

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

***Policy Roundtable 2: Meeting Summary
March 15, 2006***

Homeless Families with Children in Skid Row: Policy Roundtable 2

Background

Under Supervisor Molina's direction, First 5 LA facilitated the first of two roundtables focusing on family homelessness on January 31, 2006. Existing and potential collaboration among county agencies were discussed to address service needs and policy issues affecting homeless families in skid row to ensure child safety.

On March 15, 2006, First 5 LA convened a second and final roundtable focusing on policy recommendations addressing family homelessness. Supervisor Molina (First District) and First 5 LA Director Teresa Nuno (Department of Planning & Development) led the discussion with 45 representatives from county and city departments (DMH, CAO, DPSS, DHS, LA City Housing Authority) to identify policy and program recommendations. The following panel of experts representing children's advocates, homeless service providers, policymakers and academia highlighted potential child abuse prevention strategies: Lari Sheehan, Chief Administrative Office; Tanya Tull, Beyond Shelter; Paul Freese, Public Counsel; Grace Roberts Dyrness and Kristin Ferguson, USC.

Meeting Purpose

The second roundtable was intended to identify child safety/homelessness-related intervention and policy recommendations for consideration by the First 5 LA commission, county departments noted in the Board motion (December 2005), strategic community providers, and child & family advocates. The discussion focused on the following topics:

- Identify effective program interventions.
 - Building on possible solutions generated from the first roundtable, how do we intensify the child abuse prevention strategies from a policy perspective?
 - What promising practices & emerging policies (local/state/national) are being tried to address child abuse among homeless families?
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Issues & Gaps

- Have clear understanding of the source of the problem and why the problem exists—bring attention and put ongoing focus to the problem.
 - There is a critical need to coordinate intervention services among and with public and private entities.
 - Undocumented parents with children who are U.S. citizens are unfamiliar with available services--they are fearful of seeking help due to their immigration status.
 - Families do not have the necessary tools or information to deal with children who have severe developmental and mental disabilities.
 - NIMBY'ism ("not in my backyard") drives the problems of developing and identifying housing for families.
 - While most families want to leave skid row, they do not want government intrusion or to be in a "program." Services need to consider the transitional needs of families who have built a social network in skid row and may be reticent to move from familiar surroundings.
 - Consumer perspective is missing and needs to be incorporated when discussing solutions.
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Immediate Solutions

1. Support zero-tolerance policy towards families being in skid row through a “triage” process and by providing immediate options for relocation. Start relocating families out of skid row everyday by working with those families who want to leave. Next, conduct a more in-depth assessment for those who want to remain in skid row.
2. Prevent flow of new families into skid row by facilitating an immediate protocol to relocate back to their community of origin.
3. Assess families and create different approaches to deal with low and moderate needs families and create a response plan for each type.
4. Use local funds to extend to all CalWORKs families the homeless benefits that are currently available only to Welfare-to-Work participants.
5. Link with faith-based communities *and* private/business institutions around the homelessness issue.
6. Develop a “safe zone” for families and children as an interim solution to address needs of those who have not yet been relocated out of skid row.

Long Term Solutions

1. Use Prop 63 funds to assist families with severe mental health needs that may place them at risk of homelessness and child maltreatment.
2. Put families in transitional housing while permanent housing is being sought.
3. Do not use terms that stigmatize, label, or criminalize homeless families (i.e., by labeling housing sites as “shelters”; equating homelessness to child abuse, etc)
4. Add staffing resources to provide case management services to families.
5. Include education and enrichment components as part of homeless services.
6. Rather than building big institutions (i.e., large shelters or SROs), develop programs that can concentrate on small clusters of families.
7. Develop a public education campaign to inform the community about the needs of homeless families and how to access resources to support them.

Policy Recommendations

1. Remove all children from skid row by providing them and their families with immediate safe housing alternatives as well as needed supportive services to remain intact. Relocation efforts must focus on assisting families to return to their communities of origin to regain their support network.
 2. Create a regionalized response to homelessness by decentralizing services out of skid row. Do not fund or create new services located *in* skid row.
 3. Use new funds to prioritize funding for *a more* preventative approach and interim, short-term housing options through flexible rental subsidies and development of “master leases” (for subleasing to families), rather than focusing on the creating new housing facilities that take many years to develop.
 4. Create a funding bridge and extend CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work homeless benefits to all CalWORKs-eligible families.
 5. Develop a service delivery model specifically addressing the needs of homeless families that can be supported by a braided public funding streams.
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