



**City of Seattle**  
Human Services Department

**Date:** July 1, 2013

**To:** Councilmember Nick Licata, Chair,  
Seattle City Council Housing, Human Services, Health & Culture Committee

Sally Bagshaw, Councilmember  
Bruce Harrell, Councilmember  
Tom Rasmussen, Councilmember

**From:** Catherine Lester, Interim Director  
Human Services Department

**Re:** Human Services Department response to City Council Statement of Legislative Intent, 104-1-A-1,  
requesting a report on barriers to housing for homeless families.

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This memorandum transmits the Seattle Human Services Department's (HSD) response to the Seattle City Council's Statement of Legislative Intent 104-1-A-1 included in the 2013 Adopted Budget, requesting that HSD, in collaboration with King County Family Homelessness Initiative, Family Housing Connection (FHC) and others provide reports to the Housing, Human Services, Health and Culture Committee on prioritization and access to housing for homeless families. HSD submitted its first report to City Council on January 30, 2013 on the prioritization policy for placement of homeless families into housing implemented by FHC.

The attached report provides information regarding the extent to which issues including, but not limited to, different interpretations or definitions of homelessness, and strict eligibility criteria related to sobriety, are barriers to housing for homeless families. The report also includes information regarding HSD's efforts to address these barriers, including training and technical assistance, investments and partnerships

I appreciate your commitment and support of our goal that all children and their families in Seattle are safe and have a roof over their heads. I am happy to answer any questions you may have about HSD's attached report.

**CC:** Beth Goldberg, City Budget Office  
Jeanette Blankenship, City Budget Office  
Ben Noble, Council Central Staff  
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Susana Serna, Council Central Staff  
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Debbi Knowles, Family Homeless Initiative Project Manager, King County

**Seattle Human Services Department  
Barriers to Housing Experienced by Homeless Families  
Response to Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) 104-1-A-1**

**I. Introduction**

This report responds to Council's request to provide information regarding barriers faced by families who are homeless while attempting to access housing. The report explores barriers related to program eligibility, income and housing costs and the needs of families for specific services. The report utilizes data from the Family Housing Connection (FHC), Safe Harbors and the Seattle Office of Civil Rights. Local data has been provided whenever possible, with state and national data used when local data was not available.

In the Seattle City Council's Statement of Legislative Intent 104-1-A-1, Council requested a review of the proposed policy for prioritizing placement of homeless families in permanent housing and a report on barriers for families accessing housing. The Seattle Human Services Department (HSD), in collaboration with King County Family Homelessness Initiative, Family Housing Connection and others, was requested to provide two reports to the Housing, Human Services, Health and Culture Committee:

- 1) The proposed prioritization policy for placement of homeless families into housing that will be implemented by the Family Housing Connections (FHC) Program. This report was submitted to City Council on January 30, 2013.
- 2) Information regarding the extent to which issues including but not limited to, different interpretations or definitions of homelessness, and strict eligibility criteria related to sobriety, are barriers to housing for homeless families. In addition, if barriers are identified, what recommended policy or program changes could be implemented to help families overcome identified barriers and to access housing.

This report also includes information regarding HSD investments that address the barriers identified, as well as work being done to reduce barriers for families as part of the Family Homelessness Initiative (FHI) the City of Seattle Office of Housing (OH), the King County Office of Civil Rights and City of Seattle Office of Civil Rights (SOCR). Additional background on FHI and Family Housing Connection is included in Appendix A.

**II. Summary**

Families experiencing homelessness appear to face barriers that generally fall into three categories: program eligibility criteria, low income and education levels and specific service needs. Families self-report their characteristics and needs during the assessment conducted by Family Housing Connection (FHC).

Data from FHC reveals that while families may have barriers, they also have strengths that help them successfully stabilize in housing, such as low or no criminal history, recent work experience and past home ownership or prior experience renting. The majority have never been evicted. In fact, most families appear to have relatively low barriers and are experiencing homelessness for the first time.

Barriers that homeless families face include:

- Program eligibility criteria can be shaped by an agency's mission, who they have traditionally served and funding sources. In addition to serving homeless families, many agencies have as part of their mission statements language about serving specific communities and providing culturally specific services.
- Lack of income and employment can be a significant barrier for families, many of whom lack college degrees and access to the higher paying jobs required to afford housing in Seattle. The majority of families are very low income; 93% of families have incomes under 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI). A moderate number of families are also impacted by debt.
- Families need services, including chemical dependency services, mental health services, domestic violence services and culturally specific services. While both homeless families and families that are doubled up report needing many of the same services, a larger percentage of homeless families report interest in receiving services for chemical dependency and mental health.

**Removing barriers to housing.** On a systems level, HSD has been working with others in the regional effort to end family homelessness. In March 2013, agencies and funders participated in training designed to increase their understanding of fair housing laws; additional technical assistance was provided to help agencies revise their eligibility criteria.

Revised program criteria will be implemented and utilized by FHC this summer. Progress in reducing barriers will be measured by the increase of successful referrals through FHC and reduced time to place families in the appropriate program.

In addition, HSD currently invests in programs that help families reduce their housing barriers. Programs such as Career Bridge, Landlord Liaison Project and the Living Cities financial empowerment program have focused on addressing barriers such as employment, education and income. The Rapid Rehousing Pilot recently released by King County is one example of a collaborative project that will quickly address barriers such as income and employment by providing families with employment navigators. Support of these programs, such as the planned expansion of Career Bridge in 2014, will further assist families in removing barriers to housing.

HSD will continue to participate in the system transformation work being done with partners such as FHI, FHC, Building Changes and others to identify and address barriers to housing for families. At the same time, HSD will work directly with agencies to ensure contracting and funding requirements do not create barriers for families and to ensure funding remains flexible enough to effectively address the barriers that do exist.

### **III. Family Characteristics**

A picture emerges of the families who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness in Seattle and King County from the family assessments collected by FHC during the first year of coordinated entry. The majority are people of color, and more than half have children who are younger than 6. One-third of parents are 25 or younger.

Families bring strengths that are not always easily measured through data collection, but are important. For the majority of families, homelessness was a new experience, as 70% reported they were experiencing homelessness for the first time. Most families have relatively low barriers, with strengths that could help them successfully stabilize in housing. These strengths included low or no criminal history (85%), recent work experience (56%), and past home ownership or prior experience renting (77%). The majority of families (67%) have never been evicted.

Seven percent (7%), or 215, of the families on the placement list as of April 2013 were homeless (living in places not meant for human habitation) and more than half were doubled up with friends or family. Another 15% were staying in some form of emergency housing (a shelter or using hotel/motel vouchers), 4% were in a hotel without a voucher to pay for their room, and 10% were in a rental apartment without a housing subsidy. A small percentage of families (1%) were in a substance abuse or detoxification treatment center, while 3% were staying in transitional housing.

#### **IV. Barriers To Housing**

Families experiencing homelessness face housing barriers that fall roughly into three categories: 1) program eligibility criteria that make accessing services that could help them challenging; 2) low income and education levels that keep them in poverty and unable to afford market rate housing; and 3) specific service requirements that need to be addressed as they work to acquire and maintain housing.

On the following pages is a description of these categories and information on what HSD, working with FHI, FHC, providers and funders, is doing to address these barriers. FHC data cited comes from assessments of families, and covers the period of April 2012 through April 2013 unless otherwise indicated.

