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Date: May 8, 2018  
To: Members of the City Council  
From:  Paul Duncan, Associate Director of Performance Management  
cc: Meg Barclay, Homelessness Coordinator, Office of the City Administrative Officer  
Peter Lynn, Executive Director, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority  
Chris Callandrillo, Director of Programs, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority  
Subject: **REPORT BACK ON CF 17-1383 – REUNIFICATION PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

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I am pleased to transmit the enclosed report on reunification outcomes provided by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) in response to City Council Motion 17-1383, requesting an assessment of reunification assistance and the feasibility of a standalone pilot program in Council District 6.

The report provides an assessment of family and friend reunification programs provided by LAHSA for reconnecting individuals and families experiencing homelessness in the City of Los Angeles. Reunification is integrated into all LAHSA programs as a strategy for connecting participants to safe and stable housing.

This report summarizes reunification outcomes by program type, while also summarizing data collection practices for these programs. Since 2015, we find a significant increase in the number of individuals reconnecting with family members through street outreach and Rapid Re-Housing programs.

Recommendation

LAHSA does not recommend proceeding with a standalone Friends and Family Reunification Program for Council District 6 at this time as reunification is an existing element of all LAHSA programs. Moving forward, LAHSA will expand utilization of family reunification within our Prevention and Diversion programs and will continue to improve data collection and assess best practices among our providers successfully utilizing reunification resources.

I would be happy to meet with you and your staff to review the report. Please direct any questions or concerns to me at [pduncan@lahsa.org](mailto:pduncan@lahsa.org) or 213-683-3333.

PD:tk

Enclosed report

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# Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority

Report Back on CF 17-1383  
Reunification Outcomes in Homelessness Programs

May 8, 2018

## INTRODUCTION

This report is prepared in response to City Council Motion 17-1383, requesting an assessment of reunification services offered to persons experiencing homelessness in the City of Los Angeles and the feasibility of establishing a pilot reunification program in Council District 6. The following provides an overview of reunification assistance for individuals experiencing or at-risk of homelessness in the Los Angeles Continuum of Care (LA CoC). Reunification is a core component of all programs that are administered by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA). This report will identify how reunification assistance is integrated into current programs including:

- Rapid Re-Housing
- Interim Housing
- Street Outreach

The report also details additional reunification programs including the Youth Family Reunification program for transition age youth (TAY). In addition, the report will explore data collection on reunification outcomes, including exits to family and friends by program and across all eight Service Planning Areas (SPAs).

We find that reunification outcomes in the City of Los Angeles are expected to exceed prior year totals, suggesting success with existing efforts to reconnect clients with friends and family, as well as an opportunity to improve reunification practices through further program assessment. In addition, as outreach and other programming are carried out by Service Planning Area, a program based in a single council district would be difficult to administer fiscally and programmatically. As such, LAHSA does not recommend establishing a standalone pilot program at this time.

## BACKGROUND

Family reunification assistance is critical for supporting individuals and families experiencing homelessness who have expressed interest in reconnecting with support networks both locally and outside of the region. According to the 2017 Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count, 71% of the unsheltered homeless population in the LA CoC resided in Los Angeles County prior to becoming homeless, while 78% resided in Southern California. Two-thirds of unsheltered adults and children in adult families have resided in Los Angeles County for more than ten years. As such, many persons experiencing homelessness can exit homelessness either by re-connecting with family and friends that live within Los Angeles County, while a smaller number may reconnect with family and friends by receiving travel assistance to go to a destination outside Los Angeles County. In all cases, LAHSA staff and contracted providers' staff make contact with destination homes to ensure that participants are returning to a safe and welcoming environment that is equipped to receive them.

