

## Focus Group Notes

Date - 2/20/19 10:00-11:30am

Location - 1 SVN, 2nd Floor Atrium

Host Organizations - MOHCD, Department of Homelessness & Supportive Housing, Local Homeless Coordinating Board

Co-facilitation: Charles Minor (HSH) & Hugo Ramirez (MOHCD)

# Attendees - 13 plus 3 staff (Hugo, Barry, & Joan)

### **1. What do you and your family need to get or stay in housing?**

Resources such as money, first, last, security. Might be able to pay monthly rent, but can't get that far. Back rent, etc.

Decrease barriers to housing, like eviction history, need to have job, etc.

Affordable housing, case management, rent to own, basically more access to housing - on any given day very limited housing resources available

Produce more housing, including SROs

Better connection between service providers and property management to help households in need, make sure folks are stable

Appointment reminders, medication adherence support, from a health perspective - could be onsite or roving, depending on need

Improve budgets for services - improved quality and quantity needed - case management, etc.

Support or counseling on maintaining the unit - helping tenant meet obligations and not fail their housing, which can impact supply overall by damaging landlord relationship

Appointment reminders

Medication adherence support

On site supportive services that vary with degrees of support needed (appointment escort, drop in counseling, ride-hailing service health rides.

## **2. Other than housing services, what are the services that are most important for you and/or your family?**

Mental health

Free transportation, access to fresh food, affordable

Ways to increase their income so they can keep their unit

Childcare

Employment training - not just entry level, but how to climb the ladder

Benefits counseling

Survivor resources for DV, other

Lifeline MUNI pass is \$39 - very expensive, should be free

Childcare is critical especially for very young children, daycare is very expensive

Basic living skills for first-time renters - how to pay bills, budget, make sure you're not late, etc.

Stabilizing family - lease education

Access to fresh food, access to free transportation services, access to job training and financial counseling that supports those to not impact SSI/SSDI. Benefits counseling, ADAP support.

## **3. How would you find out about these services?**

Need a lot more case managers, availability

Case managers really improve likelihood of persons finding services, and needed for encampments

Internet

Community services, churches, other homeless persons

An app that's easy to navigate for both users and service providers

Direct street outreach

Library resources - roll out a campaign with seminars, workshops, etc.

Have a case manager station where families and homeless persons gather - warm introduction to services

Note that many don't have access to internet or even smartphones, until they get far enough up the ladder

311 is great, but requires enough literacy to understand it - digital literacy/access need

Social workers, word of mouth from friends in the community, intakes in clinics

#### **4. What gets in the way of being able to access or use existing programs and services?**

Being able to stabilize people in shelter requires more trauma-informed approach, revisiting drug/alcohol policies, dealing with DV, other trauma

Fundamental disconnect between historical definition of case management and what we need to move toward - has become synonymous with moving people out of programs, not keeping them in.

Clients just don't know what they need to access and how to get it - they have to find a case manager who really wants to help them, and has resources

ECS looking at how to remove the silos between services - have to run all over town when they're already multiply challenged. We need to centralize more resources.

As a past client, I understand the stigma at Calfresh, etc. A lot of client will stop rather than moving forward, and go without. DMV is a good example of having improved this, and other services can do that, too.

Stigma, medical acuity, substance use, mental health, need to work to access services needed, disorganization, homelessness.

Transitioning from homeless lifestyle or highly structured lifestyle (treatment program) and into independent living and not having proper support to do well. Proper support will look different for everyone. Important for all people to have some sort of a needs assessment to see what that may look like, and needs may fluctuate over time.

#### **5. Do you have any suggestions for how to make our programs and services better to meet your community's need?**

Have taken people to MOHCD for various purposes, but get people that throw information to them that they have to sort through - if MOHCD can't do it, bring in case managers

Need to have our basic standard as trauma-informed care - we say it but don't really do it - needs to be our minimum standard. If we can't start there, we won't get it.

Everyone who has spent a night on the street is experiencing trauma

Better cultural competency/humility to treat people respectfully and truly help them

City requires case managers for shelter managers to take training before they kick them out, but why not required hospitality training?

Hiring friendly people is important

Real need for safety at shelter

Housing with medical acuity support

## **6. What are the services that you need but have been unable to find?**

Specific to families not in shelter, not eligible for PSH, rapid rehousing, are in limbo

If you don't know who has the CDBG funding, resources, you don't know where to go - providing services should be more open (?) - need to know what's available out there and follow policies about RFP, etc. eligibility criteria is too specific in some cases

Client who got into DPW system for employment - private listing that demonstrated it's not clear where all opportunities are

Only some people/providers have access to certain resources

Building housing outside of the typical neighborhoods

Need more system transparency - who's working on what, what resources are where

Need to have an effective, responsive, filled service system (?) - big disconnect on what's available

Increase in affordable housing without on-site support to help people move into units that they can afford and live in independently and successfully.