##### **A. Program Eligibility Criteria**

###### **1. Identified Eligibility Barriers**

Many of the eligibility barriers noted in this report were first noticed in 2012 by FHC. As they began using agencies' eligibility criteria to refer families to services, FHC reported seeing a number of families whose referrals were not accepted by agencies. Some of the criteria being used were creating barriers for families, and these returning families meant additional time and resources had to be spent finding other referrals for the families who were denied, and identifying other families to send to the agencies.

To ensure that the practices of FHC and its partner agencies were in compliance with fair housing and to address the barriers caused by some eligibility criteria, King County FHI formed a workgroup and invited the HSD, OH, King County and City of Seattle Offices of Civil Rights, the Washington State Human Rights Commission, and the King County and City of Seattle Housing Authorities to participate.

The workgroup examined examples of eligibility criteria that had been submitted by agencies to FHC, such as:

- Requirements that clients with mental health conditions or clients who are disabled have to be able to live independently.

- Requirements that clients are employed, looking for work, or able to work.
- Requirements that limit the age of children, the household status, or the gender of those being served: only single mothers, only mothers with preschool age children, etc.
- Requirements that dictate the length of drug and alcohol programs or dictate the length of sobriety prior to program entry.
- Requirements that limit the severity of mental illness a client has; more serious mental health challenges would bar the client.

These criteria were resulting in families who were otherwise eligible for a program being screened out of that program. A single father could be denied services because of his gender, a disabled adult could be denied services because of his or her inability to work, someone recovering from alcoholism could be denied services if he or she had not been sober for the required amount of time.

## 2. Agency Mission and Values

Agencies develop their own eligibility criteria to screen families to determine if they meet the requirements for particular programs. The criteria are influenced not only by the funding sources, but by each agency's mission. In addition to serving homeless families, many agencies have as part of their mission statements language about serving specific communities, providing culturally specific services, ending poverty and other race and social justice goals.

HSD, along with other area funders, shares these values and has invested in culturally specific programs for homeless families in order to address the historic discrimination communities of color, including refugee and immigrant communities, have faced in obtaining housing as and meet the needs of the current, disproportionate number of people of color who are experiencing homelessness.

However, this mission-driven focus poses challenges when it comes to eligibility criteria and coordinated entry. Agencies are still able to provide culturally specific services and serve specific communities, but with a centralized, coordinated referral system, agencies are no longer able to do "targeted marketing" to attract specific populations directly to their agency. While agencies have always been required under fair housing laws to accept eligible clients, regardless of national origin, race or gender, through coordinated entry agencies receive more clients who fall outside of their area of specialization than before.

## 3. Funding Sources

Agencies often have multiple funding sources, some of which can impact eligibility criteria. Funding sources can include local City of Seattle general funds; Seattle Housing Levy; federal Emergency Solutions Grant, McKinney-Vento or Community Development Block Grant funding; private and philanthropic grants from Building Changes, United Way and other local and national funders.

Local Housing Authorities have additional criteria for different programs (tenant based, project based, housing choice voucher and Move to Work). While there are rules, there is an appeals process and Housing Authority staff is very willing to work with agencies.

An example of this flexibility is the case of someone with a criminal background who would otherwise be denied access to housing. Local Housing Authorities may consider letters of support regarding that person's rehabilitation; if supportive services will be provided to the person that may also be taken into account when considering waiving existing rules. The importance of agency staff knowing how to prepare appeals and having the capacity to do so is crucial to reducing barriers for families; this was addressed at a recent training (see Section VII Current Efforts to Reduce Housing Barriers for more information).

While the funding sources noted require adherence to fair housing and other laws, some have also funded agencies in part because of the population they serve. Some agencies have expressed concern that if they are serving families from many different populations, they may be out of compliance with the funding requirements.

Through participation in the fair housing training and Q and A, HSD and other local funders, including OH and Seattle Housing Authority (SHA), have affirmed the importance of compliance with fair housing laws and their expectations that agencies should accept eligible families. For more information on the fair housing training and Q and A, see Section III, Current Efforts to Reduce Barriers.

## **B. Income, Education and Housing Costs**

### **1. Income and Employment**

Lack of income and employment can be significant barriers to accessing permanent housing for many families. Families' responses to questions in the coordinated entry assessment reveal that many are unemployed, low income and interested in improving both their education and income levels. Education and employment services were requested by 83% of families during their coordinated entry assessment, and 70% indicated they were unemployed.

Ninety-three percent (93%) of families have incomes under 30% of the Area Median Income (AMI); for a family of three this would mean an income less than \$23,400. Data provided by Westat and Building Changes in October 2012 noted that the median monthly income for homeless families in a longitudinal research cohort for King County was \$646, with 58% on families receiving income from TANF and 20% having their own earned income.

The basic family budget calculator from the Economic Policy Institute indicates a single parent family with one child would need an estimated \$38,433 a year in Seattle to pay for housing, food, childcare, healthcare and transportation costs, while a parent with three children would need \$63,045 a year.

**Employment.** While a majority of families report having some education, it may not be enough to bring in the level of income needed to obtain housing in Seattle.

- 28% of families assessed by FHC report having less than a high school degree
- 32% of families report having a high school degree
- 26% of families report having some college
- 14% of families report having a vocational degree or a post-secondary degree

A study by the Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success noted that people with less than a high school diploma have higher unemployment rates, are less healthy and their reduced earning power negatively impacts their children's future.<sup>1</sup> As was stated earlier, a third of families in FHC are young; data from the first six months of coordinated entry revealed that half of the families headed by a parent 25 or younger were aged 18 to 21. The National Center for Education Statistics reports the average salary for young adults without high school diplomas is \$21,000. According to the 2011 American Community Survey, in the state of Washington, the average median income of high school graduates is \$31,001.

For younger workers (those under the age of 25 who are not pursuing additional education), the unemployment numbers nationwide reflect the challenge young families have in obtaining work. Adults under 25 with a high school diploma have 19.9% unemployment, and even those with a college degree experience 8.2% unemployment.<sup>2</sup> Workers 25 years and older with a high school diploma have 7.4% unemployment, while those without a high school diploma have 11.6% rates of unemployment.

In Seattle and King County, 473 families exited a transitional housing in 2012. Their incomes at exit indicate challenges families face in obtaining living wage jobs and reflect their lack of access to market rate housing. At exit, 54% had monthly incomes of \$750 or less, with 6% of families leaving with no income. Of the families with income, 39% had earned income; the remaining families' income was derived from a variety of assistance programs, such as TANF, as well as child support, disability payments and unemployment insurance.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Housing Costs and Debt

Even families that do obtain full-time, permanent work find themselves in a housing market that requires a substantial amount of their paycheck. According to the HUD, households paying more than 30% of their income are considered cost burdened, and their ability to pay for other necessary expenses such as food, transportation and health care may be impacted. In Seattle, the average cost of housing requires low income families to spend considerably more than the recommended one third of income.

Family size can be a barrier to housing. FHC data from April 2012-September 2012 reveals the majority of families (67%) had fewer than four members, with 35% having two members and 32% having three members. This falls in line with data from the 2010 American Community Survey that indicated that the average household size in Seattle for renters was 1.8 and for homeowners was 2.31. Of the families who are larger, 4% have six members, 2% seven

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<sup>1</sup> Marci Foster, Julie Strawn, Amy Ellen Duke-Benfield, *Beyond Basic Skills: State Strategies to Connect Low-Skilled Adults to an Employer-Valued Postsecondary Education*, Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Heidi Shierholz, *At a time of persistent economic weakness, today's jobs report represents an ongoing disaster*, Economic Policy Institute, 2013. <http://www.epi.org/publication/time-persistent-economic-weakness-todays/>

<sup>3</sup> Safe Harbors, *Transitional Housing Income Data for Families, 2012: Data on family households who exited from a transitional housing program in King County during the 2012 calendar year.*

members and 1% eight or more members. For the small number of families on the FHC waitlist with have more than four members, the cost of housing and lack of income is amplified by the challenge of finding housing adequate for a large family.

