

# “KEY TO THE CITY” YOUTH HOUSING TOWN HALL

## BACKGROUND

The Youth Commission, a body of 17 appointed youth ages 12-23, is responsible for advising the Board of Supervisors and the Mayor on "the effects of legislative policies, needs, assessments, priorities, programs, and budgets concerning the children and youth of San Francisco." As per the 2013-2014 Youth Commission Bylaws the Youth Commission shall have 5 standing, issue-based committees and the Housing, LGBTQ, Transitional Age Youth (TAY) Committee is one of these five committees. Included in our responsibilities is bringing awareness to the needs of youth in San Francisco.

It is no secret that families are experiencing a housing and affordability crisis here in San Francisco. Families are being forced to leave our city because the cost of living is too high and working wages are too low. With such limited space people moving into the city with a lot more money and much fewer responsibilities (such as children or close family ties) are being catered to with modern, expensive, luxury housing. When specific people are prioritized by housing developers, employers, and policy makers because of what they can “bring” to our city- we as a city have to be conscious of what we are losing. Aside from losing our homes due to rent increases or Ellis Act evictions we are losing our children and families.

When parents realize they are no longer able to afford to live here they force their families to relocate and many youth don't have a say in this process even though they may be losing friends, resources, and stability. When youth begin to experience the effects of the affordability crisis and decide to prioritize work over school in order to assist their families there is nowhere to share that struggle. In an effort to truly understand how this crisis affects youth and build an awareness about what resources exist the TAY/LGBT/Housing Committee decided to convene a forum “Key to the City: a Youth Town Hall on Housing and Affordability.”

At this amazing event, more than 50 youth came out from across the city to share their thoughts and expertise about the struggles our youth are facing. The number of attendees alone is great but the leadership and power of the youth at this town hall really made all the difference. Youth leaders shared personal testimony and facts about housing and homelessness in San Francisco before a more intimate breakout session where youth had even deeper discussions about what they need to lead healthy, successful lives **here** in San Francisco.

## METHODOLOGY

Brief overview of format

Brief short mention of the goals of each item on our agenda

Qualitative focus groups

sponsors and collaboration between youth organizations

## FINDINGS

### TAY HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

1. One thing I love about the city/my neighborhood is...

Youth made clear that it is easy to fall in love with San Francisco for its vibrant cultures and delicious foods, for its safe environment and convenience and accessibility.

2. Stable Housing means... (1,2,3, 4, 5)

To young people, stable housing means more than a roof over one's head. It means having full and useful employment that pays livable wages that isn't swallowed up by expensive rents. It means having living conditions in which youth are happy, healthy, and housed with the vital facilities that accompany housing as a need that is met. To youth, stable housing means a stable future that includes the possibility of owning a place of their own.

3. Some challenges I've encountered finding and maintaining housing are... (1,2,3,4,6,9)

The search for housing and the ability to maintain housed are made difficult by the cost of housing and by jobs that don't pay enough. Youth shared that the only places which they could afford are unsafe. They listed language barriers and age discrimination as barriers which limit their housing opportunities. As tenants, they have also experienced poor follow up with management.

4. Some resources that would help TAY find and stay housed are... 6

In their dialogue, youth shared a number of helpful TAY housing resources and support including websites such as SF4TAY.org and Link-SF; providers such as Larkin Street Youth Services, SF Housing Authority, and LYRIC; and programs such as City College of SF's Homeless At-Risk Transitional Student Programs (HARTS). Young folks also emphasized the helpfulness of reaching out to staff, schools, family and those within your network for assistance when hunting for housing.

5. If I have to leave the city, it will be because... 1,2,3,6,7,8

While participants shared many reasons why they love San Francisco, they also pictured many scenarios that would deny them their right to stay in San Francisco. The issue of affordability has made the dream of starting a family in San Francisco more elusive than

ever has been before. The ruthless force of gentrification has made transitional age youth participants feel vulnerable as they witness their fellow San Franciscans being driven out in droves. More concerns which were raised were the health issues and substandard living conditions that are shaping their decision to leave the City. Many participants felt that not having the degrees of the future or the skills to be competitive in the job market would lock them out of good-paying job opportunities. In the breakout conversations, youth participants shared that understanding their rights and having the knowledge of available supportive resources would help keep young people in our City.

