

San Francisco Youth Homeless System and Coordinated Entry Project Framing Report

Commissioned by the San Francisco Department of
Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH)



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Executive Summary

The San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) engaged Focus Strategies to assist in the development and implementation of the Department's Strategic Framework for ending homelessness. As part of this work, Focus Strategies has assisted HSH to assess the existing systems for serving families with children and adults, and to develop an approach to Coordinated Entry (CE) design that advances HSH's goals and objectives. In 2018, Focus Strategies is providing technical assistance to assist HSH in the development of Coordinated Entry for youth experiencing homelessness. This work builds upon San Francisco's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project (YHDP) Plan and proposal for federal dollars for interventions to help end youth homelessness. We have gathered information from a range of sources, including existing data on youth homelessness, the YHDP Plan, interviews with key informants, focus groups with youth, and discussions with HSH staff. The objective of this report is to develop an assessment of key strengths and challenges in San Francisco's current approach to addressing youth homelessness, and to make recommendations for the design of Coordinated Entry for youth that are aligned with the YHDP Plan.

Our assessment identified several strengths in the youth system and a solid foundation to build upon. These strengths include many expert providers who operate programs serving youth experiencing homelessness, strong collaborative relationships among providers and between providers and HSH, an existing system for allocating youth-targeted housing that is functioning fairly well, and new resources flowing into the community from HUD (through YHDP), local City investments, and from private philanthropy in the form of the Rising Up Campaign—a Rapid Rehousing initiative.

We also identified several challenges. In addition to a shortage of youth-focused housing programs in a very difficult housing market, challenges include a lack of standardized entry pathways into youth shelter and some housing, entry to most resources controlled at the provider level, concerns about housing outcomes for some youth and weak links between the youth and adult systems. System gaps include a lack of prevention and diversion resources specifically for youth, resources for parenting transitional-age youth (TAY) and TAY couples, and limited behavioral health and employment services for TAY. Infrastructure issues identified include a need for better and more consistent staff training, and a lack of data about the performance of the youth system as a whole.

Our report details recommendations in two categories: (1) for youth Coordinated Entry design; and (2) for the overall youth system:

Recommendations for Youth Coordinated Entry Design:

1. Overall Approach: To ensure youth Coordinated Entry is not overly automated and bureaucratic, seat an advisory group to oversee the launch and evaluation of youth CE in the first year of implementation. This group could be the Youth Policy and Advisory Committee (YPAC) or a smaller subcommittee.

2. Access Points: Access points serving youth should have the capacity and competence to meet the needs of diverse youth, particularly youth of color and youth who identify as LGBTQ. Access points must have a significant mobile component to reach youth who cannot or will not come to an access point.

Access points must offer assessment and referral to housing, but also should help connect youth to other types of services and supports.

3. Problem-Solving: The practice of Problem Solving should be an essential element of CE for youth, as it is for families and adults. However, Problem Solving for youth should be done by staff with specialized training in motivational interviewing, trauma-informed care, risk assessment, domestic violence survivor advocacy, and youth development to ensure that youth being reunified with family or returning to an informal shared living situation are not being sent back to potentially harmful situations. The Problem-Solving approach should also be integrated more generally into the youth system and may need to be practiced at drop-in centers and by outreach teams that do not serve specifically as access points.

4. Minors in Coordinated Entry: Based on the very different responsibilities of providers and City agencies in relation to minors who are unsheltered, including a legal responsibility to take youth into care if they are unable to be reunified with a parent or legal guardian, we recommend that entry into programs for minors should not happen via Coordinated Entry. Coordination among the entities working with this population (Huckleberry Youth Programs, Larkin Street Youth Services, Child Protective Services, HSH and Juvenile Probation) could lead to better outcomes for this population and improve homelessness prevention, thus, we recommend HSH convene a conversation to address this population specifically.

5. Prioritization: Given that there are insufficient resources for youth, it will be critical to develop a prioritization policy to ensure that those who have the highest needs receive priority access to youth-specific resources. Youth should also have an equal opportunity to access adult system resources. Decisions about the prioritization policy for youth may be informed by data collected in HSH's adult assessment blitz that commenced in August 2018. Results will need to be assessed closely for relevance to the needs of youth and the programs serving them. In addition, HSH should consider giving specific priority to youth who have mental health issues, who are at risk of violence, and/or who have strong San Francisco connections or roots, particularly those who are or were in SF's foster care system. At the start of the CE launch, we do not recommend including TAY emergency shelter beds in CE prioritization; over time, however, as resources grow, this may become important to address.

6. Referrals and Case Conferencing: To ensure that the referral process for housing programs is not overly-automated and includes a human element, we recommend incorporating a case conferencing component, particularly in the initial phase of implementation. Case conferences will need to be highly structured to ensure fairness and transparency and should quickly turn to focus primarily on troubleshooting CE process issues when prioritized youth are not gaining access as intended, rather than on processing all referrals.

7. Data Sharing and Reporting: To improve on the overall lack of data sharing and its impact on HSH's ability to understand the performance of the system for serving homeless youth, we recommend that ONE system records remain open within the system but closed for case notes (with the possibility of sharing with the client's permission). Youth providers and Access Points should document the progress of housing referrals in the ONE system (referrals made and outcomes). We also recommend the creation of reports on youth system resource utilization and housing outcomes be created as quickly as possible and shared with the community, including scheduled presentations to the Youth Policy and Advisory Committee (YPAC) and Youth Homelessness Oversight and Action Council.

Recommendations for the Overall Youth System:

1. Make Changes in Housing Operations/Approach: Based on feedback from both youth and providers, we recommend that HSH work with all TAY housing programs, and particularly transitional housing, to ensure they are focused on achieving permanent housing outcomes for youth upon exit.

2. Assess Shelter Inventory: There appears to a relatively large number of shelter beds for minors in relation to the number of beds for TAY, and it is possible some of the beds for minors are underutilized. We recommend that HSH conduct further analysis to determine whether converting underutilized beds to serve TAY would help improve overall system flow and performance, as well as whether additional shelter capacity is needed.

3. Evaluate the Function of Existing Drop In Centers and Street Outreach Programs: As Access Points are set up and begin implementation, it will be important for HSH and its partners to assess the functions of existing drop in centers and outreach programs that are not Access Points to ensure they have clear role in the overall youth system and a consistent protocol for connecting youth to Access Points.

4. Establish an “Ombudsperson” for Youth: During the first year of CE implementation for youth, it will be important to have a process for youth to provide feedback and submit complaints and concerns regarding not only the CE process but the functioning of the overall system and its programs. HSH may want to consider establishing an Ombudsperson office or position to spearhead this work.

I. Introduction: Purpose of Report

In 2017, the San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) developed and adopted a Strategic Framework, which lays the groundwork for achieving a significant and sustained reduction in homelessness in San Francisco by 2022. Among its high-level goals is the creation of Coordinated Entry for all populations, including a Coordinated Entry process for youth and young adults.

Because less was known about youth dynamics and a plan was anticipated for addressing youth homelessness, the initial Framework goal for youth was to develop and adopt a plan for youth in 2018. Since that time, a community plan has been developed for the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project (YHDP), which will be used as the basis for a late 2018 update to integrate youth homelessness into the Framework.

Recently, HSH announced that it has set a new Framework goal for youth which is to reduce youth homelessness by 50 percent by December 2022. This goal is expected to be met through the expansion of youth-dedicated resources, including those from YHDP and new resources from the City and private partners, as well as through system changes including the implementation of Problem Solving and Coordinated Entry for youth. The youth Coordinated Entry process is expected to launch in early 2019.

In order to set the framing for developing and implementing Coordinated Entry for youth, HSH requested Focus Strategies conduct an assessment of the existing system for assisting youth experiencing homelessness. The goal of this report is to identify areas of strength and challenges, and provide recommendations and design assistance to HSH to improve the system's ability to respond effectively to youth who are experiencing homelessness.

This report is intended to provide background and framing, as well as identify key themes for developing youth Coordinated Entry. It includes our assessment of the existing youth homeless system based largely on provider and youth feedback as well as our own observations, lessons learned from other communities that are applicable to this effort, and discussions with HSH. It also includes a set of recommendations for developing and launching Coordinated Entry for youth in the context of all CE implementation in San Francisco.