There are over 300,000 housing units in Seattle; however, the number of affordable rentals is insufficient to meet the demand in King County. For households earning less than \$19,900 in 2010, the demand for affordable units exceeded supply by about 45,500 units. For households earning between \$19,900 and \$31,100, the deficit is estimated to be about 29,000 units.<sup>4</sup>

Subsidized housing does not fill this gap. While approximately 65,250 rental units in Seattle and King County receive some form of public subsidy, only about one-quarter of all subsidized apartments are priced to be affordable to households with incomes of \$19,900 or less. These subsidized units make up 52% of the 31,200 units affordable to households in this income range. Many subsidized units are not reserved for people with specific incomes. Thus, the approximately 40,525 subsidized rentals affordable for households with incomes below \$33,100 include those for households with incomes less than \$19,900.<sup>5</sup>

The table below demonstrates the difference between the housing a 3-4 person family is able to afford and the actual cost of housing in Seattle.

**Table B: Comparison of Family Income with Rental Costs**

Family Size	30% of Median Income	Affordable rent for a 2-3 bedroom unit including utilities, at 30% of Median Income <sup>6</sup>	Average monthly rent for a 2-3 bedroom unit, based on Seattle neighborhoods*
3-4 person household	\$23,400-\$26,000	\$585-\$676	\$1,395-\$2,233

Source: City of Seattle Office of Housing

\*Ballard, Beacon Hill, Belltown/Downtown, First Hill, Magnolia, North Seattle, West Seattle.

Even if families paid significantly more of their income for rent, the average rent in Seattle remains too high for families to obtain housing, much less remain stably housed. The Seattle Housing Levy is a strong tool to leverage other resources to provide more affordable housing, although need continues to out-pace supply of new units.

**Debt.** Complicating some families' ability to obtain housing is debt; 68% of families on the coordinated entry wait list have debt, although only 18% report high levels of debt. Data from

<sup>4</sup> Communities Count, *Demand for affordable rentals (including subsidized units) exceeds supply for households earning less than \$33,000 a year.* <http://www.communitiescount.org/index.php?page=rental-supply-rents>.

<sup>5</sup> Communities Count, *Low-income households rely on a limited supply of subsidized rentals.* <http://www.communitiescount.org/index.php?page=king-county-market-rents>

<sup>6</sup> Office of Housing, *Multi-Family Rental Housing 2012 Income and Rents (as published by HUD on 12/11/12).* [http://www.seattle.gov/housing/development/docs/2013 Income and Rents MF Rental.pdf](http://www.seattle.gov/housing/development/docs/2013%20Income%20and%20Rents%20MF%20Rental.pdf)



April 2012-September 2012 shows that homeless families had more debt, including non-housing related debt, than families who were doubled up or unstably housed.

Forty-nine percent (49%) of homeless families had debt such as medical or credit card debt and 37% of families who were doubled up or unstably housed. A greater percentage of the families who were homeless had high levels of debt: 30% of homeless families, as opposed to 18% of families doubled up or unstably housed.

Nationwide, the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2012 that there was a drop in the number of families with medical debt, but warned that more than 54 million Americans still have medical debt, and families who were uninsured or had public health care coverage were twice as likely to have unmanageable medical debt (debt they could not pay).<sup>7</sup>

### **C. Service Needs of Families**

Families self-report their situation and needs during their FHC assessment. While families are not asked if they believe their need for certain services has been a barrier to accessing housing, their responses to questions regarding service needs do give us a sense of some of the challenges families are facing.

They are given the option of requesting chemical dependency services, mental health services, domestic violence services, and services that are culturally specific. Families may not be steered towards services, but are free to opt in or out, and may call FHC at any time to make changes.

While homeless families and families who are doubled up indicated similar levels of interest in services, a greater percentage of the homeless families living in places not meant for human habitation indicated interest in receiving chemical dependency and mental health services.

#### 1. Chemical dependency services

Overall, ten percent (10%) of families assessed by FHC in its first six months indicated an interest in receiving chemical dependency services. A greater percentage – 17% of those families on the placement list who were homeless (sleeping in cars, outside or other places not meant for human habitation) – wanted chemical dependency services compared to 7% of families who were at risk of homelessness.

While this is not a large number, it was a topic of significant interest at the fair housing training noted earlier in this report. The following highlights from the training give a good indication of the depth and breadth of issues that have surrounded eligibility criteria around drugs and alcohol. Agencies have been asked to revise eligibility criteria, using the guidelines noted below.

Eligibility requirements relating to sobriety and chemical dependency:

- Programs may only use a “clean and sober” designation when funded as a “clean and sober” program.

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<sup>7</sup> Dennis Thompson, *Fewer Families Struggling to Pay Medical Bills*: CDC, HealthDay, 2013.  
<http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=170299>

- A program with a "clean and sober" requirement may require that its residents not have drugs or alcohol in the house, or may have rules that prohibit being under the influence.
- Programs that are not clean and sober may not ban alcohol use; program agreements and leases may however address behavior.

Testing for alcohol or drugs:

- Providers doing random testing should be very cautious that whatever procedure they use (such as testing every 12th individual or testing every week, etc.) has no risk of possible discrimination, however unintended. Providers performing such tests should give applicants and residents the opportunity to share information about any prescription medication they are taking that could influence the test results, such as narcotics or medical marijuana.

## 2. Mental health services

Mental health issues can have an impact of a family's ability to obtain and keep employment and housing. Interest in mental health services was indicated by 31% of families. The need for mental health services is greater among families who are homeless (sleeping in cars, outside or other places not meant for human habitation), with 50% indicating an interested in mental health services.

Some eligibility criteria were found to restricted access to families with severe mental health issues, or indicated families with mental health needs could not be served at all, creating additional barriers. This is currently being addressed, with agencies receiving information and technical support so they can revise their criteria.

## 3. Domestic violence services

Of families interviewed by FHC, 32% requested services for domestic violence. Reducing the barriers to housing for survivors of domestic violence is an issue that is being addressed by both DV-specific and family homeless housing programs.

Criteria used by some domestic violence providers were identified as restricting access to a protected class, gender. Some criteria indicated that only female survivors were eligible for services. When revising their criteria following the fair housing training offered in March, domestic violence agencies were asked to remove references to serving only female survivors, and use language that was not gender specific.

It is not known how extensive the need is in Seattle for domestic violence services for families headed by males or transgender individuals. Data is extremely limited regarding the number of male and transgender survivors of domestic violence. In 2012, seven (7) male clients and one (1) transgender client out of 573 adults were served by HSD funded, short-term housing programs (emergency shelter and hotel/motel vouchers); all eight clients received hotel/motel vouchers. It is not known if they were in a hotel/motel program because they were denied access to shelter or transitional housing, or if there were no bed spaces available at the time.

Additional data is needed to determine how much of a challenge male and transgender survivors of domestic violence are having obtaining housing.

Similarly, agencies that have not traditionally served domestic violence survivors were asked to remove criteria indicating they would not accept clients whose domestic violence abuse was active.

#### 4. Culturally specific or tailored services

Thirty-six percent (36%) of families requested services be culturally specific or tailored, and 14% of families requested services for immigrants and refugees.

