

***Homeless Families with Children in Skid Row
Enhancing System-Wide Coordination and Resources***

***Policy Roundtable 1: Meeting Summary
January 31, 2006***

Homeless Families with Children in Skid Row: Policy Roundtable 1

Background

Under the direction of Supervisor's Molina's office, First 5 LA hosted a policy roundtable on January 31, 2006, to discuss existing and potential collaboration among county agencies to address service needs of homeless families in Skid Row. This meeting was a direct response to the December 20, 2005 Board Motion focusing on the issue of *child safety* among homeless families.

The goal of the meeting was to facilitate a discussion on how new partnerships, resource investments, and policy/protocols could build on current initiatives. This was intended to facilitate system-wide support for implementing the Board's zero-tolerance policy on family homelessness in Skid Row.

Directors and managers representing all county human service departments attended (DMH, DHS, DPSS, DCFS, CAO), totaling 40 roundtable participants.

Goals & Strategies

The Board Motion specified the following goals and strategies that were the focus of discussion at the Policy Roundtable:

Goals

- Assure Child Safety
- Enforce Zero Tolerance Policy
- Assure Service Coordination
- Ensure Well-being of Families

Strategies

- Service Expansion & Coordination
 - Interagency Partnerships
 - Evaluation of Outreach Services
 - Policy & Regulatory Changes
 - On-going Monitoring
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Gaps & Opportunities

- 1) Children's Well-Being: Socialization Needs & Safe Environment
 - Families with children are typically in the streets between 6am until 7pm because they cannot be in shelters/missions.
 - Very young children spend the day in the streets of Skid Row with their parents due to lack of available child care.
 - Lack of transportation prevents children from attending school.
 - City ordinance prevents a creation of outdoor facilities to serve as a safe play area for children.
 - Homeless children are unable to participate in after-school activities.
 - Children are labeled and stigmatized at school as "homeless."
 - 2) Outreach Teams
 - Multiple outreach teams operate in Skid Row and may not be familiar with one another.
 - Families in SR are not familiar with these various providers and services they offer.
 - DHS staff are not involved in or connected with any of the outreach teams.
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Action Required

Policy Roundtable: Homeless Families in Skid Row (page 2)

Gaps & Opportunities

- 3) Inter & Intra Agency Partnership and Communication
 - Departments need to partner with homeless providers who work directly with runaway and unaccompanied youth (ie., Covenant House, Children of the Night)
 - Department staff do not have information on available services and contact persons from various county agencies.
 - Private partnerships are needed to develop affordable housing.
 - 4) Preventive Services
 - There is no CHDP provider in Skid Row to provide health services for children that are offered in other areas.
 - Preventive services targeting pregnant or parenting mothers are lacking.
 - 5) Lack of Funding & Long-term Housing
 - Motel vouchers and short-term emergency housing are available. However, affordable/permanent housing is lacking for families to transition into when the vouchers (or other emergency or temporary housing) run out.
 - Rent subsidies are needed to help families afford permanent housing.
 - There are limited support available to households who do not qualify for CalWORKs (WTW) (i.e., parents who are undocumented, with felony convictions, or have “timed-out” of CalWORKs). These families can only receive approximately 50% of public benefits through DPSS.
 - 6) Administrative Barriers
 - Shelter program rules “break-up” families with restrictions based on age and gender that cannot accommodate siblings, couples (parents) or family groups.
 - Transportation barriers further limit access to available services.
 - Service providers’ hours of operation do not support child-oriented needs.
 - City regulations and funding rules present barriers and delays in implementing potential solutions.
 - 7) Data on Target Population & Services
 - How are unaccompanied youth being targeted and enumerated in homeless count?
 - Report from the homeless services pilot project (get a copy) contains a number of recommendations for Skid Row families.
 - Are available intervention/services effective?
 - What is the minimum length of services required to “stabilize” families?
 - 8) Outreach Efforts
 - Agencies need to address the needs of families and young children who cannot access services through traditional means.
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Action Required

Policy Roundtable: Homeless Families in Skid Row (page 3)

Child Safety

Immediate Solutions

- DCFS
 - Conduct child abuse background check and trigger “immediate response” protocols for children that are at risk of child abuse
 - Extend hours for staff coverage; station a social worker in the central precinct.
 - Provide cross training to Skid Row service providers and county staff on child abuse indicators, reporting process, and available resources for homeless families.
 - Provide supportive services through Family Preservation funded providers (i.e., Assistance League case manager) to do 3-months of case management for homeless families who do not have open CPS cases.

Short-Term & Long-Term Solutions

- “Safe Zone” for Children:
 - Children need a safe-zone, an indoor or outdoor place for recreational activities, to do homework, and to serve as respite area while they are waiting to enter shelter facilities.
- Child Care for Pre-School Children
- Preventive Programs for Future Pregnancies or Poor Birth Outcomes
- Inter-Agency Outreach Teams
 - Create a universal intake and assessment form that can appropriately assess for child safety.

Service Coordination

Immediate Solutions:

Interagency Exchange of Information

- Develop a website that can serve as a central resource directory for homeless families and children, as well as Department contact persons.
- Set-up ongoing meetings with all Skid Row outreach teams for the purpose of improving coordination, exchange of information, and cross-training.

Cross-Training

- Provide training and facilitate ongoing meetings among county staff and homeless service providers to discuss and learn about shared protocols and resources.
 - Facilitate regular meeting with families in Skid Row to inform them of the available services provided by county agencies and to listen to their concerns.
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Action Required

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Service Coordination

Immediate Solutions (continued)

- Participation of other department representative in the SROT

Short-Term & Long-Term Solutions

Access Center:

- Create one site in Skid Row that will “house” or co-locate staff from all the departments serving families and children. This proposal is being headed by CAO, with recommendation to be submitted in writing to the BOS in February 28, 2006.
 - DMH is considering the use of available space in their downtown drop-in center as a potential site for the Access Center.
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Interagency Partnership

Immediate Solutions

- Invite key partners representing the City of Los Angeles, City Housing Authority, LA County Housing Authority to resolve administrative barriers and delays.
- Identify ways to “fast-track” or facilitate exemptions to city or county regulations to facilitate immediate needs of homeless families and children.

Short-Term & Long Term Solutions

- Identify alternative funds for non-CalWorks eligible parents/families.
DPSS program provides the “core” financial and employment services for poor families. It has the infrastructure to extend its services to non-eligible families but does not have funding to do so.
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Evaluation of Outreach Services

Immediate Solutions

- Examine outreach teams’ composition, protocols, tools, and responsibilities and identify recommendations for improve safety assessments and intervention methods.

Short & Long-Term Solutions

- (none identified)
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Family & Child Well-Being

Immediate Solutions

- CHDP Outreach in Skid Row

Short & Long-Term Solutions

- “Housing Locators”:
 - DPSS is issuing a request for proposal in June 2006 to identify a “housing locator” service provider who will work with landlords/ property owners to develop affordable housing opportunities for families with children. The Housing Locators will also work with DPSS to provide case management services.
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