At present, LAHSA is in late-stage development of its first standalone reunification program, the Youth Family Reunification program, in addition to continued provision of reunification assistance for participants seeking family reunification within other LAHSA programs. In screening clients for program entry in all programs, providers are advised to encourage family and friend reunification when possible and assist in connecting clients to resources to facilitate reunification. Historically, service providers have implemented reunification into service delivery without formal guidance and tracking from LAHSA. Family reunification may be more formally addressed as a system goal as LAHSA assesses successful

provider utilization of reunification as an intervention. In FY 2016-2017, we find that 2,073 persons exited LAHSA programs to a family member or a friend,<sup>1</sup> on a permanent or temporary basis, comprising 5% of recorded program exits for the year.

The City of Los Angeles' Comprehensive Homeless Strategy (CHS) does not include a formal reunification program but, rather, references family reunification as a potential component of the city's approved strategies including *6E: Evaluate Homeless Navigation Centers* and *7T: Homeless Prevention and Diversion Programs*. The development of formal standalone reunification programs is, however, aligned with the County of Los Angeles' Approved Strategies to Combat Homelessness. In accordance with *Los Angeles County Strategy E14: Enhanced Services for Transition Aged Youth*, LAHSA will launch the family reconnection program for transition age youth (TAY) across the eight service planning areas in Spring 2018. The Youth Family Reconnection Program ("Family Reconnection") will provide clinical and crisis management support to facilitate reconnection of youth experiencing homelessness with family members and/or strengthen adult connections to achieve housing stability.

#### I. OVERALL REUNIFICATION OUTCOMES BY EXIT DESTINATION & PROGRAM TYPE

At present, reunification outcomes are identified by exit destinations in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) selected by agencies upon a client's separation from a program. Agencies can indicate whether a client has relocated, on permanent or temporary basis, to a family member or a friend. Additionally, clients can exit to an unknown destination, which may include cases of reunification occurring without agency assistance and/or knowledge; the data on these types of exits are largely unknown and are not reflected in the numbers of reunification exits in the tables below.

**Table 1. Family and Friends Exits from All Exits by Fiscal Year, Los Angeles County**

Exit Destination	FY 15-16	FY 16-17	FY 17-18 Q1 & Q2	All Exits Total
Staying with Family Permanent or Temporary	1,476	1,562	1,056	4,094
Staying with Friends Permanent or Temporary	603	511	322	1,436
<b>Reunification Exits</b>	<b>2,079</b>	<b>2,073</b>	<b>1,378</b>	<b>5,530</b>
<b>All Exits Total</b>	<b>42,796</b>	<b>38,057</b>	<b>18,435</b>	<b>99,288</b>

**Table 2. Family and Friends Exits as Percentage of Total Exits by Fiscal Year, Los Angeles County**

Exit Destination	FY 15-16	FY 16-17	FY 17-18 Q1 & Q2	All Exits Total
Staying with Family Permanent or Temporary	3.5%	4.1%	5.7%	4.1%
Staying with Friends Permanent or Temporary	1.4%	1.3%	1.8%	1.5%
<b>Reunification Exits</b>	<b>4.9%</b>	<b>5.4%</b>	<b>7.5%</b>	<b>5.6%</b>

<sup>1</sup> All data points drawn from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), which reflects Los Angeles County.

In FY 2016-2017, client reunification to a family member or a friend comprised four (4%) and one percent (1%) of total exits destinations from LAHSA programs, respectively. Notably, cases of reunification in FY 2017-2018 are on pace to exceed prior year reunification exit totals by 33%. This may partially be a result of improving data collection on reunification exits in addition to actual increases in reunification exits.

Table 3 (see following page) provides a disaggregation of reunification outcomes by program type. We find that family and friend reunification occurs across all programs, with the highest number of cases in Emergency Shelter, Rapid Re-Housing and Street Outreach. In the first two quarters of FY 2017 alone, recorded cases of reunification in Rapid Re-Housing and Street Outreach have nearly met or exceeded previous year totals. Cases have decreased in Transitional Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing.