A key component of fair housing is the necessity of empowering families to make the choice of services they believe would best serve them, rather than being steered towards or away from services. Adherence to fair housing and laws around protected classes will require changes in the way some agencies provide services. In particular, programs that have traditionally delivered services solely to specific communities, such as refugees and immigrants, need to ensure that their services are accessible and available to all eligible households.

Agencies with missions to serve specific populations, such as Latino families, will need to accept otherwise eligible clients from different populations, while agencies that have not traditionally served a specific group, such as Asian immigrants, will now need to serve them. Not doing so violates laws around national origin, which is a protected class.

#### 5. Arrest and conviction records

In self-reported information to FHC, 85% of families report low or no criminal history. Background checks are not performed by FHC, so it is not possible to know if some families may be uncomfortable revealing an arrest or conviction. The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) reported that in 2009, 34% of DSHS adult clients had been arrested or convicted of a crime; of that number, 34% had experienced homelessness in the past year.

Anecdotal evidence locally shows that arrest records and convictions impact families' ability to access housing and employment. A 2010 Seattle forum on prohibiting discrimination against people with arrest and conviction records yielded public comments from individuals who have been unable to obtain housing or employment because of their records. One individual noted that his conviction 20 years ago continues to prevent him from obtaining housing<sup>8</sup>.

HSD staff indicates that a conviction history and fines related to licensing (traffic violations, parking, re-licensing) pose significant barriers to obtain housing for Career Bridge pilot program participants.

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<sup>8</sup> *Town Square: Prohibiting Discrimination Against People with Arrest and Conviction Records*, Cosponsored by Councilmember Bruce Harrell, Seattle Office of Civil Rights, Seattle Human Rights Commission, and March 16, 2010. <http://www.seattlechannel.org/videos/video.asp?ID=5211117&file=1>

Seattle's Office of Housing, in partnership with the SOCR, is convening housing providers and tenant advocates to discuss ways to reduce barriers to housing for people with criminal records. The group is looking at local practices and national examples and is planning learning sessions for housing providers.

## **V. Current Efforts to Reduce Housing Barriers**

### **A. Training and Technical Assistance**

A specialized training on fair housing focused on shelter, transitional housing services and housing placement services for homeless families, addressed the specific concerns program screening criteria had raised. In March/April 2013, training sessions offered by the King County Office of Civil Rights and the Washington State Human Rights Commission have provided an opportunity for funders and agencies to address specific questions related to fair housing and program screening criteria. These sessions will be repeated later this year.

Training sessions from SHA and King County Housing Authority (KCHA) were also offered as part of the March training session. Agencies learned more about the housing authorities' appeal processes and how to document and submit an appeal. The different eligibility criteria that should be used for project based programs versus tenant based programs were also covered.

In some cases agencies had been confused by the variety of funding requirements imposed by different funders, and had been applying the strictest criteria across all of their programs, in an attempt to ensure they were in compliance. This was creating unnecessary barriers for families.

King County FHI asked all family housing programs to submit revised screening criteria on May 1, 2013; all criteria were reviewed by an FHI panel consisting of the program funders to ensure programs are not creating barriers, based on any misinterpretation of funding requirements or based on practices that would be inconsistent with fair housing or other relevant laws protecting equal access to services.

The panel identified individual program criteria that needed further revisions, and agencies were contacted to revise their criteria further. FHC will begin making referrals based on the final, revised criteria this summer. Using the revised criteria is expected to reduce the amount of time it takes to make a referral, provide more program options for families, and reduce the number of families who are denied services after being referred.

Agencies may need support as they begin working with populations that may have needs different than those of their traditional client base. Training and technical assistance needs will be identified to support agencies as they serve new communities.

HSD will work with contracted agencies to ensure funding requirements do not result in increasing barriers for families, exploring ways to add a fair housing component to current program monitoring and technical support work in order to ensure agencies have the support they need and that barriers for families continue to be reduced. HSD will train its contract management staff on fair housing and protected class laws and will examine contract language to ensure the importance of compliance with fair housing laws and laws around protected classes in all eligibility criteria is clear.

## **B. HSD Current Investments that Address Barriers**

HSD invests in programs that address barriers to employment and housing for individuals and families. Below are brief descriptions of some of these continuing and new programs.

1. Career Bridge: This pilot program works with participants to address the barriers they face obtaining living wage careers. This innovative program recognizes and builds upon the strengths of the participants and their community supporter. Many of the barriers to employment and housing faced by the participants are the same as those faced by families in coordinated entry.
2. Landlord Liaison Project: This project works with individuals and families who could not otherwise access housing due to rental barriers. Participating landlords agree to apply alternative screening criteria to applicants referred for housing through this program in exchange for supportive services to LLP tenants and assistance with any concerns that come up.
3. King County Rapid Rehousing Pilot: HSD is partnering with King County, Building Changes, the United Way and the Seattle and King County Housing Authorities on this pilot, which utilizes progressive engagement techniques to rapidly rehouse families, and connect them with employment services to address barriers related to low income.
4. Financial Empowerment: In partnership with the Mayor's Office, Seattle-King County Asset Building Collaborative (SKCABC) and Burst for Prosperity, HSD has been implementing a Living Cities financial empowerment grant over the past year and a half. This grant has enabled HSD to provide financial empowerment coaching and content training and ongoing technical assistance to seven providers of homelessness prevention programs. By combining financial empowerment with prevention assistance, case managers have been able to address families' income-related barriers in a proactive, strength-based manner.
5. Flexible Funding: HSD recognizes the need for flexible funding for agencies. Recently, HSD approved debt owed to landlords and housing authorities as an approved expense for rapid rehousing programs after receiving feedback from agencies that this was a significant barrier for a small number of families. The department will continue to work with agencies to ensure our contracting and funding is flexible and responsive and supports agencies' ability to address both existing and emerging barriers facing families.

## **C. Partnerships to Support System Transformation and Reduce Barriers**

The Human Services Department will continue to partner with the local Offices of Civil Rights, OH, King County FHI, FHC, agencies and other partners to identify and address barriers to housing for homeless families, as part of the larger system transformation work being done regionally.

## **Appendix A: Background Information on Family Homelessness Initiative**

### **Background**

The Committee to End Homelessness (CEH) in King County has made reducing family homelessness a primary investment priority. In December 2008, King County received funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and United Way of King County to develop a plan to reduce family homelessness. The Family Homelessness Initiative (FHI) was formed to lead the regional planning and implementation to create a more streamlined, accessible system of housing and services to prevent families in crisis from becoming homeless; to rapidly house those who experience homelessness; and to link families to the appropriate amount of services they need for stable housing. The King County Department of Community and Human Services is the lead for the Family Homelessness Initiative efforts on behalf of the CEH. Seattle HSD is a partner in this work, participating in the FHI Advisory Committee and Funders Workgroup, and aligning City of Seattle funding with the goals of the Initiative to maximize and leverage resources.

### **Coordinated Entry: Family Housing Connection**

Creating a Coordinated Entry and Assessment System for homeless families was one of the first important steps in implementing FHI systems change. Coordinated entry is required for communities receiving federal funding and is considered to be a best practice. King County, United Way, and Building Changes provided funding to create a coordinated entry system that launched in April 2012. FHC, operated by Catholic Community Services, is the program that manages the coordinated entry and assessment system for homeless families in King County.