Increase in affordable housing in other areas aside from Bayview, Soma, TL

## **7. What, if any, suggestions do you have for making transportation more accessible to more diverse communities in San Francisco?**

Give out free monthly passes

Encourage walking, biking, help with wheel chairs and bike, car share rental

Homeless families that get tickets for not paying MUNI

Need something for carrying groceries - MUNI is tough

Free BART

Ride-hailing service from onsite home providers to and from verifiable medical and mental health appointments

**8. If you wanted to learn about affordable rental or ownership opportunities, what method of being notified do you prefer?**

Text, email, but a lot of clients don't have access to digital literacy

Better managed free phone program - have blacklisting shelter addresses

Paper forms at resource centers would be helpful - SFAF, Lava Mae, other

Use provider address as client address

General delivery just doesn't work

Expanding idea for mailboxes, small storage

**9. If homeownership is something that you're considering, what do you feel are the main barriers to purchasing a home in San Francisco?**

Minimum income requirements are too high

There's no housing stock that would fit Section 8 or other programs - and can't find owners that would deal with this type of client

Lack of income

Lack of deposit

Lack of ability to keep up with repairs

Living "check to check"

**10. What are the kinds of things that help folks move on from temporary housing or shelter into more permanent housing? What gets in the way of moving on?**

Initial moving cost, to start with - fees that come along with buying property

Trepidation with seeking apartment for first time, so education on process is needed

What it means to be in a simple apartment - don't have all the supplies, furniture, etc. - harder sometimes to find these resources

Having stability for longer period - ie. Longer-term subsidies that are more flexible - have expectations and goals more reasonable (not to have to triple income in one year)

Section 8 is not rent controlled

Lack of access to housing - some people are having to apply at the limits of public transportation, far away, and sometimes fail it for loss of access to support network

Subsidy support

30% of income rental

Case management support

Donations from organizations to help them get set up for kitchen, bathroom, etc.

**11. If you have children, what barriers do you have for them to attend a high performing public school?**

A public school lottery is a barrier

If you have to travel from one end of the city to another, it's hard

Early childhood support so they can get into a high performing school

Lottery system

**12. Do you have any suggestions for how to improve equitable access to high performing public schools?**

Why aren't all public schools high performing?

Why are public schools matching high performing private schools?

Improve teachers' wages

Improve educational programming in public schools

Mimic private school curriculum with public school curriculum

**13. What strategies, incentives, or policies would encourage landlords to participate in the Section 8 and other voucher programs?**

Make Section 8 discrimination illegal (it is), or prosecute violators

More Brilliant Corners type of support - hotline, housing search and placement, financial incentives

Doing research to find out what barriers are, why are they resistant, and try to figure out how to bring support on those issues?

More good stories about Section 8, ie. Public information campaign "I love my Section 8 tenants"

Huge negative stigma among owners

If unit was vacant, rent could be covered anyway

If damage is caused by tenant, have it covered by some other source so landlord doesn't have to pay it

Require payee services from tenant to ensure all money is received

If it's project based, offer to pay even if the unit is vacant.

Have a partnership with the landlord so if a tenant is violating a lease agreement (ex 1: due to a behavioral problem/ noise complaint/nuisance, that whoever is managing the voucher will address the behavior, not the landlord).

Partnership with repair/building support if needed

Partnership with local security deposit support

#### **14. What has helped you or others in your community get or keep a job?**

Access to training and support once they get the job, further soft skill training - helping them integrate into environment

Better policies to support employment while in shelter - paystubs, etc., proof, support

Being able to work in the community where you live

Ride share requires taking photo in your car to show you're working; why not use something similar?

Helping them navigate application/hiring process

Partnering with businesses

Vocational programs are great for returning to work, like "Access for Jobs" - more options would help

#### **15. What, if any, suggestions do you have for the City to improve access to good jobs?**

Should be policy to require hiring locally

Better planning regarding jobs of the future

Knowing what good job retraining is - most people don't get jobs in what they're retrained for

Support people in shelter who are working

Employment specialists at point of entry into the job market - determining if person is ready, get training, job readiness services, where to send them

ACCESS4JOBS. Expand employment vocational programs that aren't tied to mental health

DOR

City College being free □ expansion of certificate programs

Develop programs that help patients recover from where they came from (peer support, patient escort to appointments, etc.)

**16. What would you and your family need in order to be financially stable and/or to be able to build wealth?**

Affordable permanent housing, they can go from there

Checking accounts without high fees

Don't let clients leave a program with a bunch of cash and no savings account

City's Office of Financial Empowerment is very good

Have to be able to meet basic needs first, or you can't go beyond - need a more livable minimum wage - need to help them get through today first

All basic needs met

**17. Is there something that we should have asked, something that is important to you?**

A few topics - transparency for undocumented persons, for housing - expansion of community land trust properties - cooperative housing provided by City?, people are open to living this way

Having a monthly summit of providers to close the gaps would be great - this session has been very helpful

Who are the populations whose needs are least being met?

What are some examples of communities outside of the Bay Area that we could learn from?