## SINGLE-ROOM OCCUPANCIES AND PUBLIC HOUSING

### 1. One thing I love about the city/my neighborhood is...

In this session, youth folks counted their many blessings for being proud residents of San Francisco. They feel blessed with the open space that they use for leisure and for play, the accessibility of the city by all kinds of transit options, the boundless opportunities offered by an extensive network of youth programming and services, and the diversity that San Francisco is renowned for across the country and around the world.

### 2. Some ways I've seen my neighborhood change are... (3, 7)

To this question, youth spoke to the issue of unemployment and of prices that are spiraling high. They have witnessed a number of small businesses closing, and have seen their teachers and their friends leave the City at a time when living in San Francisco meant living in poverty for countless people. While youth noticed an increase of construction, youth shared the perception that there are less youth-friendly places in their communities.

### 3. Some things that would make my neighborhood safer and healthier for youth are... (3,7)

Youth attendees made the following assertions: A neighborhood that is cleaner and has enhanced lighting and better transportation would improve the quality of life for young people. A neighborhood with more open space, parks, and police would bring safety and good health to youth. Participants spoke with conviction about the need to eradicate food deserts and bring affordable and high-quality fresh foods to their social communities.

### 4. Some ways I've seen my community struggling with these changes are... (4,5,7)

Youth are feeling a psychological impact in the wake of these changes made to their community. They are perceiving a less welcoming atmosphere and feeling less secure, and they are floundering as they sense the dissolution of their community identity.

5. To me safe and stable housing means... (1,7,8)

Youth participants shared that safe and stable housing means living without the fear of robbery or the fear of a sudden Ellis Act eviction, and that there is rent stability, a strong and diverse community, and safe open space.

## DISPLACEMENT AND AFFORDABILITY

1. One thing I love about the city/my neighborhood is...

Let there be no doubt that young people hold San Francisco dear to their hearts. They are grateful for the peace and low crime rates in Park Merced, the strong sense of community in Chinatown, the central location of Fillmore, and the accessibility and transit-friendliness of Nob Hill. They expressed their deep gratitude for the fact that in no other city in the country are the values as progressive, the people as diverse, and the resources for children and families as extensive as those in San Francisco. They are excited to be the next generation to carry the baton of the City's longstanding tradition of being actively engaged in civic matters.

2. Some ways I've seen my neighborhood change are..1,2,3,4,5,7

Youth are seeing their neighborhoods colonized by the expanding tech industry. The shuttle bus program used by tech companies are taking a toll on the public transit system and our City is transforming into a bedroom community for affluent tech workers. Youth are questioning the City's dedication to *all* constituents, and not just to tech workers. The young in our City are crushed by the weight of the affordability and housing crisis which is exacerbated by new, high-cost renovated housing. As San Francisco is becoming more expensive, young people are perceiving more profiling by an increased police presence, and are also feeling less connected to friends in their neighborhood.

3. Some ways these changes are affecting me and my neighborhood are...7,8

In the face of this affordability and housing crisis, young people are the ones who feel it first and feel it the worst. They are anxious about what bigger dollar signs in their bills would mean for their future in San Francisco. They are left wondering how they would survive this highly-competitive job market while their minds are also never far away from the threat of evictions. Youth made it heard that the changes made to their community should not come at the expense of their homes, their communities, and their livelihoods.