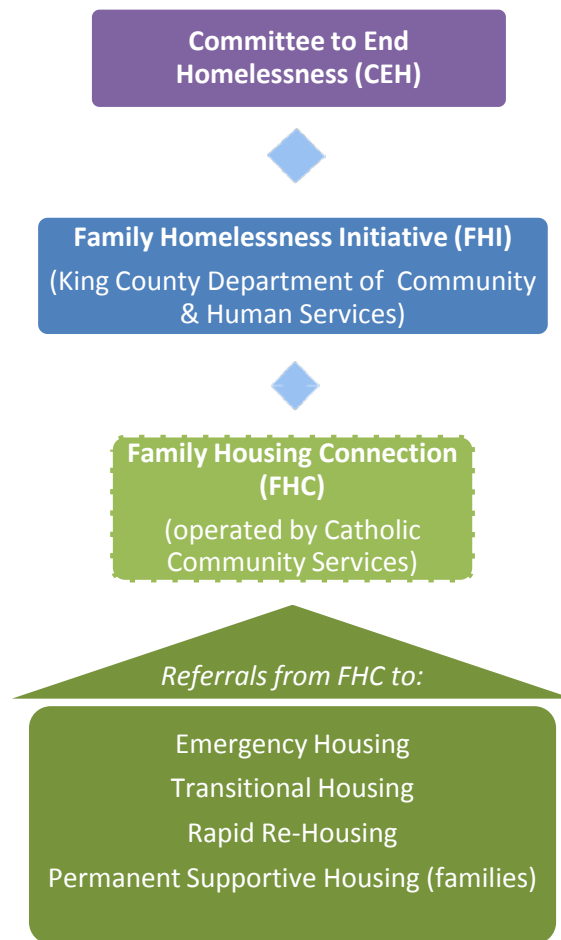
Prior to coordinated entry, families navigated the system on their own, making multiple calls to access services or be placed on waiting lists. Now, FHC helps families who are homeless access emergency housing (shelter), transitional housing and rapid rehousing short-term rental assistance programs. FHC does not connect families with non-time limited, permanent housing.

A family calls 2-1-1, the King County Community Information Line, and is referred to FHC for an assessment; during the assessment they are asked to select any specialized services they might need and are assessed for barriers. Referrals are then made to a program based on the family's needs as identified in the assessment.

Prior to coordinated entry, system-wide information about the number of families who were experiencing homelessness, what their barriers to housing were and what services they needed was limited. Now this information is collected in one database, providing a better sense of what the need is regionally.

A chart that illustrates the agency relationships that make up FHC/coordinated entry's place in the homelessness system is on the following page. HSD participates in CEH, partners with King County and supports coordinated entry by requiring participation by agencies contracted by HSD to provide emergency services, transitional housing and rapid rehousing for families.

### Chart for Family Homelessness Initiative and Coordinated Entry



When FHC first began assessing families in April 2012, both families who were homeless and those who were doubled up or at-risk of homelessness were assessed, put on the placement list and referred to programs based on earliest waitlist date, family size, eligibility and specialized service requests. The families who were doubled up contributed significantly to the size of the placement list.

Currently, families who are staying in a place not meant for human habitation (on the streets, in a car, in an abandoned building) are prioritized by FHC for referral and placement into emergency housing (shelter). HSD provided a report to City Council on the prioritization policy in January 2013.

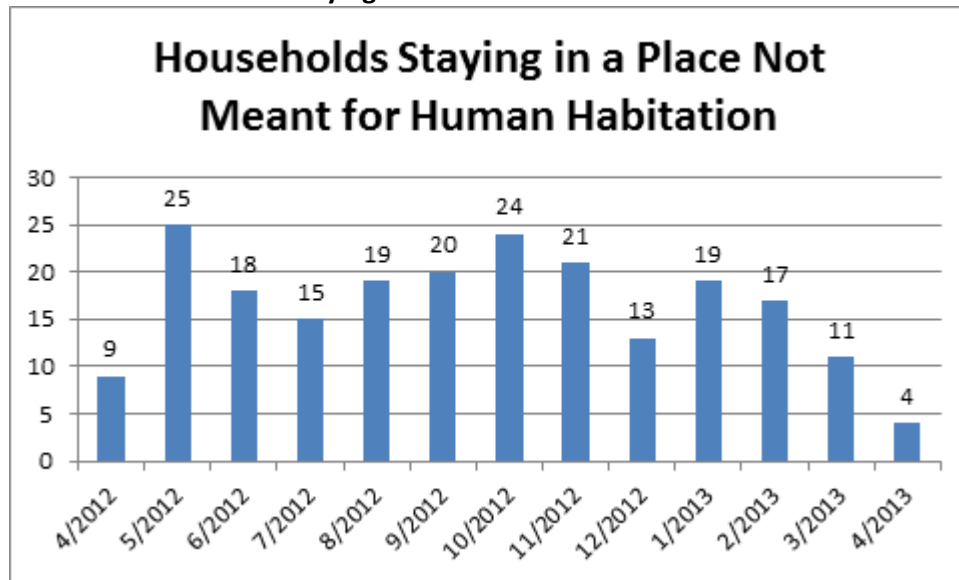
Families currently in emergency housing (shelter) are then referred to rental assistance, transitional housing, service enriched or permanent supportive housing resources; if none of the families in emergency housing are eligible, then FHC would refer the next eligible family on the placement list.

FHC's prioritization policy means that families who are homeless under this definition receive referrals prior to families who are doubled up or at-risk of losing their housing. The families who are homeless receive referrals based on earliest waitlist date, family size, eligibility and specialized service requests.

FHC completed housing assessments for 4,145 families between April 23, 2012 and June 13, 2013. As of June 13, there were 3,487 families on the placement list who have been assessed and are waiting for a referral to emergency housing. This number includes 240 homeless families and 1,962 doubled-up families who report being at-risk of losing their housing.

The table below shows the number of families in coordinated entry who were staying in places not meant for human habitation during the first year, on a month to month basis. The number has remained small throughout the year.

**Table A: Households Staying in a Place Not Meant for Human Habitation**



Source: King County

**Referrals to programs.** 680 households were successfully referred to programs. 247 of these families moved into emergency housing (shelter) or were provided with hotel/motel vouchers; of these families, 435 families moved into rental assistance programs, transitional housing, service enriched housing or permanent supportive housing; many of these families also were referred to emergency housing and/or received hotel/motel vouchers.

There were more referrals than placements; not all referrals resulted in families being accepted into programs. Families rejected 26% of referrals, and 19% of referrals were denied by agencies, according to data from April 2012-April 2013. Agencies can deny families for three reasons: a change in family circumstances (2%), ineligible upon referral (9%), or new information obtained between assessment and referral (8%).

**Federal Definition of Homelessness**

In 2012, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released revised categories and definitions of homelessness. Agencies receiving federal funding for programs are required to use federal definitions when determining eligibility. These definitions were considered when developing the prioritization plan for FHC, in order to ensure that coordinated entry was consistent with HUD categories.



- Category One: Adults and families who are living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, in transitional housing, or are exiting an institution where they temporarily resided. This includes adults and families who are exiting an institution where they resided for up to 90 days (it was previously 30 days), and were in shelter or a place not meant for human habitation immediately prior to entering that institution.
- Category Two: Adults and families who are losing their primary nighttime residence, which may include a motel or hotel or a doubled up situation, within 14 days and lack resources or support networks to remain in housing.
- Category Three: Families with children or unaccompanied youth who are unstably housed and likely to continue in that state. This category is for families with children or unaccompanied youth who have not had a lease or ownership interest in a housing unit in the last 60 or more days, have had two or more moves in the last 60 days, and who are likely to continue to be unstably housed because of disability or multiple barriers to employment. Currently this category is not used for McKinney-Vento funded programs by the City of Seattle or King County.
- Category Four: Adults and families who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, have no other residence, and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.