For this work, we have collected and analyzed information from the following sources:

- Interviews with key stakeholders from 11 different agencies and departments, including City staff, providers of shelter and housing, and representatives of other organizations and systems serving youth (List of stakeholders provided in Appendix A);
- Information from three focus groups with youth experiencing homelessness, conducted by HSH and youth lead, as well as youth feedback related to Coordinated Entry gathered in YPAC meetings;
- A review of Coordinated Entry practices and approaches to Coordinated Entry for youth from three other communities, including conversations with representatives from these communities;

- Review of documents from HSH, including existing program policies, reports, and other information regarding the current San Francisco youth system, and documents and practices related to San Francisco’s Adult and Family Coordinated Entry. (List of key documents reviewed provided in Appendix B).
- Verbal feedback and input from youth providers and advocates during a presentation summarizing results of the first draft, as well as written feedback to the first draft from some providers. Feedback that corrected misunderstandings, clarified practices, or provided additional content resulted in changes to the final report. Additional feedback that did not result in changes to this report was summarized and presented to HSH under separate cover.

II. Context: Youth Homelessness in San Francisco

Youth between the ages of 18 and 24 make up a significant portion of the population experiencing homelessness in San Francisco. San Francisco’s 2017 Homeless Unique Youth Count and Survey found that there were 1,363 youth experiencing homelessness, of whom 104 (7.6%) were unaccompanied children and 1,259 (92.4%) transitional-age youth (TAY). This is a decrease of 13% from the previous count in 2015 which found 1,569 were experiencing homelessness, however it is still a very significant portion of the population. Approximately 20% of individuals experiencing homelessness in San Francisco in 2017 were between the ages of 18-24. Among TAY experiencing homelessness, 19% were living in shelters or other homeless facilities and 81% were unsheltered.

Youth of color and youth who identify as LGBTQ experience homelessness at a disproportional rate. A survey of homeless youth in the weeks following the 2017 Count found that 50% of respondents identified as male, which is much less than the general population of people experiencing homelessness in San Francisco. Thirty-nine percent (39%) of participants identified as female, while 12% of participants identified as transgender (10%) or genderqueer/gender non-binary (2%). Among youth under 25 who participated in the survey, 49% said they self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ), which is significantly higher than San Francisco’s adult population (25%). Additionally, the largest percentage of youth respondents said they identified as being Multiracial (35%), followed by Black/African American and White (each at 26% of youth respondents). Twenty-nine percent of those surveyed identified as Hispanic or Latino – 9% higher than adult survey respondents.

Further, nationwide studies on the intersectionality of race and sexual orientation among youth experiencing homelessness show that belonging to more than one marginalized group puts youth at even greater risk of becoming homeless. According to the National LGBTQ Task Force’s 2016 report *At the Intersections*, “LGBTQ youth of color—particularly transgender youth of color—are more likely to experience violent crime, including sexual assault, police violence, robbery, and murder. Furthermore, LGBTQ young people of color are vulnerable to discrimination in education, employment, housing, and involvement in the criminal justice system. Institutional racism contributes to pathways into homelessness for these young people, and it stymies their ability to exit.”

Many youth have significant histories of homelessness or housing instability. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of youth survey respondents reported they had experienced homelessness multiple times (compared to 77% of adults.) Forty-three percent (43%) of youth survey participants reported being homeless for a year

or longer. Eighty-five percent (85%), a clear majority, had been without housing for more than 6 months at the time of the survey.

The population of youth experiencing homelessness also has different pathways to homelessness and reasons for being in San Francisco. These include youth who grew up in and became homeless in San Francisco, as well as youth who entered the foster care system and were placed outside of San Francisco and became homeless during or after their foster care placement. A majority of youth who participated in the survey (56%) were living in San Francisco when they became homeless, while 28% of youth reported moving to San Francisco from another county in California.

An estimated “one in five former foster youth experiences homelessness within four years of exiting the foster care system,” according to the 2017 Youth PIT Count. Among youth who responded to the survey, 26% reported a history of foster care. Additionally, nearly one-third (29%) of youth report involvement with the justice system prior to the age of 18, while 10% report they were on probation or parole when they most recently became homeless. The population also includes minors and young adults who leave homes in San Francisco, as well as other communities, fleeing violence, intimidation, physical and emotional abuse, and conflict with a family member, parent, or legal guardian. Other primary causes of homelessness reported by youth include alcohol and drug use, loss of employment, eviction, mental health issues, and financial issues.

Barriers to accessing housing and other assistance vary among youth experiencing homelessness. Just over one-quarter (28%) of youth reported not knowing how or where to access assistance to resolve their homelessness, while the same percentage of youth (28%) said they did not have identification or personal documents needed to obtain assistance. Forty-three percent (43%) said their age was an obstacle to obtaining permanent housing, while 32% reported age prevented them from being getting employment.

III. Assessment of Current State

A. Elements of the Current Youth Homeless System

San Francisco has an array programs and services for youth experiencing homelessness and those with critical housing needs, though the overall portfolio of interventions is small relative to the size of the youth population.

The chart below summarizes the intervention types that comprise the youth homeless system in San Francisco and the main providers of each intervention, however it is not intended to be a comprehensive list. This chart focuses primarily on those programs and providers expected to participate in the Coordinated Entry process, or be involved in referring or supporting youth who have been assessed.

| Intervention Type | Providers/Description |
|---|--|
| Emergency Shelter for TAY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lark Inn [Larkin Street Youth Services (LSYS) - 40 beds for youth 18 – 24] |
| Emergency Shelter for minors (17 and under) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Huckleberry House (6 beds) • Diamond Youth Shelter (LSYS - 16 beds) |

| Intervention Type | Providers/Description |
|---|--|
| Transitional Housing (time limited) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Larkin Street Youth Services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Site based: Geary House (35 beds), 1020 Haight (15 beds) - Scattered Site: Castro Street Housing Initiative (32 beds), Routz Transitional Housing program (14 beds) - Assisted Care/After Care (30 beds) The Sunset (Homeless Youth Alliance - 44 beds) THP Plus: 70 beds for youth in extended or exiting foster care operated by Salvation Army, First Place, Larkin Street Youth Services, and Edgewood. |
| Non-time limited Transitional housing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5th and Harrison – (Community Housing Partnership - 44 units) |
| Rent Subsidy Programs (Rapid Re-Housing) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Larkin Street Pathways Project (50 youth) Rising Up Campaign (approximately 500 youth) |
| Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) | <p>HSH fills 134 units in five PSH buildings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 864 Ellis St (TNDC and LSYS -24 units); Edward II (Community Housing Partnership and LSYS- 24 units); 1100 Ocean (Mercy Housing and First Place for Youth -25 units). John Burton Advocates for Youth Housing (John Stewart Co. and First Place for youth -25 units) Aarti hotel for youth with serious mental health needs (TNDC and LSYS -36 units) |
| Outreach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homeless Youth Alliance, At the Crossroads, Larkin Street Youth Services |
| Resource Centers/Drop In Centers ¹ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LYRIC, The SF LGBT Center, At the Crossroads, Homeless Youth Alliance, Larkin Street Engagement Centers (Golden Gate and Haight Street.) |

There are also crisis and transitional residential programs in the mental health system operated by Progress Foundation that serve or target youth and young adults. In addition, several programs offer case management services, targeted medical services and other programming for youth and youth adults. Transitional-age youth are also eligible for admission into the City’s adult homeless programs, or family programs if they are parenting – this includes shelters for adults and/or families, transitional, and rapid rehousing programs for families and permanent supportive housing for families and adults.

¹ Drop in centers vary from provider to provider and are not funded by HSH. Typically they provide a safe place for youth to meet their basic needs by offering refuge from the outdoor elements, meals, showers, hygiene supplies, and laundry facilities. Drop in centers may also offer access to case management, housing assistance, behavioral health services, and/or referrals to outside programs and resources.

B. System Flow

Currently, there is no direct path or formal process for youth to access and enter the homelessness response system's available emergency and temporary programs. HSH estimates that San Francisco rehouses approximately 500 youth per year, based on its reporting on the current inventory. At this time, however, there is no consistent way to examine entries and exits to all youth programs in the system. This poses challenges to identifying how youth access and exit the system's programs and resources.

