

County of Los Angeles  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES

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March 9, 2005

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Bryce Yokomizo, Director

SUBJECT: **REPORT ON CalWORKs HOMELESS FAMILIES  
(BOARD ORDER #3 – JANUARY 4, 2005)**

On January 4, 2005, your Board asked DPSS to do the following:

- Quantify and analyze the number of CalWORKs homeless families in Los Angeles County, also examining the correlation of CalWORKs noncompliance sanctions and homelessness; and
- Implement safeguards to reduce homelessness and develop a pilot program to fill the gap for families who do not qualify for DPSS' programs.

The following is in response to these requests.

**Studying CalWORKs Homeless Families**

To quantify and analyze CalWORKs homeless families, DPSS, in collaboration with the Chief Administrative Office's Service Integration Branch, developed two approaches for analyzing the population.

The first is a study of administrative data. Using caseload information for the period of September through November 2004, CalWORKs families were identified as homeless, not homeless, or at-risk of homelessness. The following are preliminary findings from this administrative data:

- Approximately 7% of CalWORKs families who received CalWORKs sometime between September and November 2004 appeared to be homeless.
- Homeless participants had much younger children than non-homeless participants, with more than half of these children age five or under.
- Homeless participants used mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence services more than non-homeless participants.

- Among homeless families, there was a slightly lower proportion of timed-out adults and a much lower proportion of sanctioned adults, compared to non-homeless families.
- The total income for homeless and non-homeless families was very similar, indicating that differences in income do not explain why some CalWORKs families are homeless.

The second planned approach for studying CalWORKs homeless families is a participant survey. Using a survey form mirrored after the one being used by LAHSA as part of the Homeless Count, DPSS conducted a survey among homeless CalWORKs participants who came to a DPSS district office last week. This survey will complement the administrative data, and will provide information on the reason and duration for homelessness, the number of homeless episodes, and the barriers to permanent housing.

After fully analyzing both the administrative and survey data, I will share the final study results and any program implications with your Board by May 1, 2005.

### **Safeguards to Reduce Homelessness/Pilot Program**

Based on the administrative data, as well as input from other stakeholders, including other County departments, legal advocates, and service providers, we have developed additional interventions to reduce homelessness among CalWORKs families. These strategies are detailed on the attached Action Plan and address the following key issues:

- screening/case managing these families and locating affordable housing;
- triaging homeless families in DPSS' district offices;
- providing a toll-free number the public can access for DPSS' homeless services; and
- broadening program eligibility to ensure all of DPSS' housing programs are available to all CalWORKs homeless families.

**Direct Rent Payments**

Among possible safeguards to reduce homelessness, your Board was interested in exploring the possibility of direct rent payments to landlords to ensure that the CalWORKs grant was spent on housing, for which it is intended. In exploring this option with the State and County Counsel, we have determined that there is no legal authority in federal or State law to mandate vendor (or any third party) payments except under specific circumstances (i.e., cases in which an adult is sanctioned for three or more months, when a parent has a felony drug conviction, when Homeless Assistance funds have been misused, and for home repairs). In general, the grant is an entitlement that must be delivered unconditionally to the family. Prior legal authority to restrict payments due to problems with money management has been repealed.

Although direct rent payments to a landlord cannot be implemented on the basis of a prior incidence of homelessness, DPSS is taking the following steps to address this issue:

- When a participant is issued Homeless Assistance for a hotel/motel, he/she must provide receipts that the money was spent on the intended shelter; otherwise, any future Homeless Assistance payments will be made out via two-party checks to both the participant and the hotel/motel. This applies to the State's 16-day Homeless Assistance program in addition to DPSS' newly implemented Homeless Assistance +14 program. This particular payment restriction is allowed by State regulation.
- Once a homeless family finds permanent housing, he/she will be eligible to a rental subsidy of up to \$250 for four months. Each month, the participant must provide a rent receipt. During the four-month period of eligibility for the rental subsidy, if a rent receipt is not provided, no additional rent subsidies are issued. As the rental subsidy program is a County-implemented program, it is not considered an entitlement. Therefore, DPSS is issuing these payments as two-party checks to the participant and the landlord to ensure they are spent on housing.
- To determine whether children in homeless families are endangered/at risk, DPSS and DCFS have developed an assessment tool and response protocols to ensure children's safety. The attached Action Plan details the assessment/protocols in place.

I will report back to your Board by May 1, 2005 with the results of the administrative data analysis and participant survey, any additional planned interventions, and the status of each of the strategies in the Action Plan.