**City of Seattle**  
Human Services Department

Date: January 30, 2013

To: Councilmember Nick Licata, Chair  
Seattle City Council Housing, Human Services, Health and Culture Committee

Sally Bagshaw, Councilmember  
Bruce Harrell, Councilmember  
Tom Rasmussen, Councilmember

From: Dannette R. Smith, Director  
Seattle Human Services Department

Re: Statement of Legislative Intent #104-1-A-1  
Report on Prioritization Policy for Homeless Families

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This memorandum transmits the Seattle Human Services Department's (HSD) response to the City Council's Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) #104-1-A-1 included in the 2013 Budget, requesting the Human Services Department, in collaboration with King County Family Homelessness Initiative (FHI), Family Housing Connection (FHC) and others to report on the proposed prioritization policy for placement of homeless families into housing that will be implemented by the FHC Program.

The SLI also requests a separate report on housing barriers for homeless families and on recommended policy or program changes to overcome identified barriers, which is due no later than July 1, 2013.

HSD is working closely with the King County Committee to End Homelessness/FHI to implement the new prioritization policy. HSD supports the FHI system change that more effectively matches an individual family's needs with appropriate resources available in emergency voucher programs, emergency shelter/housing, transitional and rapid re-housing programs. City funds dedicated to assist homeless families will be aligned with the new prioritization policy and system change efforts to decrease the number of families who are literally homeless and unsheltered—those who are staying in a place not meant for human habitation such as a car or abandoned building.

The attached report describes: (1) the Family Homelessness Initiative's prioritization policy; (2) background on the Family Homeless Initiative and Family Housing Connection; (3) alignment with City of Seattle investments; and (4) next steps in policy implementation.

Over the next six months, I will provide the Committee Chair and members with quarterly updates on the progress of policy implementation. In addition, HSD will include a formal report on implementation as part of SLI 104-1-A-1 report on barriers to housing due by July 1, 2013.

I appreciate your commitment and support of our goal that all children and their families in Seattle are safe and have a roof over their heads. I am happy to answer any questions you may have about HSD's attached report.

Cc: Catherine Lester, Deputy Director, Seattle Human Services Department  
Debbi Knowles, Project Manager III, King County  
Beth Goldberg, Seattle City Budget Office  
Becky Guerra, Seattle City Budget Office  
Jeanette Blankenship, Seattle City Budget Office  
Ben Noble, Council Central Staff  
Susana Serna, Council Central Staff  
Traci Ratzliff, Council Central Staff  
Jaline Quinto, Mayor's Office

Attachments: *Seattle Human Services Department Response to Seattle City Council Statement of Legislative Intent: 104-1-A-1, Report on Prioritization Policy for Homeless Families.*  
*Committee to End Homelessness' Family Homelessness Initiative Prioritization Policy Recommendation.*

## **Seattle Human Services Department Report on Prioritization Policy for Homeless Families Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) 104-1-A-1**

The Seattle City Council approved Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) 104-1-A-1: Reports on Prioritization Policy and Barriers to Housing for Homeless Families as part of the 2013 budget. City Council members expressed an interest in reviewing the proposed policy for prioritizing placement of homeless families in permanent housing with a report due to Council no later than January 30, 2013. A second report on barriers for families accessing housing will be submitted no later than July 1, 2013.

This first report responds to the City Council's request for the Human Services Department (HSD) in collaboration with King County Family Homelessness Initiative, Family Housing Connection (FHC), and others to provide a report to the Housing, Human Services, Health and Culture Committee on the "proposed prioritization policy for placement of homeless families into housing that will be implemented by the Family Housing Connections Program."

### **Background**

Family Housing Connection (FHC), the coordinated entry and assessment system for homeless families in King County, launched in April 2012. More than 2,400 families have met with FHC and completed a housing assessment. Families on the placement roster are either experiencing homelessness or are at imminent risk of losing their housing (within 30 days). Since its launch, more than 400 homeless housing resources have become available and been filled (or a referral is pending).

There are no "priority categories" within the current FHC process. Referrals are made using the placement roster (date and time of first call to the Community Information Line / 2-1-1), the eligibility criteria of the program opening, and the type of program opening matched to the family's level of housing barriers.

Approximately five percent of families assessed by FHC throughout King County indicated they stayed in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g. car, street, abandoned building, etc.) when they were asked where their family stayed last night. This is an average of approximately 17 families per month reporting they are literally homeless (ranging from a low of 10 families to a high of 29 families in one month).

There are 115+ emergency crisis units (shelter, motel vouchers, etc.) for families within the FHC system. The turnover rate for these emergency units is an average of 12 openings per month. The reported need for emergency crisis units by literally homeless families is greater than the average number of openings reported by FHC each month.

However, there are approximately 40+ emergency crisis units for families operating outside FHC (DV shelters/vouchers and non-publicly funded faith-based programs). FHC does referrals to some of these programs as appropriate.

## **Family Housing Connection - Coordinated Entry & Assessment System**

The Family Homelessness Initiative (FHI) seeks to create a more streamlined, accessible system of housing and services to prevent families in crisis from becoming homeless, to rapidly house those who experience homelessness, and to link families to the appropriate amount of services they need for stable housing. Systems change will focus initially on three key areas and be implemented over several years: (1) Coordinated Entry and Assessment; (2) System Transformation; and (3) Mainstream Collaboration.

In November 2012, FHI created a Coordinated Entry and Assessment (CEA) Subcommittee to review information and explore the issue of prioritizing or emergency crisis units (shelter, motel vouchers, etc.) openings for families currently on the street with no temporary place to live.

The CEA Subcommittee reviewed the information provided to them, discussed several options, and explored the potential consequences of any changes to the current policy. Members of the Subcommittee include representatives from the Family Housing Connection/Catholic Community Services, YWCA, Solid Ground, Crisis Clinic, El Centro de la Raza, the Salvation Army, Hopelink, Friends of Youth, Building Changes, United Way of King County, Seattle HSD, and King County.

## **Family Homelessness Initiative Prioritization Policy Recommendations**

The Family Homelessness Initiative has **recommended that Family Housing Connection policies be revised to prioritize literally homeless families for emergency crisis units within FHC.** Families who are literally homeless are those who are living in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings (on the street).

The prioritization policy proposal was presented to the Committee to End Homelessness (CEH) Funders Group on December 10, 2012 and to the Interagency Council (IAC) on January 7, 2013. The IAC provided approval to move forward with implementation of the prioritization policy proposal, and subsequent briefings to the Committee to End Homelessness (CEH) will be provided as necessary. The report to the CEH is attached.

## **Prioritization Policy Implementation**

The proposed policy recommendations will not result in immediate “real time” referrals to shelter units. As the FHC data indicates, with current turn-over rates there are not enough family shelter openings in FHC to serve all the families identifying as literally homeless.

FHI warns that families will still wait weeks, and probably months, for a family shelter/emergency housing opening. Impacts and ramifications will be evaluated in three-month intervals to determine effectiveness and overall affect on the system (including any unintended consequences).

