds of unsheltered adults and children in adult families have resided in Los Angeles County for more than ten years. As such, many persons experience homelessness can exit homelessness either by re-connecting with family and friends that live within Los Angeles County, while a smaller number may reconnect with family and friends by receiving travel assistance to go to a destination outside Los Angeles County. In all cases, LAHSA staff and contracted providers' staff make contact with destination homes to ensure that participants are returning to a safe and welcoming environment.

At present, LAHSA is in late-stage development of its first standalone reunification program, the Youth Family Reunification program, in addition to continued provision reunification assistance for participants seeking family reunification within other LAHSA programs. In screening clients for program entry in all programs, providers are advised to encourage family and friend reunification when possible and assist in connecting clients to resources to facilitate reunification. Historically, providers have implemented reunification into service delivery without formal guidance and tracking from LAHSA. Family reunification may be more formally addressed as a system goal as LAHSA assesses successful provider utilization of reunification as an intervention. In FY 2016-2017, we find that 2,073 persons exited LAHSA programs to a family member or a friend,¹ on a permanent or temporary basis, comprising 5% of recorded program exits for the year.

The City of Los Angeles' Comprehensive Homeless Strategy (CHS) does not include a formal reunification program but, rather, references family reunification as a potential component of the city's approved strategies including *6E: Evaluate Homeless Navigation Centers* and *7T: Homeless Prevention and Diversion Programs*. The development of formal standalone reunification programs is, however, aligned with the County of Los Angeles' Approved Strategies to Combat Homelessness. In accordance with Los Angeles County Strategy E14: Enhanced Services for Transition Aged Youth, LAHSA will launch the family

¹ All data points drawn from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), which reflects Los Angeles County.

reconnection program for transition age youth (TAY) across the eight service planning areas in Spring 2018. The Youth Family Reconnection Program (“Family Reconnection”) will provide clinical and crisis management support to facilitate reconnection of youth experiencing homelessness with family members and/or strengthen adult connections to achieve housing stability.

OVERALL REUNIFICATION OUTCOMES BY EXIT DESTINATION & PROGRAM TYPE

At present, reunification outcomes are identified by exit destinations in the Homeless Information Management System (HMIS) selected by agencies upon a client’s separation from a program. Agencies can indicate whether a client has relocated, on permanent or temporary basis, to a family member or a friend. Additionally, clients can exit to an unknown destination, which may include cases of reunification occurring without agency assistance and/or knowledge; the data on these types of exits are largely unknown and are not reflected in the numbers of reunification exits in the tables below.

Table 1. Family and Friends Exits from All Exits by Fiscal Year, Los Angeles County

Exit Destination	FY 15-16	FY 16-17	FY 17-18 Q1 & Q2	All Exits Total
Staying with Family Permanent or Temporary	1,476	1,562	1,056	4,094
Staying with Friends Permanent or Temporary	603	511	322	1,436
Reunification Exits	2,079	2,073	1,378	5,530
All Exits Total	42,796	38,057	18,435	99,288

Table 2. Family and Friends Exits from All Exits by Fiscal Year, as Percentage, Los Angeles County

Exit Destination	FY 15-16	FY 16-17	FY 17-18 Q1 & Q2	All Exits Total
Staying with Family Permanent or Temporary	3.5%	4.1%	5.7%	4.1%
Staying with Friends Permanent or Temporary	1.4%	1.3%	1.8%	1.5%
Reunification Exits	4.9%	5.4%	7.5%	5.6%

In FY 2016-2017, client reunification to a family member or a friend comprised four (4%) and one percent (1%) of total exits destinations from LAHSA programs, respectively. Notably, cases of reunification in FY 2017-2018 are on pace to exceed prior year reunification exit totals by 33%. This may partially be a result of improving data collection on reunification exits in addition to actual increases in reunification exits.

Table 3 (see following page) provides a disaggregation of reunification outcomes by program type. We find that family and friend reunification occurs across all programs, with the highest number of cases in Emergency Shelter, Rapid Re-Housing and Street Outreach. In the first two quarters of FY 2017 alone, recorded cases of reunification in Rapid Re-Housing and Street Outreach have nearly met or exceeded previous year totals. Cases have decreased in Transitional Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing.