During focus groups with youth experiencing homelessness and housing crises, many reported that the way they identified and accessed homeless system programs was primarily through word of mouth – from friends, a school representative, medical professionals, or other people they encountered as they sought assistance. Others said they found programs by conducting an internet search. In most cases, youth said they were told to access Larkin Street Youth Services (LSYS) for assistance.

Several programs operate street outreach and engage with youth who are living outside. Outreach programs and drop-in centers typically attempt to connect youth to appropriate assistance and resources to resolve their homelessness or housing crisis.

Entry Processes

Emergency Shelter: Currently, the Lark Inn, operated by Larkin Street Youth Services (LSYS), is the only emergency shelter dedicated to serving youth age 18-24 in San Francisco. Larkin Inn shelter residents can access the shelter 24 hours a day. Shelter bed reservations are made for 120 days. Emergency beds, available for one night only, are distributed at 7pm each night at the shelter site using a lottery system. One can call in advance to be placed on a waiting list for a long-term, 120 day, bed.

Transitional Housing: Entry to most time-limited transitional housing (TH) programs for youth is controlled by the program providers, primarily LSYS. THP+ referrals are managed by HSH. Recently, LSYS created a “centralized navigation” process for youth to access their housing programs, including transitional housing. During stakeholder interviews and focus groups, some providers and youth expressed concerns that the Lark Inn shelter serves as the main entry point to transitional housing resources and that youth who are unwilling or unable to enter shelter may not be able to access transitional housing and other housing resources. LSYS says this is not the case, and that access to transitional and other housing programs is not contingent in any way on being sheltered.

Permanent Housing and Non-Time Limited Transitional Housing: San Francisco HSH currently manages access to five permanent supportive housing (PSH) programs and one non-time limited transitional housing program for youth. To access these housing programs, youth must be actively engaged and working with one of fourteen referring agencies in San Francisco. Youth cannot apply to these housing programs directly.

As vacancies occur within these sites, the openings are offered to the fourteen referring agencies on a rotating or “round-robin” basis². Each agency is encouraged by HSH to queue up clients internally in order of priority based on need, however there are currently no specific guidelines for agencies on how to prioritize youth for housing vacancies. The only requirement is that referring agencies should ensure clients referred meet eligibility criteria for the programs to which they are being referred. In general, stakeholders who participated in the input process expressed that this method of access to housing resources has been satisfactory and efficient and was noted to be a significant improvement over the previous system.

Still, some stakeholders said that despite improvements to the process for accessing housing, it is challenging to take advantage of available housing openings. HSH provides agencies with a minimum of seven days to submit clients’ required housing documents (identification, income certification, and application) and often extends this deadline to give providers more time. Some providers report that they still find these requirements difficult. In particular, programs that are outreach or drop-in based report facing challenges with locating clients in a timely manner in order to access housing on their behalf.

From a systems perspective, this method of placement is also not prioritized or standardized in terms of how agencies select young people for the referrals. Nonetheless, it is a strong foundation for building out youth coordinated entry practices for these and additional resources.

C. Other Systems of Care

Currently, the Department of Public Health, Behavioral Health Care Division (BHC) and the Human Services Agency’s Family and Children’s Services (FCS) are the two primary systems of care within the City that are most closely linked to the homelessness response system for youth and have also been involved in the community planning efforts for youth services. They are the ones most likely to both participate in or need to be considered in the design of Coordinated Entry.

Family and Children’s Services (FCS)/Child Protective Services(CPS): FCS intersects with the homeless youth system primarily through its role as CPS and manager of the foster care system. Foster care placement is a significant predictor of later homelessness for youth, and youth leaving foster care with nowhere to go are a significant portion of the homeless population. For former foster youth, FCS has access to Transitional Housing Plus Foster Care (THP+FC) resources for youth in foster care up to age 21. These resources run through FCS, which must make those placement decisions. (HSH manages THP Plus, which is a State-funded housing programs for former foster youth who are no longer in care and can provide support up to age 25.)

² Agencies that can make referrals to this housing include At the Crossroads, Booker T Washington, The Center, Department of Public Health (DPH), Family Children Services (Human Services Agency, SF), Family Services Agency, First Place for Youth, Guardian Scholars (City College), Guardian Scholars (SF State), Homeless Youth Alliance, Huckleberry Youth Programs, Juvenile Probation, Larkin Street Youth Services, and LYRIC.

In San Francisco, about 65% of youth are moved to foster placements outside of the City due to a shortage of SF placements. In these communities, youth may have little to no support networks. Some of these youth leave their placements, either at the end of the foster care time or prior, become homeless, and seek to return to San Francisco. Those who meet THP Plus criteria can receive housing assistance, but there are former foster youth who are homeless in SF who are not eligible (e.g. due to being over age 25).

CPS also has legal responsibility for the care of minors who are in San Francisco and who have nowhere safe to live. FCS is required to assess minors who are unsheltered. If these minors cannot safely go back home, and are not already in the care of another community's foster care system, CPS must intake these youth and provide them services. However, perhaps due to the shortage of existing placement opportunities, there appears to be a reluctance by FCS to take responsibility for children who arrive at the shelters designated for minors. Providers are expected to work to reunify the youth with their families; in some cases, they may wait for them to come of age to qualify for other TAY services. Minors who are in foster care from another community are the responsibility of that county; such minors will likely stay in shelters for minors until their home county CPS reunifies with them.

Department of Public Health (DPH) Behavioral Health Care: Behavioral Health provides mental health services to children and young adults with mental health needs and has some dedicated programs for Transition Age Youth, including TAY full service partnerships (FSPs), peer support, vocational programs, and partnerships with TAY-dedicated supportive housing (included in the PSH inventory mentioned above.) In September 2018, DPH launched a new dedicated TAY System of Care (TAY SOC) that will expand programs serving TAY ages 16-24 to improve coordination and transitions between systems and levels of care.

As part of this new effort, a pilot Homeless Treatment Team will be developed to provide flexible treatment services for TAY in homeless shelters, supportive housing programs, and to those living on the streets. The team will carry a caseload from housing and homeless service programs serving TAY, and will be available for onsite services, consultation, and mobile support with crisis intervention. Specific sites and service models are currently being designed in consultation with the selected providers, HSH, and other stakeholders. BHC identifies housing access as a primary need of many of the youth it serves and hopes that Coordinated Entry will make access for this population more plentiful and predictable.

Criminal Justice(CJ): The juvenile justice/criminal justice system is seen by many as a feeder to the homeless system, however most stakeholders did not mention having working relationships with any specific CJ organizations. In recent years efforts have been made to decriminalize offenses such as sex work, which has reduced the overall number of youth in San Francisco's juvenile justice system.

Some programs do have connections with the CJ system. Huckleberry Youth Programs (HYP), runs the Community Assessment and Resource Center (CARC) serving 1/3 of all arrested youth and the Huckleberry Advocacy and Referral Team (HART) serving commercially sexually exploited youth (CSEC) many with juvenile justice involvement. Other resources for youth who are currently or formerly CJ-involved include Young Women's Freedom Center, which provides leadership and advocacy opportunities for females of color who have been CJ-involved and grown up in poverty, and Sunset Youth Services, which provides stability services and supports for high-risk youth and their families including justice-involved youth and TAY. A newly funded supportive housing program is a partnership with Larkin Street

Youth Services and Young Adult Court. It will house youth in young adult court programming who are homeless.

D. Strengths of Current Approach

The following section provides an overview of the key strengths of the existing array of programs serving youth experiencing homelessness.

Youth Focus: In general, San Francisco's youth providers have an exclusive or primary focus on youth and young adults and are well-versed and expert on youth programming and youth development. Many have long histories of working with youth and strong national reputations, while newer providers and programs have brought innovation and creativity to the field and pioneered new ways of working with youth. Some programs and agencies also are specifically structured to serve and meet the needs of significant portions of the youth population, such as LGBTQ youth, street/traveler youth, and youth of color.

Relationships: Providers report that, overall, they have strong working relationships with one another. To date, relationships have been the primary method of coordination among youth providers and, while a truly coordinated system has not been adopted, these relationships have been instrumental in addressing challenges in many cases. There is an expressed desire to continue to work together and build upon these relationships, although stakeholders mentioned some distrust and concerns, which are addressed more specifically in the following section.