Families who are literally homeless in Seattle may access emergency vouchers through the City-funded emergency services/voucher program (also known as the “*Late Night Program*”) operated by the YWCA as funding levels allow. Funding for this program was increased in 2013 to provide immediate placement into a hotel/motel for families with children who are unsheltered. Families are assisted with case management, information and referral services, and advocacy to access shelter/housing. The program was originally designed to act as a late night emergency response for families who were on the street after shelters had closed, with referrals to the program coming from the Seattle Police Department. In 2012 referral sources were expanded to include daytime Community Based Organizations, including Day Centers, and outreach/providers for families at Nickelsville and the Safe Parking Program.

If implemented, it will be several months before results from the prioritization policy for the family homeless system take hold. In this interim period, the pressure on the City-funded emergency services/voucher “*Late Night Program*” is expected to increase. The City will be exploring potential adjustments in the service model and funding level of the “*Late Night Program*” given the external pressures associated with implementation of the FHC, as well as increased outreach to families presenting at Nickelsville and other encampments in the city. HSD will work collaboratively with King County FHI and FHC to ensure that any changes to the “*Late Night Program*” are part of a larger regional/Countywide response.

#### **Next Steps**

HSD is working closely with the King County Committee to End Homelessness/FHI and FHC to implement the new prioritization policy that was approved by the IAC on 1/7/13. HSD is aligning City funds dedicated to assist homeless families with the new prioritization policy to decrease the number of families who are literally homeless and unsheltered. City investments will support FHI system change that more effectively match an individual family’s needs with appropriate resources available in emergency voucher programs, emergency shelter/housing, transitional and rapid re-housing programs. This alignment effort is currently in development and a status update will be included in future reports to City Council associated with this Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI #104-1-A-1).

- FHC staff will develop an implementation plan to address protocols and data system needs.
- FHI staff, in collaboration with FHC and the CEA subcommittee, will develop a data system to track any unintended effects of the change. The data will be reported back to the CEA subcommittee and CEH at three-month intervals. In response, adjustments or modifications will be proposed to address any issues that develop.
- The policy is expected to be implemented by the end of the first quarter of 2013. If no or minimal data system modifications are needed, implementation could begin as soon as February 2013.
- Over the next six months, HSD will provide the Committee Chair and members with quarterly updates on the progress of policy implementation. In addition, HSD will include a formal report on implementation as part of SLI 104-1-A-1 report on barriers to housing, due to City Council by July 1, 2013.



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## Family Homelessness Initiative Coordinated Entry and Assessment (CEA) Subcommittee

In 2011 the IAC, Funders and Governing Board approved by consensus the Charter and Scope of Work for the Family Homelessness Initiative. The charter is framed around the three main elements – coordinated entry and assessment, system transformation and mainstream collaboration. With the launch of Coordinated Entry in April, 2012 additional policy considerations have emerged around prioritization of shelter openings to families currently on the street with no temporary place to live. The Coordinated Entry and Assessment (CEA) Subcommittee has explored the issue of prioritizing of shelter openings to families currently on the street with no temporary place to live and putting forward a recommendation to the CEH, as explained below.

### Family Homelessness Initiative Investment Priority

The Family Homelessness Initiative (FHI) seeks to create a more streamlined, accessible system of housing and services to prevent families in crisis from becoming homeless, to rapidly house those who experience homelessness and to link families to the appropriate amount of services they need for stable housing. Systems change will focus initially on three key areas, and be implemented over several years:

- 1. Coordinated Entry and Assessment:** Implement a system to coordinate entry and uniform assessment for homeless and at-risk families.
- 2. System Transformation:** Realign the current, traditional model of homeless service delivery for families to one that promotes prevention and rapidly re-housing into appropriate levels of services and housing supports.
- 3. Mainstream Collaboration:** Increase collaborations with mainstream systems to assure families receive the services and supports they need to maintain housing stability.

Family Housing Connection (FHC), the coordinated entry and assessment system for homeless families in King County, launched in April 2012.

- More than 2,400 families have met with FHC and completed a housing assessment. Families on the placement roster are either experiencing homelessness or are at imminent risk of losing their housing (within 30 days).
- Since launch, over 400 homeless housing resources have become available and been filled (or a referral is pending).
- Data on households identifying as literally homeless is provided in Research/Data below.

### Background

FHC was built on existing capacity and resources. As expected, there continues to be fairly long waiting periods for shelter and homeless housing services/housing; and virtually no capacity to provide real time referrals directly into programs for those families who are literally

on the streets or living in their cars. Currently, families call 2-1-1 and are screened for eligibility (homeless and a minor child residing in the household) and assessed by FHC staff (see Attachment A for the definition of homeless). The date the family called 2-1-1 is their “placement roster” date, which is used to refer them to appropriate resources when there is an opening. There is no “priority categories” within the current process. Referrals are made using the placement roster (date), the eligibility criteria of the program opening, and the type of program opening matched to the family’s level of housing barriers.

The CEA Subcommittee (see Attachment A for the committee roster) has been meeting since mid-November to explore the prioritization of shelter openings to families currently on the street with no temporary place to live.

**Research/Data:**

- When asked where their family stayed last night, approximately five percent of families seen by FHC indicated they stayed in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g. car, street, abandoned building, etc.). This is approximately 17 families a month (ranging from a low of 10 to a high of 29).
- There are 115+ emergency crisis units (shelter, motel vouchers, etc.) for families within the FHC System.
- The turnover rate for these emergency units is an average of 12 openings per month (to date through FHC).
- There are approximately 40+ emergency crisis units for families operating outside FHC (DV shelters/vouchers and non-publicly funded faith-based programs). FHC does “soft” referrals to some of these programs as appropriate.

FHI staff contacted the National Alliance to End Homeless regarding the prioritization issue to see what other communities are doing.

- Many places end up targeting/prioritizing their shelter beds for those with the most urgent needs.
- Communities are attempting to cut down on extremely long shelter wait lists by administering comprehensive prevention and diversion programs as part of their coordinated assessment systems. Systems that have adopted diversion in this way are reporting between 15-30% of families being successfully diverted (prevented from entering shelter), freeing up all of those shelter beds for households with more urgent needs.
- Generally the Alliance believes it’s a good idea to prioritize families for shelter that are on the street over others.

FHI staff also contacted other communities that have a coordinated entry system and do not have a “right to shelter” policy. Communities that have a “right to shelter” policy operate very differently from our community. They usually have centralized “gateway shelters” and are required to serve everyone that seeks shelter, unless they have shelter diversion program and they are able to strategize with the family an alternative option (which keep system costs down).

- Whatcom County: Their coordinated entry system prioritizes households that are literally homeless.



- Dayton Ohio: They prioritize people who are unsheltered because of their vulnerability; this would be especially true for families. They are using their assessment to decide who should be served in their programs after shelter (ex. TH, RR, PSH) not who gets access to shelter. They don't have a right to shelter but they prioritize safety and their shelter provider expands their capacity to serve as many people as possible.
- Pierce County: They have narrowed their definition of who they serve through coordinated entry and they only "assess" households that meet the HEARTH category 1 definition of homeless ("literally homeless") with one exception, they have also added households who must leave their current nighttime residence within 72 hours. They tightened their definition in part to address the overwhelming demand they experienced when coordinated entry started.

### **Recommendation**

The CEA Subcommittee reviewed the information provided to them, discussed several options, and explored the potential consequences to any changes to the current policy. It is their recommendation that FHC policies be revised to prioritize literally homeless families for emergency crisis units within FHC. This will not result in "real time" referrals. As the data above indicates there are not enough shelter openings, with the current turn-over rate, to serve all the families identifying at literally homeless. Families will still wait weeks, and probably months for a shelter opening.

Assuming implementation, ramifications would be evaluated in three-month intervals to determine effectiveness and overall affect on the system (including any unintended consequences).