Table 3. Family and Friends Exits by Program Type by Fiscal Year

Exit Destination/Program Type	FY 15-16	FY 16-17	FY 17-18 Q1 & Q2	All Exits Total
Staying with Family Permanent or Temporary	1,476	1,562	1,056	4,094
Coordinated Assessment	0	6	0	6
Day Shelter	9	41	0	50
Emergency Shelter	505	440	249	1,194
Homeless Prevention	33	111	44	188
PH - Housing Only	1	0	3	4
PH - Housing with Services (no disability required)	2	4	0	6
PH - Permanent Supportive Housing (disability required)	110	99	24	233
PH - Rapid Re-Housing	271	352	294	917
Safe Haven	N/A	N/A	1	1
Services Only	66	66	42	174
Street Outreach*	9	106	296	411
Transitional Housing	470	337	103	910
Staying with Friends Permanent or Temporary	603	511	322	1,436
Coordinated Assessment	0	1	0	1
Day Shelter	5	17	0	22
Emergency Shelter	214	129	105	448
Homeless Prevention	15	24	2	41
PH - Housing Only	0	1	0	1
PH - Housing with Services (no disability required)	1	0	0	1
PH - Permanent Supportive Housing (disability required)	28	30	13	71
PH - Rapid Re-Housing	119	131	109	359
Services Only	21	23	18	62
Street Outreach	2	21	36	59
Transitional Housing	198	134	39	371
All Exits Total	2,079	2,073	1,378	5,530

*The significant rise in reunification outcomes for street outreach may be attributed to an increase in outreach resources and/or incomplete data capture in previous years.

Limitations on Reunification Data

Exit Destinations

At present, HMIS data does not capture the location of exit destinations, which would identify whether reunification placement occurs within or outside of Los Angeles County. As mentioned earlier, however, 2017 Homeless Count data found that 71% of the unsheltered homeless population in the LA CoC resided in Los Angeles County prior to becoming homeless while 78% resided in Southern California, suggesting that a sizable portion of reunification exits may be within the region.

Diversion Tracking

LAHSA has created an HMIS module to more effectively track Diversion, a program type which attempts to place households back with family or friends before entering the homeless services system. In previous years, tracking of Diversion across the LA CoC was inconsistent, with some providers failing to enter diverted clients into HMIS and record their exits from the homeless system. With the formal development of an HMIS program for Diversion, which will allow providers to show and track reconnection that happens outside of formal entry into a program, LAHSA will improve its ability to track the overall number of persons reconnected with family and friends. Providers will also be able to use a small portion of financial assistance through prevention programs to facilitate this work.

CURRENT PROGRAMS UTILIZING REUNIFICATION

Standalone Programs

Youth Family Reunification Program

The 2017 Homeless Count found that 2,796 transition age youth (TAY) in the City of Los Angeles experience homelessness on a given night, a 50% increase from 2016. Seventy-nine percent are unsheltered. Administered by LAHSA, the Youth Family Reconnection program is designed to provide TAY and unaccompanied minors between the ages of 16-24 who are experiencing homelessness and express interest in family reconnection, with individualized support services to facilitate reunification and a stable housing placement with family members. The program addresses the critical need for wrap-around services and after-care for youth and families to ensure long-term reconnection and housing stability post-reunification. For the purposes of the program, "family" will be defined by the youth and may include biological family and non-biological relationships. The goal of the program is to limit the time youth experience homelessness through connection and relocation with family, and/or connect youth with resources that can help them achieve housing stability with family support.

Upon identification and program enrollment, participants work in coordination with Case Managers and/or therapeutic professionals to establish a Family Reconnection Plan. Supportive services include individual and family counseling services, crisis intervention, pre-reconnection bonding activities and aftercare support. Enrollment for the program is one year, with an additional six months of aftercare support for participants who relocate back with family. A completion of a standardized home assessment is required prior to reunification.

The Youth Family Reunification Program is in alignment with Los Angeles County Strategy E14: Enhanced Services for Transition Aged Youth, and is expected to serve roughly 400 youths per year. The program is budgeted at \$1.75 million. The anticipated kick-off for the program is at the end of April 2018.

Family Reunification Housing Subsidy

Los Angeles County Strategy B6: Family Reunification Housing Subsidy (FRHS) provides Rapid Re-Housing and case management services to homeless families with children in out-of-home care in Los Angeles County, where the sole barrier to reunification is homelessness. Families enrolled in the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program may lose program eligibility when a child is taken from the home. As a result, families lose financial assistance for housing and children remain in foster care for an extended period of time. Since program implementation in January 2017, 116 families have been enrolled and 50 permanently housed. The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and LAHSA are lead agencies for this strategy.