Permanent Housing Access: The process of accessing youth-targeted permanent housing is functioning fairly well, is viewed as an improvement over past practice, and provides a solid foundation from which to build a more systematic practice of access for all resources.

New Youth Plan and Expanded Youth Engagement: San Francisco received one of the first YHDP grants from HUD and has been recognized for its planning work to design a new system and fill gaps within the current program array. This plan has also led to extensive youth engagement in the system planning and evaluating processes to ensure the voices and expertise of youth experiencing homelessness are reflected in the broader conversation. HSH has hired a dedicated peer position and is regularly engaging with the YPAC on a variety of issues, as well as holding youth focus groups specifically to gather feedback on the Coordinated Entry design.

E. Challenges and Gaps

The primary challenge facing San Francisco in addressing the crisis of youth homelessness is a shortage of youth-targeted resources and an extremely difficult housing landscape, in which all low-income and homeless people experience significant barriers in the housing market. Youth are especially disadvantaged in this area due to these circumstances. HSH is undertaking major efforts to expand the inventory and variety of resources available for youth, which is intended to have a strong impact on the system's capacity to serve more youth and reduce youth homelessness.

However, even with a significant expansion of housing resources, prioritization and standardization processes for the distribution of available resources will be essential to ensure that new resources are

well-targeted and achieve intended outcomes. We identified several challenges within the system as it currently exists, which are detailed below.

No Standard Entry Process: As mentioned, standard entry processes for youth-dedicated housing and shelter resources, as well as common information and messaging about how youth can access temporary and permanent housing do not exist. Two models are currently in place that provide an opportunity to be built upon: Larkin Street Youth Services' internal process and HSH's housing access process.

Access to Shelter and Transitional Housing: The only youth shelter (for non-minors) is operated by Larkin Street Youth Services; this provider also operates most of the community's transitional housing for youth. Providers and youth generally perceive that the only way into the transitional housing is through this shelter, which has both limited space and is not available and/or suitable for all youth. Youth expressed frustration about this issue, while providers reported that some youth refuse to enter shelter due to safety concerns, especially transgender and LGBTQ youth. Youth also expressed concerns about biases that exist and perceived preferential treatment in the process for accessing these resources. Larkin Street Youth Services reports that being sheltered does not provide preferential access to housing through Larkin Street's TAY Navigation program which is currently provided on a first-come, first-served basis regardless of the young person's ability or willingness to be sheltered at the Lark Inn.

Transitional Housing Concerns: In addition to challenges reported in accessing transitional housing, there was widespread concern from youth and providers about these programs' focus more on programming and compliance, rather than on housing. We heard repeated stories of youth reaching the end of their stay without housing identified, and reporting a lack of assistance finding alternative housing or aftercare. Providers and youth both report that transitional housing programs have significant emphasis on fulfilling program requirements such as performing chores, learning time management and professionalism, as well as undertaking some practical steps that are useful for future housing (i.e. obtaining IDs or completing legal work). Housing-focused assistance and supports are perceived as limited, coming too late in the process, and do not prevent some youth from exiting the program to the streets. (We note that we did not examine data related to this issue. LSYS, which operates many of these programs, reports last year only 17% of young people leaving their transitional programs exited to the streets, shelter, or another unknown destination.) Trusted system and program-level data is needed to dispel misperceptions, as well as determine what might be done to improve outcomes for those who do exit programs without housing.

Inconsistencies and Barriers in Permanent Housing Programs: While generally not spoken of with as much concern as transitional housing programs, permanent housing programs for youth were also characterized by some as being too difficult for youth to access. Getting into permanent housing has been streamlined through the HSH process but is often still a lengthy and challenging process to navigate. Of greater concern, we heard from some providers that once housed, youth are not always supported in the way they need to be remain stably housed, and that there remains a perception that youth fail out of these housing settings.

Major changes have been made to ensure permanent housing for TAY is flexible and evictions are reduced and/or prevented. We did not receive data on the eviction rates; it may be this may be an area still in need of attention, or it may be that greater information needs to be shared about how programs are currently working.

Non-alignment with Adult System: The homeless system for adults has a much larger pool of resources than the youth system, however housing in the adult system is currently prioritized for long-term chronically homeless individuals, as well as extremely vulnerable and ill adults. This effectively precludes most youth from the adult system resources. Stakeholders also raised the issue of youth aging out of youth-specific services and not being connected to adult resources. However, we could not determine if this is a widespread issue. We did not hear any specific comments about problems with linkages between the youth and family homeless systems.

System Gaps: In addition to the large gap in the availability of shelter and housing for youth mentioned above, there are other gaps that were specifically identified by respondents, including:

- *Prevention and diversion support needed to prevent youth from going to the street:* Stakeholders noted that the loss of DCYF's violence prevention-focused case management funding will continue to impact youth and TAY and may result in more youth becoming homeless, as these dollars were used to provide services that supported youth to stay at home.
- *Resources for parenting TAY and TAY couples:* Some stakeholders mentioned that there is less available for coupled and/or parenting youth.
- *Behavioral health services for TAY:* Stakeholders noted that a full continuum of behavioral health services and supports are needed for youth and TAY. Currently, resources such as therapy and residential treatment are reported to be extremely limited; and
- *Employment services and supports for TAY:* It was reported that adult employment program models do not work well for youth, leaving a large gap in the system for supporting youth in the area of employment. Stakeholders reported a need for these services to be longer-term; help connect youth with long-term, well-paying positions; link youth to educational resources and opportunities; and utilize a trauma-informed approach.

Geographical Issues: Many programs and housing serving adults and youth are concentrated in the Tenderloin or central City areas. Some providers reported that they work with youth who are more comfortable in other regions of the City, especially youth who live or stay in the Haight and in the Bayview. Geographic barriers, including transportation and physical barriers (such as hills), as well as cultural barriers were noted. This issue was not raised by youth in any focus groups held to date, however this question was only asked once directly.

Training Needs: Many people spoke about the need for increased staff training. Youth and providers both feel that the quality of staff is integral to youths' housing success, however tends to be highly variable from person to person, program to program. We heard many comments about the need for more rigorous and standardized training.

Issues of Discrimination Against Youth: Some respondents talked specifically about youth who have experienced discrimination in some of the youth and adult service and housing program settings. In

particular, transgender and LGBTQ youth do not always feel safe or well-served in programs for the general population. Jazzie's Place was cited as a particularly strong model for serving trans adults, however nothing similar exists for youth. Some respondents also indicated that youth of color, particularly African-American and Latino youth, are less well served by the system than other youth.

Lack of Shared or System-level Data: Although providers maintain program- and agency-level data and regularly share such data with HSH, little information from HSH is available currently about the results of the system or network of programs for youth. Some interviewed reported that there have been repeated requests for utilization and outcome information, especially about shelter and transitional programs, but that this information it is not available. Some providers told us they suspect there are unfilled beds, particularly at the shelter for minors and elsewhere within the system, but that occupancy data has not been widely shared or otherwise made available.

Providers also reported it is unclear to them the rate at which youth are successfully exiting to permanent housing. Greater accountability throughout the system is desired, including for the Coordinated Entry process once it is underway. Providers and youth said that they want to feel their time invested in developing CE is well spent, and data will allow them to know whether CE is successful. In addition, data about youth is currently not shared across providers who are not in the ONE system and youth must repeat their information multiple times as they move through the system.

Another area of need relating to data is the lack of data on youth with multi-system involvement (e.g. homeless, foster care system, behavioral health, criminal justice). There is a perception that "feeder" systems are contributing to youth homelessness, but little data available with which to test this assumption. Having data on homeless youth collected through Coordinated Entry will help stakeholders understand the inflow of youth into homelessness and where they are coming from.

Youth Input: Providers who were interviewed strongly believe in supporting youth and providing youth-appropriate services and approaches, however there is a widespread perception that this approach is missing from many of the residential (shelter and housing) programs. Youth complain about restrictions in their residences, a highly rule based culture in many programs and staff "micro-managing their lives." Significant work is currently underway to allow for input opportunities and incorporate the voices of youth in the system planning process, however it is not clear if this is also true at the *program* level and whether youth have venues for expressing concerns about specific programs and service delivery. Because some program requirements are inflexible or less flexible, due to funding requirements and/or licensing, youth should be provided a clear overview of what aspects of their housing/program participation may be influenced by their input.