**Table 3. Family and Friends Exits by Program Type by Fiscal Year**

Exit Destination/Program Type	FY 15-16	FY 16-17	FY 17-18 Q1 & Q2	All Exits Total
<b>Staying with Family Permanent or Temporary</b>	<b>1,476</b>	<b>1,562</b>	<b>1,056</b>	<b>4,094</b>
Coordinated Assessment	0	6	0	6
Day Shelter	9	41	0	50
Emergency Shelter	505	440	249	1,194
Homeless Prevention	33	111	44	188
PH - Housing Only	1	0	3	4
PH - Housing with Services (no disability required)	2	4	0	6
PH - Permanent Supportive Housing (disability required)	110	99	24	233
PH - Rapid Re-Housing	271	352	294	917
Safe Haven	N/A	N/A	1	1
Services Only	66	66	42	174
Street Outreach*	9	106	296	411
Transitional Housing	470	337	103	910
<b>Staying with Friends Permanent or Temporary</b>	<b>603</b>	<b>511</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>1,436</b>
Coordinated Assessment	0	1	0	1
Day Shelter	5	17	0	22
Emergency Shelter	214	129	105	448
Homeless Prevention	15	24	2	41
PH - Housing Only	0	1	0	1
PH - Housing with Services (no disability required)	1	0	0	1
PH - Permanent Supportive Housing (disability required)	28	30	13	71
PH - Rapid Re-Housing	119	131	109	359
Services Only	21	23	18	62
Street Outreach	2	21	36	59
Transitional Housing	198	134	39	371
<b>All Exits Total</b>	<b>2,079</b>	<b>2,073</b>	<b>1,378</b>	<b>5,530</b>

\*The significant rise in reunification outcomes for street outreach may be attributed to an increase in outreach resources and/or incomplete data collection in previous years.

SPA 2 (San Fernando Valley), which includes council districts 2, 3, 6, 7, 12 and portions of districts 4 and 5, has seen an increase in reunification exits since 2015, driven by a significant rise in family reconnection outcomes. In addition, SPA 2 exits comprise a growing share of reunification exits across the county. SPA 2 and SPA 6 (South Los Angeles) are on track to double the number of reunification exits, with figures for the first two quarters of the current fiscal year exceeding prior year totals.

**Table 4. Family and Friends Exits by Program Type by Fiscal Year for Service Planning Area 2<sup>2</sup>**

SPA	Fiscal Year			
	FY 15-16	FY 16-17	FY 17-18 Q1 & Q2	All Exits Total
<b>Exit Destinations</b>				
<b>SPA 2: San Fernando Valley</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>461</b>
Staying with Family Permanent or Temporary	84	134	132	350
Staying with Friends Permanent or Temporary	42	32	37	111
<b>Grand Total of County Reunification Exits (% of SPA 2 exits)</b>	<b>2,079 (6%)</b>	<b>2,073 (8%)</b>	<b>1,378 (12%)</b>	<b>5,530 (8%)</b>

#### *Returns to Homelessness*

Reunification assistance is intended to divert participants from entering into the homeless services system, and provide a pathway to stable housing and social connection. HMIS data shows a small rate of returns to homelessness by persons with previous reunification exits, suggesting that the majority of reconnection exits result in successful long-term outcomes. In SPA 2, HMIS data showed that a total of 60 persons, or 13% of the total of 461 reunification exits, subsequently enrolled in another program, suggesting they re-entered homelessness. This rate of return to homelessness is comparable or lower than many other homelessness programs. It should also be noted that a sample size of 461 exits over a two and a half year span is relatively small sample size and time frame and does not encompass the entire universe of homelessness programs, including programs administered by the Veterans Affairs Administration (VA), the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, and others. As such, this data should be interpreted with caution.

#### **Limitations on Reunification Data**

##### *Exit Destinations*

At present, HMIS data does not capture the location of exit destinations, which would identify whether reunification placement occurs within or outside of Los Angeles County. As mentioned earlier, however, 2017 Homeless Count data found that 71% of the unsheltered homeless population in the LA CoC resided in Los Angeles County prior to becoming homeless while 78% resided in Southern California, suggesting that a sizable portion of reunification exits may be within the region.