- Literally homeless will be defined as families staying in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings (on the street).
- Families will be identified at the time of the initial FHC assessment and the families' housing situation will be reassessed prior to a referral is made (to confirm that they are still literally homeless).
- Families meeting the definition will be prioritized within the placement roster for shelter openings as they occur.
- Shelters will still be allowed to use their existing eligibility criteria.
- Literally homeless families will still be allowed to indicate geographic preference for shelter referrals but will not be allowed refusals for any other reason if they are to retain priority standing.
- Acknowledging that family's situations change, FHC will update information if families advise FHC their housing/homeless status has changed.

### **Elements Pending Resolution & Potential Unintended Consequences**

Families may hear about this policy change (from other families or service providers) and try to "present" to FHC that they are literally homeless or actually decide to become literally homeless to get assistance. It is key that the correct messaging goes out with the policy change to internal stakeholders (homeless housing provider staff, funders, etc.) and external community partners (schools, DSHS, etc.) in order to limit miscommunication.

Additional discussion still needs to occur regarding how this initial prioritization affects the families' placement roster status once they are in shelter and what the unintended consequences are to the other families on the placement roster.

Need to conduct outreach to special populations to explore/address potential issues (i.e. cultural biases) resulting from the policy change that will disproportionately affect specific segments of the homeless family population (potentially young adult, immigrant and refugee, etc.).

Additional analysis needs to be done related to existing eligibility criteria for shelter and whether it will inhibit the prioritization policy from serving literally homeless families. Staff proposes to look at a sample of families on the placement roster who indicated they are literally homeless and seeing if they would likely qualify for a shelter opening (using a sample of shelter eligibility criteria).

### **Next Steps**

- FHC staff will develop an implementation plan to address protocols and data system needs. Note: this could trigger modifications to the data system, which could affect timing of implementation.
- FHI staff, in collaboration with FHC and the CEA subcommittee will also develop a data set to track the unintended effects of the change. The data will be reported back to the CEA subcommittee and CEH at three-month intervals. In response, adjustments or modifications will be proposed to address any resulting issues that develop.
- FHC staff feels it is reasonable for this policy to be implemented within FHC by the first quarter of 2013. (If no or minimal data system modifications are needed, implementation could begin as soon as mid- to late-January.)

### **Related Systems Work**

In addition to the task at hand, the committee also discussed several related issues that they feel should be discussed and explored in tandem to the specific issue of prioritizing literally homeless families. These will be explored and in some cases are already being addressed by the larger work of the Family Homelessness Initiative:

- Shelter diversion: Can we add this intervention at the front door (coordinated entry) to support families where they are and assist them in not entering the "homeless system" unless absolutely necessary. This is being explored right now with FHC.
- Through-put: How can we free up more capacity within the current system? Other communities have increased their emergency crisis response capacity without adding additional stock by decreasing length of stay in transitional housing, increasing rapid rehousing capacity, and better targeting of resources to family needs. The conversion process that FHI is undertaking with family providers will address this.
- Eligibility Criteria: This is also a "targeting" issue and a "through-put" issue. How can we align eligibility criteria to better serve the families seeking services within the system, by reducing eligibility barriers to program entry, etc.? The FHI Peer Learning group has taken up this issue and providers are discussing this amongst themselves.
- Are there other partners, such as the faith community, that can be approached to address needs for families on the street right now?

**Attachment A**

**Definition of Homeless:**

A family is considered homeless only when they reside in one of the places described below:

- In places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings (on the street).
- In an emergency shelter (or hotels/motels paid by charitable orgs or public funds).
- In transitional or supportive housing for homeless persons who originally came from the streets or emergency shelters.
- Is being discharged within two weeks from an institution (such as a mental health or substance abuse treatment facility or a jail/prison) in which the person resided for 90 days or less **AND** who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering the institution.

In addition, the following are also included:

- Is being evicted within a 14 days from a private dwelling unit and no subsequent residence has been identified AND the person lacks the resources and support networks needed to obtain housing.
- Is fleeing (or attempting to flee) a domestic violence housing situation and no subsequent residence has been identified and the person lacks the resources and support networks needed to obtain housing.

<b>Coordinated Entry and Assessment Subcommittee Membership</b>	
Andrea Akita	City of Seattle HSD
Christy Becker	Hopelink
Ciara Murphy	Salvation Army
Debbi Knowles	Family Homelessness Initiative Staff
Derek Wentorf	Friends of Youth
Donna Dziak	Building Changes
Jeanice Hardy	YWCA
Julie McFarland/Bill Hallerman	Family Housing Connection
Kelli Larsen	King County HCD
Lauren McGowan	United Way of King County
Michelle Valdez	Solid Ground
Susan Gemmel	Crisis Clinic /2-1-1
Sylvia Rubio	El Centro

**2013 - 2014 Seattle City Council Statement of Legislative Intent**

**Approved**

Tab	Action	Option	Version
104	1	A	1

**Budget Action Title:** Reports on Prioritization Policy and Barriers to Housing for Homeless Families

**Councilmembers:** Bagshaw; Harrell; Licata

**Staff Analyst:** Traci Ratzliff

**Budget Committee Vote:**

Date	Result	SB	BH	TR	RC	TB	NL	JG	SC	MO
11/07/2012	Pass 8- 1-Absent	Y	Y	-	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

**Statement of Legislative Intent:**

Council members are interested in reviewing the proposed policy for prioritizing placement of homeless families in permanent housing, and a report on barriers for families accessing housing. The Human Services Department is requested, in collaboration with King County Family Homelessness Initiative, FHC, and others to provide the following two reports to the Housing, Human Services, Health and Culture Committee:

- 1) The proposed prioritization policy for placement of homeless families into housing that will be implemented by the Family Housing Connections Program. This report is expected no later than January 30, 2013.
- 2) Information regarding the extent to which issues including, but not limited to, differing interpretations or definitions of homelessness, and strict eligibility criteria related to sobriety, are barriers to housing for homeless families. In addition, if barriers are identified, what recommended policy or program changes could be implemented to help families overcome identified barriers and access housing. This report is expected no later than July 1, 2013.

Background:

Family Housing Connections (FHC), the Countywide coordinated entry and assessment program, has a placement list of over 1,800 families Countywide who have been formally assessed and are in need of housing and other services. This number includes families who are homeless, those already residing in and those placed into emergency shelter, and families at risk of losing housing (within 30 days).

Currently, people are placed in housing from the FHC placement list based on eligibility for specific program services and the date they are referred by the Community Information Line (2-1-1) to FHC. A formal prioritization policy is not in place that guides which families on the placement list should be given housing first. The King County Family Homelessness Initiative - consisting of partners involved in implementing the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness that funds FHC - is developing a prioritization policy for FHC that will be reviewed with agency partners prior to being vetted and approved by the Committee to End Homelessness Funders Group and Interagency Council, by early 2013. Council members are interested in reviewing this policy and aligning use of City funds for homeless families with this policy.

In addition, in a July 2012 report to the Housing, Human Services, Health and Culture Committee, staff from FHC indicated there were high denial rates for housing placement for families due to:

- Differing interpretations of homelessness definitions
- Strict eligibility criteria related to sobriety

Council members have indicated a desire to obtain further understanding of what issues pose barriers for families accessing housing and potential policy or program options that could be implemented to overcome such barriers.

**Responsible Council Committee(s):** Housing, Human Services, Health, & Culture

**Date Due to Council:** January 30, 2013 & July 1, 2013