IV. Lessons from Other Communities

Coordinated Entry for youth is still in its infancy in most communities and there is a wide range of practices in place related to access, assessment, and prioritization for youth. Work currently underway across the country vary from Coordinated Entry processes that are exclusively focused on youth to communities where youth-specific resources are fully integrated into the general CE system for all populations.

Among these, a handful of communities have had Coordinated Entry targeting youth in place for several years. We have looked most closely at three: Los Angeles, California, Seattle, Washington, and the State of Connecticut. Here we briefly highlight features each model and summarize key lessons emerging from these three communities.

Los Angeles, California: Los Angeles piloted youth Coordinated Entry in the Hollywood area between November 2016 and Nov 2017. The pilot was expanded Countywide thereafter with a number of significant changes. Focus Strategies evaluated the pilot program; our research found that the Coordinated Entry pilot had changed the relationship between providers, created a more straightforward method for allocating housing resources, and removed some of the burden on youth to find resources from multiple providers. However, the pilot worked better for youth with moderate levels of need (both because there were more resources for them and because the process worked better for them). Many programs still retained high entry barriers and complex application processes, which made it difficult for highest-need youth to get in. We also found that had been little focus on lower-need youth and no systematic practice of diversion or Problem Solving.

A big challenge in the launch of Coordinated Entry for youth was the technology: the HMIS system was never able to meet the intended role and, even with a new software provider, this continues to be a challenge for the community. They are still not able to pull real-time lists of active/inactive youth; however, the community hopes to achieve this function in the near future.

Since the completion of the pilot year, CE for all populations has gone to scale in every Service Planning Area (SPA). Each SPA has a Coordinator for each of the three primary populations (adults, families, and youth), as well as an overall Regional Coordinator that facilitates cross-system work. As a result, there is much greater coordination with the family and adult systems than previously, and the County is adding significant new resources that are “population neutral.” To allocate the system’s neutral resources, LA is using a system-wide prioritization that advantages certain populations – targeting the highest needs families first, followed by youth, and finally single adults. They have also moved from a “bucketed” form of prioritization, in which a score is used to determine which resource is assigned to whom, to a more dynamic prioritization approach, in which the highest need persons in each population are considered for all resources.

Each SPA also had dedicated Navigators for each population working with those who are highest priority and/or matched to a housing resource. In SPA 4, which has the largest youth population, they are adding two peer positions -- one to work with on system integration and one with the navigators on youth connections and outreach. They have just started widespread prevention/diversion, but this is so new there is no information about how it is functioning.

King County Seattle, Washington: King County began CE for families and for youth in 2014 with a separate system for youth, which included only youth-specific resources. The resulting process was complex, not well received in the community, and resulted in long waits for youth and for programs that were trying to fill vacancies. This occurred in part because large numbers of youth were assessed and put onto a list, however, because openings occurred infrequently, the system often could not find the youth that were prioritized. Programs also preserved their own entry processes and, in many cases, still imposed high

barriers to entry. In addition, youth had to be assessed in multiple systems to be eligible to be served with other resources.

In 2017, King County reformed its CE process, and created a single Coordinated Entry for All (CEA). This new system created Regional Access Points (RAPS) to assess and match people throughout the County to all resources. The new system uses a Housing Triage Tool and results in a single list. For youth, however, youth-specific access points exist in each region. Youth are also allowed to access RAPS. Youth can also be assessed within 14 days of becoming homeless, while other populations must be literally homeless. Shelter for youth and young adults is currently excluded from the CEA process. Most recently, King County has added dedicated youth navigators and youth-targeted diversion assistance.

Connecticut CAN Network: The State of Connecticut has had Coordinated Entry operating across the State since 2015. Eight State regions in the Coordinated Access Network (CAN) all share basic common design features, however also have local differences. Each CAN includes primary entry through 211 referrals and outreach, which allows people to access a CAN assessment agency for appointments. Connecticut uses the SPDAT suite of tools, including the Next Steps tool for youth.

For the first few years, youth were not addressed as a separate population within the CAN system. In the last year, however, the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness has focused on improving and modifying the process for youth through the Coordinated Access for Youth and Young Adults Working Group. The model for youth is similar to the overall model, but with a new specific youth emphasis including: 1) starting the process for youth by determining risk and assessing for alternative supports; 2) including assessors at each CAN that are trained to work specifically with youth; and 3) employing dedicated youth navigators who focus not only on housing solutions, but also on making connections to mainstream and community services and natural supports.

Each CAN network also has its own working group called a YETI (Youth Engagement Team Initiative) composed of youth providers, McKinney-Vento Liaisons, members of the Department of Children and Families, Department of Education, and Department of Mental Health and Addition Services, as well as advocacy groups in the region and youth with lived experience. These groups are focused on improving linkages and coordination for youth across systems and have created comprehensive regional asset maps to help guide their coordination process.

Lessons Learned

Each of these implementation experiences has led to some lessons that can be drawn upon in designing youth-focused Coordinated Entry practices. These include:

- Create System Integration: Some level of integration of processes and resources for all populations is necessary to ensure that youth have equitable, or even preferred, access to all system resources for which they qualify, not just those specifically designated for youth. If there is a separate youth Coordinated Entry process, the community must work to ensure meaningful and real-time integration with the other CE systems, including compatibility or redundancy of assessments. If the populations are not separated in Coordinated Entry, however, evidence suggests there needs to be a focus on youth in at least some areas of the CE practice to ensure

that youth feel comfortable, are provided meaningful ways to engage, and available services respond to their specific needs. This may include dedicated youth access points, outreach workers, and/or navigators specifically trained and targeted to work with youth and address their unique needs. In many cases, a separate tool is used to assess youth, and in those cases, a method that crosswalks the scores or ensures that youth that are aging out of the TAY age range are reassessed with the adult tool in a timely fashion (prior to aging out of eligibility) is needed. Pregnant and parenting youth need similar consideration in the family system.

- *Focus on Ensuring High Needs Met:* Unless Coordinated Entry processes for youth make specific efforts to ensure that the highest need youth are prioritized for all resources *and assisted to get access in a timely fashion*, youth can be lost or skipped over for resources. Just using a tool that prioritizes high-need youth alone does not ensure that these youth will be housed quickly. Again, specific strategies, such as dedicated navigators, can assist in this area. However, a primary factor should be ensuring that the number of youth prioritized is more closely aligned with the resources available to ensure placements are made quickly.
- *Reduce Program Barriers:* Related to the lesson above, a focus on high needs youth and prioritization does not ensure access to the actual programs the system has to offer if barriers to entry remain. This requires special attention and a systematic approach to reducing as many entry requirements as possible and standardizing the remaining ones.
- *Balance the Role of Case Conferencing:* Case conferencing offers an important opportunity to bring in information that assessment tools alone cannot capture, as well as to ensure that a youth's current situation and desires are well understood. A case conference can also be a place to deal with challenging situations or address repeated failures to engage or locate high-need youth who have been prioritized. However, case conferences need to be designed to address specific needs with clear parameters – otherwise, these meetings become both extremely time consuming (given that every provider must participate weekly in multiple conferences) and can re-create a subjective process in which participation by an entity in the case conference is the primary factor leading to placement. Case conferences work best when they are clearly structured and managed by a coordinator that can notify participants in advance about the particular situations or openings that will be addressed. Additionally, action must be taken in between meetings so as not to delay referrals.
- *Deploy Diversion/Problem-Solving:* Access to diversion and Problem Solving assistance and resources are increasingly understood as a critical piece to reducing inflow and addressing housing crises quickly. In many ways, Problem Solving is a natural fit with youth-oriented services, as many providers have worked on family reunification as a key rehousing strategy for years. However, Problem Solving for youth has special features and needs, and risk assessment is a critical part of this. This is one area where youth-targeted services, specialists, and peer-support may be well used. All three communities are now either piloting or operating specific youth-targeted diversion activities that will soon provide more knowledge to this area.
- *Build in Cross-System Linkages:* Linkages to mainstream and community resources are important for all homeless populations, but they are particularly important for youth. Coordinated Entry approaches for youth are increasingly building strong relationships with mainstream and community resources serving youth, particularly in the areas of education, health, and child

welfare. Asset maps that gather information about a comprehensive set of resources can help access points and others understand the range of resources more fully and help make better connections for youth.

