

The Roadmap

A Five-Year Plan
to End the Crisis of Family Homelessness
in San Francisco



Acknowledgments

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San Francisco

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This report can be downloaded from our Website.



**There are
enough homeless
children in San
Francisco to fill
70 classrooms.**

*“When are we going to have a home?”
Eight-year-old homeless child, to his mother*

Executive Summary

Child homelessness in San Francisco is the most severe it has been since the Great Depression. Enough public schoolchildren are homeless to fill 70 classrooms. Throughout the city, there are children who live in cars with their parents, in residential hotels, crowded on mats in church basements, in shelters, or in tents.

The change has been rapid and dramatic: A decade ago, waits for shelter were no more than a week, and a family could generally expect to find a place to live in San Francisco by the time their shelter stay ended. Today, not only are more San Franciscans losing their housing due to displacement, but also the likelihood of finding housing at the end of a shelter stay in San Francisco has faded to the vanishing point.

In San Francisco, we are fortunate to have the resources and know-how to end this crisis. We’re presenting a carefully constructed plan from a broad coalition of community organizations: family services providers, non-profit housing developers, and advocacy organizations. The report details a roadmap that could end homelessness for all currently homeless children within five years. We hope to address the housing needs of all those families with minor children who meet the City’s definition of homelessness including those in shelters, in cars, in residential hotels, doubled up and in garages. Each of these forms of existence has negative impacts on the development of children that can be addressed by ensuring dignified housing.

Our goals are ambitious, but they are achievable:

- This city can house every child who is currently homeless. For the current backlog of unhoused families, this will end the lengthy periods of homelessness that are so detrimental to a child’s development.
- We can return our family system to the role it was designed to play: an emergency system that can immediately or quickly provide homeless families with shelter without waiting for a bed to open.
- We can prevent family homelessness in the future by reaching families before they lose their housing. For cases in which prevention is unlikely—such as flight from domestic violence, or displacement by fires—a truly emergency shelter system will be able to quickly shelter newly homeless families, and other City programs will be able to rapidly re-house them.

We believe there are approximately 3,222 homeless children in San Francisco. Our best estimate of the current number of homeless families is 1,989. This number has grown alarmingly in recent years: 94%

growth since 2007. Even using the most conservative Department of Housing and Urban Development numbers, family homelessness in San Francisco has grown over this period.

With the investments we recommend over five years, over 2,383 families will be able to exit homelessness—every family currently homeless, and then some. We can then fully invest in homeless prevention efforts to keep San Francisco families housed. These six steps maximize the use of private, Federal, and state resources by further moderate investment by the City.

1. Increase “LOSP” Affordable Housing Subsidies

375 Families Low-Income Operating Subsidy Program subsidies (LOSPs) have been used in non-profit housing for a number of years to allow extremely low-income people to move into buildings with affordable rents. These subsidies are typically attached to newly constructed units. Currently, 199 such future units are allocated to all homeless people. We are calling for an additional 375 units to be allocated specifically to homeless families. (\$6,484,594)

2. Place Homeless Households in Turnover Non-Profit Housing

31 Families Part of the solution is to create a new way of using the subsidies program: upon vacancy, units in existing affordable housing developments would be designated as homeless units. Non-profit landlords would receive the difference between the prior rent and affordable rent for the tenant as a subsidy from the City. (\$391,979)

3. Invest in Rapid Re-housing

1,321 Families The rapid re-housing program provides financial assistance to homeless families to either stay in their homes, or pay partial rent on a privately owned apartment. Typically the subsidy lasts 12 to 18 months, and gives families an opportunity to stabilize and improve their financial situation to take over the full cost of the rent. In each of the next two years, CalWORKs is funding 100 short term subsidies for families in San Francisco. In addition, private funding is expected to fund an additional 70 subsidies in 2015 through a partnership with SFUSD. We propose that the City fund an additional 29 subsidies for families in 2016–2017. (\$520,710)

4. Move Homeless Households Into Vacant San Francisco Housing Authority Units

576 Families According to the San Francisco Housing Authority, an average of six of the units in their portfolio turn over every month starting July 1. Currently, homeless households get priority for vacant SFHA units. Since September, the SFHA has used funding from the Mayor’s Office to fix up vacant units, and has moved over 100 homeless households into them. This must continue as long as it does not slow down planned reconstruction of public housing units. (\$0)

5. Fund Need-Based Subsidy Pilot

130 Families The current subsidy programs have been effective for a portion of the population—those who require only temporary help until they can cover market rent on their own after a period of time. However, there are many others who will not be able to increase their income in a relatively short period of time in order to afford housing. Last year the Homeless Emergency Service Providers Association created a new pilot subsidy program that recognizes this need and fills that gaping hole in our system. The program would house families in SF in private market housing at the bottom 20% of the rental market, and the City would subsidize their rent while their income requires it. We are proposing a further expansion next year, to house an additional 80 in 2016. (\$1,501,140)

6. Prevent Homelessness

San Francisco's on-going eviction epidemic is well documented, and its contribution to the city's homelessness crisis is significant: According to the 2013 San Francisco Homeless Count Survey, 35% of homeless San Franciscans reported having been evicted from their housing immediately prior to becoming homeless. Before last year, only one in nine San Francisco tenants had access to legal representation in eviction cases, while real estate speculators were using high-priced attorneys to drive thousands of tenants from their homes. Existing legal and financial services for the prevention of evictions have been invaluable lifelines for many San Franciscans facing homelessness.

For the past two years, San Francisco has made a serious investment in preventing evictions, adding nearly \$2,000,000 to eviction prevention efforts, and staving off displacement for over 2,000 households. In addition, a number of non-profit organizations in the city run eviction prevention programs, such as back rent payments and counseling, which focus on preventing homelessness. These programs have made critical expansions to include full-scope eviction services so that tenants get representation at trial. This year, the Homeless Emergency Services Program Association has a \$2.5 million proposal to further expand full-scope eviction defense, a mediation program for publicly funded housing, and a door-to-door tenant education outreach effort. We include in our budget \$501,231 in funding for the portion of that would serve families (20%).

We recognize the importance of a citywide eviction prevention program, but believe that more resources should be invested in targeted homelessness prevention. Research shows that such efforts can reduce the number of families entering shelter due to eviction by 26%. We recommend that a planning process be formulated to make dynamic system changes to the fully-funded prevention system in order to identify families that are at risk of displacement and to connect them to ongoing support to maintain their housing. (\$501,231)

By leveraging existing resources, the total cost would be just over \$9 million over five years. This is certainly achievable within our city's robust budget. We call on Mayor Lee and all City officials to stand with us and tackle the problem. With sincere City leadership, we can return our homeless services to treating incidents of family homelessness as extraordinary, temporary crises, rather than the everyday reality of 3,222 children too many.