##### *Diversion Tracking*

LAHSA has created an HMIS module to more effectively track Diversion, a program type which attempts to place households back with family or friends before entering the homeless services system. In previous years, tracking of Diversion across the LA CoC was inconsistent, with some providers failing to enter diverted clients into HMIS and record their exits from the homeless system. With the formal development of an HMIS program for Diversion, which will allow providers to show and track reconnection that happens outside of formal entry into a program, LAHSA will improve its ability to track

<sup>2</sup> Association with a SPA is indicated by the participant's last exit.

the overall number of persons reconnected with family and friends. Providers will also be able to use a small portion of financial assistance through prevention programs to facilitate this work.

## **II. CURRENT PROGRAMS UTILIZING REUNIFICATION**

### **Standalone Programs**

#### *Youth Family Reunification Program*

The 2017 Homeless Count found that 2,796 transition age youth (TAY) in the City of Los Angeles experience homelessness on a given night, a 50% increase from 2016. Seventy-nine percent (79%) are unsheltered. The Youth Family Reconnection program, administered by LAHSA, is designed to provide TAY and unaccompanied minors between the ages of 16-24 who are experiencing homelessness and express interest in family reconnection, with individualized support services to facilitate reunification and a stable housing placement with family members. The program addresses the critical need for wrap-around services and after-care for youth and families to ensure long-term reconnection and housing stability post-reunification. For the purposes of the program, "family" will be defined by the youth and may include biological family and non-biological relationships. The goal of the program is to limit the time youth experience homelessness through connection and relocation with family, and/or connect youth with resources that can help them achieve housing stability with family support.

Upon identification and program enrollment, participants work in coordination with Case Managers to establish a Family Reconnection Plan. Supportive services include individual and family counseling services, crisis intervention, pre-reconnection bonding activities and aftercare support. Enrollment for the program is one year, with an additional six months of aftercare support for participants who relocate back with family. A completion of a standardized home assessment is required prior to reunification.

The Youth Family Reunification Program is in alignment with *Los Angeles County Strategy E14: Enhanced Services for Transition Aged Youth*, and is expected to serve roughly 400 youths per year. The program is budgeted at \$1.75 million. The anticipated kick-off for the program is at the end of April 2018.

#### *Family Reunification Housing Subsidy*

*Los Angeles County Strategy B6: Family Reunification Housing Subsidy (FRHS)* provides Rapid Re-Housing and case management services to homeless families with children in out-of-home care in Los Angeles County, where the sole barrier to reunification is homelessness. Families enrolled in the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) program may lose program eligibility when a child is taken from the home. As a result, families lose financial assistance for housing and children remain in foster care for an extended period of time. Since program implementation in January 2017, 116 families have been enrolled and 50 permanently housed. The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and LAHSA are lead agencies for this strategy.

### **Integration of Reunification into Existing Program Types**

#### *Rapid Re-Housing and Homeless Prevention*

Rapid Re-Housing is a proven housing intervention that quickly places individuals and families experiencing homelessness in stable housing with case management services. Homeless Prevention programs will be providing services for individuals and families at-risk of homelessness to stabilize in current housing or access other housing opportunities to prevent homelessness. Agencies are asking

participants what, if any, resources or options they may have to divert them from entering the homeless services system, including reconnection with family and friends. Agencies can provide reunification assistance to a participant through the duration of program enrollment if and when a participant expresses an interest in reconnecting and relocating with family or friends. Family reunification can also be part of a participant's Housing Stability Plan, whereby a case worker can assist a participant in facilitating reconnection through financial assistance and other supportive services. In cases where a client expresses interest and a location for reunification, case management staff make contact with the family member or friend that will be receiving the client and affirm that they are willing to receive the client and that it is a safe environment for the client to return to. Upon the completion of reunification and relocation process, agencies must exit participants from program enrollment.