4. In order to keep living in San Francisco I would need...1,3,5,6,8

As some of the most vulnerable long-term tenants living in San Francisco, young people recognize the need for City Hall to act on their behalf; to make policy that expedite affordable housing waitlists, to protect renters including transitional age youth from speculative and no fault evictions, and to provide resources and programs such as Section 8 that would make our City a more viable home for all. To remain in San Francisco also absolutely necessitates gainful employment that yields a big income

which young people would know how to manage when given a robust financial literacy education. One participant put it best that in order to keep living in San Francisco, youth would need to win the lottery.

5. If I have to leave the city, it will be because... 1,2,6,8

The theme of this breakout dialogue—the twin issues of housing and affordability—remains to be the defining challenges of our times. To this question, housing in particular had a direct bearing in the kind of answers youth participants gave: If we fail in our moral strive for an eviction-free San Francisco, if we don't move the needle in our work to sustain housing for youth for the long haul, provide assistance to victims of foreclosure, rehabilitate deteriorated buildings for the benefit of its residents, and organize and educate our communities to advocate and increase awareness on this issue—then we will unwittingly seed our children, youth, and families to elsewhere but to San Francisco. Young people should not have to bear the brunt of unreasonably expensive rents or spiraling costs.

6. Some ways my community could learn more about our housing rights are...5,6

Communities could learn about housing rights by calling the 211 helpline, visiting housing clinics, searching up resources on the Internet, or receiving helpful advice from someone who have experienced housing rights struggles. Youth participants wanted more townhalls where young people can come together, connect with one another, make their collective voice heard, and learn from each other about housing rights--and where politicians can answer to the needs of their constituents who sent them to City Hall.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### CONTINUE THE PIPELINE OF HOUSING FOR TRANSITIONAL-AGE YOUTH TO MEET OR EXCEED THE 400 UNIT GOAL BY 2015

Youth participants have spoken up for the need of City Hall to spend more political capital on making sure that every youth would have a roof over their heads. While it is truism that we can't build our way out of this housing crisis, we can still take conducive steps to provide housing by meeting the existing goal of fully funding and identifying 400 housing units for TAY by the end of next year.

### DEVELOP AN EVALUATION TOOL THAT MEASURES THE QUALITY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF TAY HOUSING AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

### PROVIDE RESOURCE SUPPORT FOR TAY WHO ARE NOT DISCONNECTED BUT ARE STRUGGLING WITH HOUSING

### FUND A TWO-YEAR “BRIDGE” FOR VITAL TAY SERVICES

Across all the breakout conversations, youth attendees are feeling their future shortchanged by our City in the times when we fail to re-engage them to education and employment opportunities, and to [meetaddress](#) the challenges they face with targeted programs and services. Their voices tell us that we need to lift up our most vulnerable and disconnected TAY in such ways as creating two years of funding for vital TAY services not currently covered by the Children’s Fund. Making these investments would stretch the social safety net for the poorest of our young , and would have social and economic dividends in the long term for our City.

### ADVOCATING FOR TAY WRAP-AROUND SERVICES

#### OUTREACH AND COORDINATE SUPPORT FOR YOUTH MORE EFFECTIVELY

by have intentional strategies that reaches out to LGBT young people, young parents, foster youth and reentry clients; develop a mechanism to share information about available TAY housing resources and allow those who use it to navigate the system in the most effective manner.

#### ENGAGE YOUTH ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE AFFORDABILITY AND HOUSING CRISIS

#### ENACT NECESSARY MEASURES TO ELIMINATE OR REDUCE THE NUMBER OF SPECULATORY OR NO-FAULT EVICTIONS CAUSED BY THE ELLIS ACT

MOTION NO.1314—02 The San Francisco Youth Commission strongly supports the resolution to amend state law to return of local control over the Ellis Act to prevent the speculation and abuse of no-fault eviction. <http://www.sfbos.org/modules/showdocument.aspx?documentid=47901>

#### MAKING SURE EXISTING AFFORDABLE RENTAL HOUSING THROUGH MOHCD DOES NOT CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDE YOUTH ESPECIALLY TAY WITH FAMILIES BY BARRING FULL TIME STUDENTS FROM APPLYING.