

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

Executive Summary

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Policy Roundtable on Homeless Families with Children in Skid Row

Board Motion on Zero Tolerance & Child Safety: In December, 2005, after a homeless 47-year old man with a three-month old infant sought assistance from a downtown Los Angeles service provider, the baby was found dead in a motel room approximately three weeks later. This tragedy highlighted the urgency to focus on child safety among homeless families in Skid Row and to enforce the Board's zero tolerance policy for families living in this unsafe environment through effective assessment, outreach and intervention services. On December 20, 2005, Supervisor Molina (First District) introduced a motion directing the Departments of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Public Social Services (DPSS) as lead agencies to work with the Department of Mental Health (DMH), Department of Health Services (DHS), Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA), First 5 LA and Public Counsel along with other advocates in Skid Row to "*assure that the services to Skid Row families are adequately coordinated.*"

Policy Roundtables: As the chair for the First 5 LA Board of Commissioners, Supervisor Molina directed First 5 LA staff to convene policy roundtables focusing on program and policy solutions to improve child safety among homeless families. On January 31, 2006 and March 15, 2006, two policy roundtables on family homelessness were held with more than 40 representatives from various county and city departments and homeless advocacy/service agencies. The discussion resulted in recommendations intended for the county departments taking a lead role in partnership with other groups noted in the December 2005 Board motion (DCFS, DPSS, DMH, DHS, LAHSA), the Chief Administrative Office, First 5 LA commission, homeless community providers, city and county policymakers, and advocates for children and families. These recommendations will also benefit current county-wide planning efforts around homelessness, including the Blue Ribbon Panel's work on the *Bring LA Home*.

Integration & Collaboration: As prior Board Motions acknowledged and based on county department reports, a number of internal policy and practice changes along with increased collaborative efforts have been underway to improve the outreach, assessment, and services to homeless families with children who are in Skid Row. It was also apparent in both roundtable discussions that county departments were eager to identify and work towards furthering not just internal systems improvement, but also in strengthening networks to achieve cross systems integration of program delivery and funding resources. They identified a desire to partner with private and business institutions, recognizing this as a key strategy to address the county-wide problem of family homelessness. Similarly, engaging faith-based organizations as partners was acknowledged as another critical area of focus in which cultivating better partnership may leverage increased support and resources needed by homeless families. As the panel of experts reiterated, *government cannot do this alone*. Successful efforts toward service and policy reforms will also depend on creating these wider public-private alliances in all efforts to relocate families back into their own communities and re-establish a supportive environment.

Recommendation Highlights: While there is general recognition that a high concentration of homeless people are located in Skid Row, a number of roundtable participants underscored the need to look at the problem of family homelessness as a countywide issue as well as generate solutions that include linking and developing resources on a regional level, *outside* Skid Row. This approach is consistent with the premise that families coming to downtown Los Angeles need to be reconnected back to their communities of origin and to complement formal support services with the families' natural support network.

Another important element for implementing the zero-tolerance policy for families in Skid Row rests on providing immediate safe housing alternatives as well as supportive services to keep families together. Given the urgency of moving families and children away from the dangerous environment of Skid Row, a triage approach has been recommended to institute a process that immediately identifies families who are willing to relocate and to initiate an in-depth assessment of and services to those who are reticent to leave the area without risk of losing their children *simply* because they are homeless. Meanwhile, it remains necessary to address the dangerous environment in skid row, particularly for children. Therefore, safe zones or family-friendly areas near downtown Los Angeles need to be identified and made accessible to homeless families who are yet to be relocated away from Skid Row. For example, this may include an outdoor play area or an indoor after-school center for children to socialize or do homework.

Finally, preventing new families from becoming homeless or coming into Skid Row is critical in ensuring child safety and well being. Proposed solutions to divert families include

- cross-systems staff training of outreach workers, community service providers, and county workers on available services, eligibility, screening and referral protocols
- coordinated and aggressive outreach strategy and intervention services that target low and high-needs families;
- increased focus on preventative approaches by investing on supportive, family preservation, and intensive case management services;
- development of flexible rental subsidies and “master leases”;
- extension of CalWORKs Welfare-to-Work homeless benefits to all CalWORKs-eligible families; and
- development of a delivery model supported by a blended funding streams.