- *Manage Data Systems Expectations:* Every community has found that data systems to operate Coordinated Entry can pose challenges. Attempting to place everything into one system can be an obstacle to timely CE launch and/or operations, requiring communities to improvise for a while. Some have found that the inventory portion of the matching process must be maintained in a different data system or method. Frustration with data systems is one of the main challenges reported by all communities, thus it is essential to create appropriate workarounds or a locally designed system to manage the process.

V. Recommendations for Youth CE Design

A. Overall Approach and Concerns

Overall, we found a high level of understanding of the need for and reasons for a more coordinated, systemic response to youth homelessness in San Francisco, with Coordinated Entry as a critical component in the process. Respondents are especially hopeful that a new, more coordinated system will be more manageable, predictable, and equitable than what currently exists. However, there are also major concerns that the CE process will be too “automated,” bureaucratic, and create unintended consequences that reduce (rather than increase) access for youth in need. There is fear that the matching process will not take into consideration all the nuances of how to identify housing solutions and place each youth. Others expressed that youth might need to move through several different placements before they exit homelessness and feared CE will make this process more difficult.

We recommend that to address the overall set of concerns, as well as the specifics listed below, there be an advisory group formed to evaluate youth CE for at least its first year. The group will need to be well-versed in the intentions of the CE process and bought into the vision of youth CE. The group would also need to establish guidelines for their work and what they exactly will be reviewing to determine success and areas in need of improve. This could be the role of the YPAC, but may be best performed by a smaller subcommittee, as the group must be small enough to work well together and should not include any members who may have a conflict of interest.

B. Access Points

Access points designed to serve youth were thought by most to be a good idea. In particular, youth support the concept of having clear pathways and specific places to access all system resources.

In creating youth access, HSH will need to decide whether to establish specific youth-dedicated access points or to incorporate youth-focused outreach, navigation and other partnerships at more general access points, or a combination of both. In making this determination, we recommend that HSH consider various issues and concerns raised in the informational interviews, including:

- The ability of access points to meet the needs of diverse youth who need help. As one stakeholder said, “Diverse youth equal diverse needs.” This includes addressing the need for

geographic diversity, as well as ensuring that youth of color, LGBTQ youth, and non or limited English-speaking youth have access and feel welcomed, safe, and comfortable at access points. This also includes hiring people at access points who have lived experience of homelessness.

- In addition, youth expressed a strong desire for access points to be more than just places that assess and prioritize individuals for housing services alone. Youth expressed interest in being able to access a wide range of services and programs through access points and to have support available onsite, if needed. HSH and its partners should work to ensure that access points have strong connections to other systems of care that intersect with youth, particularly the TAY SOC for behavioral health services, Family and Children’s Services, and the education system.
- Ensuring that mobile outreach is an integral part of the process for access/engagement and assessment. The Coordinated Entry process should meet youth “where they’re at” as much as possible.
- Training staff at access points is vital to ensuring that interactions with youth are welcoming, client-centered, trauma-informed, and youth-appropriate. This will also need to include use of the ONE system and other data collection methods; ensuring data collection does not override the interpersonal interactions at Access Points.
- HSH will need to be particularly alert to any actual or perceived favoritism or self-dealing if access points are operated by providers with shelter or housing resources.

C. Problem Solving

Understanding of the intent and practice of Problem Solving in San Francisco is growing. There is a broader recognition that Problem Solving is already utilized in the youth system in certain ways – for example, family reunification efforts. However, providers and youth are also concerned that Problem Solving is not used in ways that would return youth to harmful situations or deny access to other services or housing for those who need it. One provider said, “Generally speaking, any sort of practice that looks at whether youth can return to family is very complex and you have to really assess what is safe.”

Youth in focus groups are interested in ensuring that Problem Solving leads somewhere and said that Problem Solving should also include treatment referrals and education vouchers.

We recommend that Problem Solving for youth be handled by dedicated Problem Solving staff who are trained in conducting open-ended Problem Solving conversations, as well as motivational interviewing, trauma-informed services, domestic violence survivor advocacy, and youth development. Training on how to serve youth engaged in street and survival economies, the sex trade, and youth experiencing trafficking through culturally competent practices will also be important, as Problem Solving staff may be the first to engage with these young people. This training and information about the techniques associated with Problem Solving should also be made available to all providers. It is possible that Problem Solving will need to be deployed more widely in the youth system than it is currently in the family system, as multiple drop-in centers and street outreach are likely to continue to exist for youth in San Francisco. Access points may only exist as subset of these providers.

Furthermore, there is a growing national conversation around diversion/Problem Solving and other communities experimenting with targeted programs for youth. Carefully studying the learnings gleaned through these pilots and programs will be useful to San Francisco.

D. Minors in Coordinated Entry

There is a small but significant number of non-emancipated unsheltered minors in San Francisco that must be assisted. Currently, two shelter programs are dedicated to this purpose. Based on our understanding of the different responsibilities that providers and the City take on when serving minors, as well as the short duration of available shelter programs, we recommend that minors do not enter these programs through the Coordinated Entry process.

There is a reported need for improved coordination between the primary players that seek to address homelessness among minors, primarily Huckleberry Youth Programs, Larkin Street Youth Services, Family and Children’s Services, Juvenile Justice/Probation, and HSH. We recommend HSH convene a special conversation around this population with the stakeholders cited above. Note that we also heard concerns about differences between the two shelter programs related to their approaches to reunification and service delivery for minors, as well as questions as to whether all the shelter capacity for minors is needed (please refer to recommendation V.B. in the following “System” section).

E. Prioritization Criteria and Assessment Process

This section addresses three aspects of prioritization. First, we discuss the recommended criteria to focus on for prioritizing youth. Secondly, we discuss the potential process for assessment and prioritization, as well as whether this process should be integrated or separate from the adult process and tool. Lastly, we discuss prioritization for youth shelter.

1. Criteria for Youth Prioritization

There is a widespread recognition that youth will need to be prioritized for housing due to limited resources. However, providers expressed strong concerns that virtually any prioritization rubric—particularly one that prioritizes based primarily on vulnerability – may have unintended consequences. Providers voiced concerns that an emphasis on risk or risky behavior may result in some youth being viewed as “not risky enough” and drive youth to engage in high-risk behavior in order to gain access to housing resources. One person expressed a widely shared concern that there is nothing available for “middle ground youth”—meaning those who are neither highly vulnerable nor relatively low need and easy to assist. This concern was reflected in many suggestions by stakeholders not to prioritize in a manner that causes a youth’s situation to have to deteriorate further before receiving help.

These concerns are understandable and need to be addressed in part by having more interventions for moderate-need youth that can assist youth out of homelessness quickly. The addition of significant rapid rehousing for youth through the Rising Up Campaign and other new housing resources from YHDP should help meet this need. Additional transitional housing may also be helpful; however, the community must ensure transitional housing is housing-focused and low barrier to effectively meet the need. (See the sections below for more information.)

Even with additional resources, however, youth will need to be prioritized, and highly vulnerable youth will have to be identified and specifically assisted with the system's dedicated resources or they are most likely to continue to be homeless and to suffer other adverse consequences.

The strongest recommendations for prioritization from providers and youth were:

A. Mental Health: By far the most frequently cited need or issue that both youth and providers feel should be prioritized is youth with mental health issues. Concerns were centered around what to do when youth have not been diagnosed or do not report a mental health condition, and the need for youth Coordinated Entry to be connected to the ability to obtain specific mental health assessments and/or services. In addition, considerations for how to assess and prioritize youth with mental health conditions such as PTSD, and other conditions that do not constitute permanent disabilities needs to be considered.

B. Youth at Risk of Violence: Many people distinguished the impact of homelessness from the potentially more serious and immediate danger or threat of violence. Several stakeholders noted that a youth living on the street may be safer than another youth who is doubled up or staying with someone who endangers them. Youth who are at risk or facing violence or danger is a group that many people agreed should be prioritized, even if they are not living outside. Youth fleeing violence may include youth fleeing violence from their families, communities, and/or country of origin.