Integration of Reunification into Existing Program Types

Rapid Re-Housing and Homeless Prevention

Rapid Re-Housing is a proven housing intervention that quickly places individuals and families experiencing homelessness in stable housing with case management services. Homeless Prevention programs will be providing services for individuals and families at-risk of homelessness to stabilize in current housing or access other housing opportunities to prevent homelessness. Agencies are asking what if any resources or options they may have to divert them from entering the homeless services system, including reconnection with family and friends. Agencies can provide reunification assistance to a client through the duration of program enrollment if and when a client expresses an interest in reconnecting and relocating with family or friends. Family reunification can also be part of a participant's Housing Stability Plan, whereby a case worker can assist clients in facilitating reconnection through financial assistance and other supportive services. In cases where a client expresses interest and a location for reunification, case management staff make contact with the family member or friend that will be receiving the client and affirm that they are willing to receive the client and that it is a safe environment for the client to return to. Upon the completion of reunification and relocation process, agencies must exit participants from program enrollment.

Funding is available for reunification assistance in the form of transportation subsidies, which are distributed upon verification that a family member or friend outside of Los Angeles County has agreed to provide permanent housing to the client. Subsidized transportation includes travel by bus, train, or plane, with expenses paid directly to transportation providers. Agencies are required to select the most cost-effective option. If a participant with an automobile expresses a need for financial assistance for fuel costs, a gas card can be provided based on mileage and estimated fuel costs. In FY 2016-2017, 483 individuals exited Rapid Re-Housing programs to a family member or friend, a 24% increase from the prior year. Reunification outcomes in Rapid Re-Housing are on pace to exceed previous year totals.

Crisis Housing

Crisis housing provides individuals and families experiencing homelessness with short-term emergency shelter, providing clients a stable and supportive environment as they self-resolve their homelessness or are connected to more safe and supportive housing resources. Upon entry into a Crisis Housing program, providers are required to make efforts to divert the client from the homeless system and encourage reunification. These diversion and reunification efforts are conducted in an ongoing manner as staff screen for alternative housing options and are conducted in alignment with trauma-informed care principles to ensure that the family member or friend that may receive the client is going to a safe and stable environment.

In FY 2016-17, emergency shelter programs saw 569 individuals exiting through reunification with friends and family, the highest total of all LAHSA program types. As LAHSA assesses program performance of interim housing programs, family reunification may be a topic of further exploration if providers have found to be successful at reunifying clients with families.

Street Outreach

LAHSA's Homeless Engagement Teams (HET) provide direct outreach to individuals experiencing homelessness, which can include support and financial assistance for reconnecting clients with family members and friends. In cases where individuals express an interest in reunification, outreach team members facilitate the process of assessing identified family members and friends for placement, and provide financial assistance for transportation costs. Prior to facilitating transportation, LAHSA HET staff affirm that a family member or friend is willing to receive the client and can provide them with a safe and stable environment. At present, LAHSA does not administer formal guidance on reconnection services for outreach, which are often "one-off" interactions with clients. Post-relocation contacts with clients to ensure arrival at their destination and housing stability afterward are currently not required of outreach teams.

Reunification Assistance Programs Outside of the City of Los Angeles

Reunification assistance programs are present outside of the City of Los Angeles, traditionally in the form of city-funded programs that subsidize bus travel for individuals and families in need of financial assistance for reunification.

Mayor's Fund for the Homeless (Long Beach): The Mayor's Fund for the Homeless in Long Beach, created in 1990, is a community-based donation pool designed to meet gaps in service delivery, including relocation assistance, in the Long Beach Continuum of Care. Community members are encouraged to donate to the fund through an annual mail and online solicitation campaign. At present, the fund generates roughly \$20,000 per year. Funds are distributed to service providers upon assessment of unfunded need by the city's Homeless Services Advisory Committee. Historically, uses for the fund include relocation support, including transportation assistance. In addition, the Mayor's fund currently supports the city's Homeward Bound Program, which provides individuals and families experiencing or at-risk of homelessness with subsidized Greyhound Bus vouchers to facilitate reconnection with family and friends outside of the Long Beach area.

Project Homecoming (Santa Monica): In 2006, the City of Santa Monica launched Project Homecoming. The program is a family reunification initiative that provides individuals experiencing homelessness with financial assistance in reconnecting with family and friends outside of the region who agree to provide housing support. Upon verification of family placement, staff from the city's Human Services Division provide the participant with a subsidized Greyhound Bus voucher, and conduct a series of follow-up phone calls to ensure the participant's arrival to the stated location and stability in housing. From 2006 to 2015, the program has assisted 1,669 individuals in reconnecting with support networks, at an average cost of \$214 per person.