These strategies may provide more time and cost-efficient options compared to other alternatives involving higher costs such as creating new homeless facilities that also take many years to develop.

Next Steps: The role of First 5 LA as a convener of these discussions is linked with the commission’s focus on health, safety and well-being of children and families. These recommendations will also be considered to inform future programs and investments for First 5 LA, particularly in the Partnership for Families initiative, First 5 LA’s flagship to support and address child safety.

Summary of Recommendations for Homeless Families with Children in Skid Row

Main Issues Identified	Proposed Solutions	Potential Coordinating Agencies
<p>1. Service Gaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of child and family-oriented facilities; transportation; health services; preventive services; children's recreation 	Please refer to the Summary Reports from Policy Roundtables 1 & 2 for more information about the following items:	
	Identify a "safe zone" for families in downtown LA.	CAO, LAHSA, City of LA
	Create a "triage" protocol to immediately relocate families out of Skid Row and help them return to their neighborhoods.	DHS, DCFS, DPSS, DMH, LAHSA
	Prioritize various preventive strategies (i.e., flexible rental subsidies, master leases, case management, supportive services, CHDP, pregnancy prevention) and focus on diverting or relocating new homeless families.	DPSS, DCFS, DMH
	Identify alternative funds to create a bridge for extending WTW homeless assistance to all CALWORKS recipients.	DPSS, DCFS
	Develop recreational activities and educational enrichment services for homeless children.	LAHSA
<p>2. Limited housing options</p>	Create regionalized response by decentralizing services out of Skid Row and build programs in other areas of county.	CAO, LAHSA
	Priorities funds for flexible rental subsidies are needed to help families afford housing	CAO
	Hire "housing locators" to help families identify more long-term housing alternatives.	DPSS, DMH
	Invite city representatives to identify ways to fast-track homeless services.	CAO
<p>3. Lack of awareness & coordination among service providers and homeless families.</p>	County departments need to partner with each other, with homeless providers, private businesses and institutions, and faith-based community to develop affordable housing.	CAO, LAHSA, City of LA
	Provide inter-agency cross training for county staff, community service providers, and outreach teams.	DPSS, DCFS, F5LA
	Develop a website that can serve as a central resource directory for homeless families and children, as well as Department contact persons.	CAO, DPSS
	Set up ongoing meetings with all Skid Row outreach teams to improve coordination, exchange information, and cross-train staff.	DPSS, DCFS, LAHSA
	Increase outreach to families in Skid Row & develop strategies for low to high-needs families.	DPSS, DCFS, CAO, LAHSA
	Create a family access center (one-stop shop) in downtown LA, but not in Skid Row.	DMH, DPSS, DCFS
<p>4. Program rules, city ordinances and funding rules present administrative barriers to service expansion & integration.</p>	Develop a public education campaign to raise awareness about homelessness issues and services available to them.	
	Invite city and private agency representatives to work with county departments to improve homeless services.	CAO, LAHSA, City of LA
<p>5. Families in skid row have diverse needs, including severe developmental and mental disabilities & substance abuse that may place children at risk.</p>	Develop a service delivery model that can be supported by multiple "blended" funding streams	CAO
	Develop a triage approach addressing different types of families with low versus high need.	DMH, DPSS, DCFS, LAHSA
	Use Prop 63 funds to address needs of families with mental health issues.	CAO, DMH
	Consumer perspective must be included in program design and outreach. Services need to consider the transitional needs of families who have built a social network in skid row and assist them in transitioning into a new location.	CAO, LAHSA
	Extend DCFS & DPSS staffing coverage (hours & co-location), family preservation services, and immediate response.	DCFS, DPSS
Create universal intake and assessment forms/processes for different outreach teams to assess for child safety.	DCFS, DPSS, LAHSA	