C. Native or SF-Connected Youth: Many people suspect that youth who are native or long-time San Franciscans are underserved in the current youth system, in favor of youth who have arrived in San Francisco more recently. Like other low-income San Franciscans, many young people who have lived in San Francisco most or all of their lives are being driven out of San Francisco by rising rents. In some cases, youth may have family in the City who are themselves impacted by housing instability and homelessness. Several providers felt that youth with familial, historical, or support systems in to San Francisco should be prioritized. Some specifically mentioned that this as an important way to more fully represent and ensure greater assistance is targeted to African-American youth.

A subset of the SF-connected youth about whom there is strong interest are youth who through foster care were placed outside the City, have aged out of or left foster care and are now homeless and returning to the city homeless, or seeking to return. We note, however, that there are dedicated resources already for this group and there is not agreement on whether additional resources are needed. This is an area where additional research on existing resources and any unmet need may be beneficial.

Additional criteria that were suggested as priorities less frequently were pregnant or parenting youth, youth in transitional housing, youth with substance use and/or chronic health conditions, formerly incarcerated youth, and those that are employed or engaged in employment activity.

We recommend prioritizing youth with mental health issues and working with the new TAY SOC to identify ways that youth that have not been diagnosed/treated or that do not self-represent their situation can be appropriately assessed and prioritized.

We also recommend considering prioritizing youth who have been in the San Francisco foster care system, while recognizing that dedicated resources for these youth exist. A closer examination of the gaps between the needs of former foster youth and the number of currently dedicated slots for this group may be needed to determine if this is an important criteria to emphasize, or if there is sufficient capacity.

A focus on risk of violence is also an important factor to consider, but harder to determine through an assessment tool alone. This factor may need to be addressed through a combination of initial assessment information and information that may be brought forward in a case conference.

2. Assessment & Prioritization for Adult and Youth System Resources

In addition to determining what criteria should be given emphasis in youth prioritization, the CE design must also establish the process whereby youth are prioritized for youth-specific resources and also for adult-system resources.

Currently, youth are technically eligible for resources in the adult homeless system, but the current prioritization process for many adult housing resources is based on length of time homeless and therefore tends toward older adults who have been homeless for a long time.

The new adult CE process HSH is implementing will use a primary assessment tool that includes many more factors than length of time homeless. It was designed to include weighting methods that balance out factors that are likely to increase with age (such as measuring time homeless related to age.) The current Adult assessment blitz (August – October) should provide information that will help to assess whether this assessment is functioning as intended. Once this data has been collected and analyzed, if youth do not proportionally rise to the higher-need levels, Focus Strategies will recommend how best to adjust the tool or the process to ensure that youth have the level of intended access to adult system resources. There are a number of ways this could be approached, and further recommendations will be forthcoming once the Assessment Blitz is completed.

A related question is whether the primary assessment tool for adults can be used to prioritize youth for youth-specific resources, or whether a different tool will be needed. Again, a recommendation on this topic will be forthcoming once the Assessment Blitz is completed and data can be analyzed. As a general matter, Focus recommends having one tool and process whenever possible, since having dissimilar initial assessment processes for youth and adult resources is likely to make it harder to create integration between the two systems.

We also note that there are community concerns regarding housing youth in permanent supportive housing of any kind, especially in housing designed for and primarily serving adults. Even when youth have disabilities and long histories of homelessness, providers express concerns about defining them in a permanent way. We concur with these concerns. However, the largest current supply of housing exits for high need youth is still likely to be within the City's adult PSH inventory, at least until significant new housing resources come on line. To ensure that youth can be well served in these programs may require youth specific navigators or other specific service supports for youth in PSH. This is an area that could also be explored with the new DPH System of Care (TAY-SOC) and with Whole Person Care.

3. Emergency Shelter Prioritization

Above, we have addressed shelter for minors and suggested that it should not be included in Coordinated Entry. Shelter for TAY is also extremely limited, operated by one provider, and currently available primarily on a first come, first served basis. When HSH designed the Family CE system, shelter prioritization was extremely important because 1) it is one of the primary resources available to families, 2) it is operated by multiple providers, and 3) HSH has an explicit strategic goal to ensure that no family is unsheltered.

The number of unsheltered youth is so much greater than the number sheltered that if there is no immediate and dramatic expansion of youth shelter, it may be extremely challenging to prioritize for such a limited resource and could cause more tension and confusion than improvement. That said, once housing prioritization is occurring, it could be very valuable to have dedicated shelter or other temporary beds for high-need youth that are likely to receive a housing resource. In Los Angeles, there are two types of shelter beds – emergency beds which are still first come, first served and “bridge” beds which are dedicated to those who have been prioritized for housing. We suggest that in the medium-term this is a good approach for San Francisco to consider, especially with a Youth Navigation Center, which is expected to have capacity for between 50 and 75 youth and is anticipated to open in the first half of 2019.

We also note that if shelter stays are not connected to preferred access to other resources such as transitional or permanent housing, this may force the issue of shelter prioritization. With the vast expansion of rapid rehousing through Rising Up, sheltered youth may have enough access to resources that it does not clog the shelter; but if shelter continues to be first come, first served while other resources are provided in a prioritized way, shelter may also come to be viewed as a dead end. For the moment, however, we do not think that access to the currently limited youth shelter beds should be based on prioritization, unless Larkin Street Youth Services is interested in tackling this immediately.

F. Case Conferencing and Referrals

Case conferencing is an important part of many current youth Coordinated Entry approaches across the country. The desire for and benefit of case conferencing must be balanced with ensuring that the process does not perpetuate a subjective methodology, become overly time consuming, and/or create delays in matching and placement. Providers express concerns that the Coordinated Entry process San Francisco envisions will be too automated, resulting in inappropriate matching and placement for youth. Providers strongly favor a method that includes case conferencing.

Case conferencing should be considered at least at the start of the system, but we do not recommend this as the primary method through which openings are filled and referrals are made. If regular case conferencing is used to make referral determinations, this practice will need to be monitored closely to ensure that it is not resulting in an advocacy-based system, in which the most frequently participating or well-represented providers have outsized influence and well-connected or high information youth continue to be the most likely to receive a housing offer. A period of case conferencing at the beginning of CE operations should be considered, with the intention of reducing the frequency over time and

focusing the attention of case conferencing in the long run on trouble shooting where the system is stuck and finding solutions for specific youth that are not being well served.

We recommend for the referral process:

- Ensure that the referral process allows previously placed youth to move within the system if the initial placement is not appropriate, without having to go through the Coordinated Entry process again as if they are new to the system.
- Consideration of youth preferences for locations be made at the time offers are available, and a refusal based on a geographic preference not have negative consequence in terms of youth receiving additional housing offers.

G. Data Sharing and Reporting

Overall, there is recognition that there is not enough data sharing at this time and that youth are asked repeatedly to provide the same information as they move through the homeless system. Several people expressed a desire to have more consistent information available and that providers should share a core set of question that do not have to be repeated. There was also interest in being able to see where youth have appointments and the results of housing applications so that program staff can know what has happened to a youth they have been working with.

However, there is also a strong concern that data sharing needs to protect sensitive information, including protecting information about how a young person fared in a previous program. Provider staff also expressed concerns about the importance of obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and allowing for youth to opt out of information sharing while still being able to access housing resources. We recommend the ONE system records be open within the system but potentially closed for case notes, with the ability to share those with client's permission. We also heard recommendations that the ONE system be evaluated for greater youth-friendliness, including allowing for most frequently used or preferred name to be primary and legal or given name secondary.

The youth system will need metrics and data so that HSH and stakeholders can assess how it is performing. As soon as possible, reports about youth system functioning, resource utilization, and youth outcomes should be available from ONE and the Performance Team. The ability to see how the system and its component programs are performing will be important to create greater trust, as suspicion of underutilization or poor outcomes now exists in part due to a lack of consistent information from HSH about utilization and impact of programs. There is also much speculation in the community about the extent to which other systems of care are contributing to the problem of youth homelessness, which could be more objectively tested if more system-level data were available.

VI. Recommended Changes to Overall Youth System

The YHDP plan outlines many potential changes and improvements to the youth system that are being undertaken at this time. Our intention is not to restate those, but rather to highlight a few system issues

that emerged during this inquiry that may impact the capacity for CE to be successful which, if addressed, could improve outcomes and the ability to serve more youth.