Funding is available for reunification assistance in the form of transportation subsidies, which are distributed upon verification that a family member or friend outside of Los Angeles County has agreed to provide permanent housing to the client. Subsidized transportation includes travel by bus, train, or plane, with expenses paid directly to transportation providers. Agencies are required to select the most cost-effective option. If a participant with an automobile expresses a need for financial assistance for fuel costs, a gas card can be provided based on mileage and estimated fuel costs. In FY 2016-2017, 483 individuals exited Rapid Re-Housing programs to a family member or friend, a 24% increase from the prior year. Reunification exits in Rapid Re-Housing are expected to exceed previous year totals in FY17-18.

#### *Interim Housing*

Crisis housing provides individuals and families experiencing homelessness with short-term emergency shelter, providing clients a stable and supportive environment as they self-resolve their homelessness or are connected to more safe and supportive housing resources. Upon entry into an Interim Housing program, providers are required to make efforts to divert the client from the homeless system and encourage reunification. These diversion and reunification efforts are conducted in an ongoing manner as staff screen for alternative housing options and are conducted in alignment with trauma-informed care principles to ensure that the family member or friend that may receive the client is going to a safe and stable environment.

In FY 2016-17, emergency shelter programs saw 569 individuals exiting through reunification with friends and family, the highest total of all LAHSA program types. An increase in reunification exits is expected in FY17-18, with the first half of the year recording 354 unique cases of family and friend reconnection.

#### *Street Outreach*

LAHSA's Homeless Engagement Teams (HET) provide direct outreach to individuals experiencing homelessness, which can include support and financial assistance for reconnecting participants with family members and friends. In cases where individuals express an interest in reunification, outreach team members facilitate the process of assessing identified family members and friends for placement, and provide financial assistance for transportation. Prior to facilitating transportation, LAHSA HET staff affirm that a family member or friend is willing to receive the participant and can provide them with a safe and stable environment. At present, LAHSA does not administer formal guidance on reconnection services for outreach, which are often "one-off" interactions with participants. Post-relocation contacts with participants to ensure arrival at their destination and housing stability afterward are currently not required of outreach teams.

Reunification exits through street outreach has grown significantly since 2015, likely driven by an increase in street outreach resources and participant tracking. Figures for the current fiscal year (Q1 & Q2 only) are more than twice the number for FY16-17, with triple the number of family reunification outcomes.

### **III. PILOT PROGRAM FEASIBILITY**

HMIS data indicates that persons experiencing homelessness are exiting programs through reunification and doing so in increasing numbers across programs and throughout the City of Los Angeles. The increase is largely driven by high numbers of exits to family and friends from Rapid Re-housing and Street Outreach, areas that have received significant investment from the City and County. A standalone Family and Friends Reunification Program would duplicate existing successful efforts that are successfully reconnecting persons with family and friends. As noted earlier, SPA 2, which includes Council District 6, is one of two SPAs in the county with reunification exits on pace to double the number of reunification exits from the previous fiscal year. In addition, while HMIS data is limited, it suggests that reunification is a successful long-term outcome for the vast majority of persons that exit the homeless services system through reunification.

The proposed pilot also introduces challenges in administering a program contained within a single council district, the boundaries of which may not align with the County Service Planning Areas used for managing homeless services in the county. SPA 2 contains seven council districts, the largest concentration of districts among all SPAs. In addition, the introduction of a reunification pilot may introduce staffing challenges and divert staffing resources from other programs.

### **III. RECOMMENDATION**

LAHSA recommends a bi-annual assessment and report on the effectiveness of efforts to reunify persons experiencing homelessness with family and friends. Programs have built-in efforts to assist persons in reunifying and Los Angeles has seen success in reunification, and could benefit from deeper monitoring of the long-term effectiveness of the program. LAHSA has awarded funding for programs that will provide case management for up to nine months after youth have reunified with family to meet known needs that youth often face with reconnecting. This provides an opportunity to track outcomes after the initial period of reconnection, and the long-term effectiveness of a standalone program. Assessing ongoing data and best practices will allow for an informed approach of improving existing programs and optimizing existing reunification. LAHSA does not recommend proceeding with a pilot program at this time.