A. Make Changes in Housing Operations/Approach

As mentioned above, we heard many concerns about the operations of TAY housing programs, transitional housing in particular, and the perception that for too many youth enrollment in such programs results in a return to the streets. We did not independently assess these housing programs. However, in other communities where we have worked, we have heard similar concerns about programs with high compliance expectations and low re-housing focus. We understand that youth programs are attempting to address the developmental needs of youth, as well as provide specific structure. However, if they result in youth returning to the streets, then these alternative goals are not supporting, and may be working against, the primary goal of ending homelessness within the community. We suggest this issue be explored separately by HSH, and steps be taken to ensure that all TAY programs are housing-focused and do not have unreasonable or unrelated service requirements.

B. Assess Shelter Inventory

As mentioned above, we heard concerns about the differences between the two shelter programs for minors as well as questions as to whether both shelters are fully utilized or needed. Again, we did not independently investigate or have access to any data to prove or disprove these claims. We recommend that HSH in partnership with FCS conduct an analysis for the need for two dedicated facilities for minors, particularly considering the lack of shelter beds for transition age youth. Converting one of the two facilities to serve TAY could be a better use of the physical resource, though we realize that the operation and service grants supporting these shelters are likely not convertible in this way. The addition of a TAY Navigation Center may help fill some of the shelter gap.

C. Evaluate the Function of Existing Drop-In Centers and Street Outreach Programs

As HSH moves forward with creating youth access points, we note that there are several agencies that provide drop-in services and/or street outreach. As the Access points come on line, they will need to be very closely connected with these existing locations and programs, offering services at those sites or through the existing teams. Otherwise, clear roles and relationships will need to be established between the access point agencies and any other drop in and/or outreach providers. Youth spoke repeatedly about their desire to access all necessary information and assistance from a single source. We are concerned that continued operation of multiple outreach and drop-in centers that are disconnected from the system will confuse youth and reduce the impact of Coordinated Entry. We did not gather information on the differences between the different drop-in center services but we believe that defining clearly to role of drop-in services and what should be available within them may be an important next system step, especially if significant resources are currently invested in these centers and teams. As with the above, this is likely to be a separate exploration/assessment and will be affected by which and how many agencies are selected as access points. Further discussion of this may be warranted.

D. Establish an Ombudsperson for Youth

Some youth suggested that there should be a system Ombudsperson that can investigate complaints and concerns about the youth system and about programs within it. They felt that there is little accountability among providers to consider youth concerns and that programs have insufficient oversight. We recommend that during the first year of Coordinated Entry there be special attention paid to complaints and concerns raised, especially by system users, and a process adopted to deal with complaints and appeals (this is a requirement for CE in any case.) Whether an ongoing youth system Ombudsperson is needed is not something we can determine at this time, however we suggest it be discussed internally and possibly with the Advisory Board. A potential first step for this process could be auditing current practices and procedures related to filing concerns and complaints about the youth system and its programs. The Advisory Board or other designated body may then review the number of grievances filed and common reasons for these grievances to determine what areas of the system and programs need further attention and which are already being addressed.

VII. Conclusion and Next Steps

The Department and Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) and its partners have many strengths upon which to build a strong homeless crisis response system for youth, including a Coordinated Entry process that streamlines access and provides a clear and transparent process to assess and prioritize youth, and make matches to the most appropriate housing interventions, whether in the youth or adult homeless systems. This report identifies some key parameters that will inform the design of CE for youth as well as changes to the broader homeless youth system that will result in improved housing outcomes.

The next phase will involve HSH and stakeholder input and discussion of the report recommendations to help flesh out the details of the youth CE process, particularly in relation to eligibility, Problem Solving and prioritization. It will also include analysis of the data gathered from the Adult assessment blitz. Further steps include the selection, training, and launch of youth access points. Youth Coordinated Entry is expected to fully launch in early 2019, including access, assessment, prioritization, and referral.

Appendix A: Stakeholder Interviews and Youth Focus Groups

1. Provider and Referring Agency Interviews

| Organization | Persons Interviewed | Date |
|--|---|---------------|
| LYRIC | Jodi Schwartz, Executive Director Staff: Priya S, Denny D, Judy J, Kyla C, Gustavo B, Janique B | May 14, 2018 |
| Huckleberry Youth Programs | Mollie Brown, Director of Programs Patrick Buckalew, Residential Coordinator | May 21, 2018 |
| Larkin Street Youth Services | Sherilyn Adams, Executive Director Ilsa Lund, Senior Director of Operations | May 21, 2018 |
| Department of Public Health - Behavioral Health Care | Kali Cheung, TAY System of Care Program Manager Heather Weisbrod, Clinical Director Maureen Edwards, TAY Linkage supervisor Marlo Simmons, Dep. Director BH Services | May 21, 2018 |
| Community Housing Partnership (CHP) | Ryan Fouts, Program Director 5 th Street | May 22, 2018 |
| 3 rd Street Youth Center and Clinic | Joi Jackson-Morgan, Executive Director Katie Higgins, Director of Operations | May 22, 2018 |
| Taking it to the Streets | Christian Calinsky, Co-Founder Valkyrie, Case Manager Nari, Case Manager | May 23, 2018 |
| Human Services Agency, Family Children Services | Robin Love, Program Manager | June 8, 2018 |
| Homeless Youth Alliance (HYA) | Mary Howe, Executive Director Kenn Sutto, Program Manager | June 13, 2018 |
| At the Crossroads | Anna Fai, Program Manager, Meshan Earls, Program Manager | June 14, 2018 |

2. Youth Focus Groups

| Youth Focus Groups | Number of Youth Participating | Date |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| YPAC General Meeting | 20 | March 22, 2018 |
| YPAC General Meeting | 20 | May 24, 2018 |
| YPAC-recruited group #1 | 6 | June 21, 2018 |
| YPAC-recruited group #2 | 3 | July 2018 |
| LYRIC | 5 | August 16, 2018 |

3. Key Informants from Other Communities

| Community and Organization | Persons Interviewed | Date |
|---|--|---------------|
| LGBT Center, Los Angeles | Kris Nameth, Associate Director - Youth Services | July 6, 2018 |
| Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness | Mary Ann (Mimi) Haley, Deputy Director | July 9, 2018 |
| All Home, King County, WA | Danielle Winslow, Assistant Director | July 16, 2018 |

Appendix B: Documents Reviewed

- All Home King County. "Young Adult Diversion Manual." Undated, downloaded 5/4/2018.
- Applied Survey Research. *San Francisco 2017 Homeless Unique Count & Survey, Comprehensive Report*. 2017.
- City and County of San Francisco. "Department of Public Health Behavioral Health Services Monthly Director's Report," June 2018.
- Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness. *Young Adult Coordinated Entry Tool Kit*. Revised 7/23/2018.
- Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness. "YETI Roles and Responsibilities." Unpublished and undated, received 7/9/2018.
- Focus Strategies. *Children's Hospital Los Angeles Youth Coordinated Entry System (CES) Final Evaluation Report*. April 2017.
- Larkin Street Youth Services. *Referral Guide*. 2016.
- Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. Draft Coordinated Entry (CES) Matching Policies. Undated, download 5/4/2018.
- Many Coordinated Entry Learning Collaborative, *Diversion Snapshot*. Undated, download 7/9/2018.
- Price, C., Wheeler, C., Shelton, J., & Maury, M. (Eds.). (2016). *At the Intersections: A collaborative report on LGBTQ youth homelessness*. True Colors Fund and the National LGBTQ Task Force.
- San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing. "Monthly Report to the Local Homeless Coordinating Board." August 2018.
- San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing. *Rising Up Campaign: An Initiative to Reduce Youth Homelessness in San Francisco*. Undated, received 7/2018.
- San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing. *San Francisco Coordinated Community Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness*. 2018.
- San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing. *TAY Housing*. Undated, received 6/29/2018.
- San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing. "Youth Housing Referral Training." January 22, 2018.
- San Francisco Department of Public Health, Behavioral Health Care. "Developing a BHS TAY System of Care in San Francisco." June 2018.
- HomeBase. "Stable Housing Strategies" prepared by for the Development of the Coordinated Community Plan. Undated, received 6/29/2018.
- U.S. Department of Housing And Urban Development. *HUD 2017 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Housing Inventory Count Report*. 2017.