BY:fw

Attachment

c: Chief Administrative Office  
County Counsel  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors  
Director, Department of Children and Family Services  
Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority

## **ACTION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING FURTHER INTERVENTIONS TO REDUCE HOMELESSNESS AMONG CalWORKs FAMILIES**

***Based on the preliminary findings from the CalWORKs Homeless Families administrative data analysis, as well as input from other stakeholders, including other County departments, legal advocates, and service providers, the following additional interventions are being implemented by DPSS to reduce homelessness among CalWORKs families.***

### **Housing-Based Case Management**

As reflected in the preliminary administrative data findings on CalWORKs families, individual circumstances, rather than income, appear to distinguish homeless CalWORKs families from other families receiving CalWORKs. As case management is key in assisting families to overcome their circumstances and avoid/move out of homelessness, DPSS plans to assign GAIN Services Workers (GSWs) to each DPSS district office to screen and case manage all homeless families who are receiving or applying for CalWORKs. Case management will be the foundation for the support system homeless families often lack to rebuild their lives after an episode of homelessness.

The screening/case management will include:

- crisis intervention;
- short-term stabilization;
- screening and needs assessment;
- developing an individualized housing plan;
- coordinating with contracted relocation specialists to assist families in finding housing;
- providing temporary case management after the move; and
- making referrals for other available services.

For applicants, the housing-based screening/case management will begin at the time of application. For approved cases, this same screening/case management will begin as DPSS is notified about a family's homelessness. For existing homeless cases, this screening will be conducted over a three to four month period.

Status: A two-month pilot in one district is planned for May 2005 prior to Countywide implementation in July 2005.

### **Screening for Endangered/At-Risk Children**

To determine whether children in homeless families are endangered/at-risk, DPSS and DCFS staff developed a screening tool for this purpose which is now being piloted by DPSS eligibility staff outstationed at the Weingart Access Center in Skid Row. Based on the results of the screening tool, it may be necessary to make a referral to the child abuse hotline. Alternatively, if the family is at risk and needs support services, DCFS is making alternative family support services available to CalWORKs homeless families (e.g., counseling). Even with a screening tool, there will be times when a professional assessment is needed to determine what services, if any, are needed. For this purpose, DCFS has made a consultant available for DPSS staff to call for assistance.

Status: The screening tool was implemented on a pilot basis on March 4, 2005. It will be expanded in May 2005 to the pilot district for Housing-Based Case Management, and will then be implemented countywide in July 2005 along with the countywide implementation of Housing-Based Case Management.

### **Housing Counselors/Relocation Specialists**

Given the scarcity of affordable housing in the County, homeless families need help locating and securing affordable housing. Therefore, the Department plans to contract for housing counseling/relocation services. This staff will coordinate with the housing GSW, and will have primary responsibility for identifying appropriate neighborhoods and rent levels for families, overcoming barriers to obtaining housing (e.g., poor credit and evictions), negotiating with landlords, providing money management/life skills training, and maintaining a database of available housing. The Department anticipates being able to absorb this cost within its proposed FY 05-06 budget.

Status: Following an RFP process, DPSS plans to have this service in place by early 2006.

### **District Office Protocols for Homeless Families**

To ensure all homeless families are screened/case managed, district office protocols are being developed for homeless families. Once a homeless family is identified, the family will be immediately referred to district housing GSWs for screening/assessment.

Status: These protocols will be piloted in one district beginning in May 2005 in conjunction with the pilot for housing-based case management, prior to Countywide implementation in July 2005.

### **Toll-Free Hotline for Homeless Families**

To ensure information is readily available about DPSS' services for homeless families, the Department is establishing a toll-free hotline within DPSS for participants and providers to call to find out about available services, including emergency shelter, cash aid, help with evictions, moving assistance, rental subsidies, etc. The Department can absorb any associated costs within its FY 04-05 budget and proposed FY 05-06 budget.

Status: The hotline is targeted for implementation in June 2005.

### **Additional Housing Programs for Families**

Except for the Moving Assistance and Rent to Prevent Eviction programs, which are partially funded through Performance Incentives-Net County Cost (PI-NCC), most of DPSS' housing programs are funded through the CalWORKs Single Allocation. This means that families not qualifying for Single Allocation funding (including child only cases, families in which the adult(s) are exempt from GAIN, and sanctioned cases), are not eligible to all of DPSS' housing programs.

To broaden the range of programs available to all CalWORKs homeless families, DPSS is modifying the PI-NCC-funded homeless prevention services to make all of DPSS' housing programs available to all CalWORKs families. Programs to be added will be:

- Homeless Assistance +14: 14 days (in addition to the existing 16 allowed by the State) to pay for a hotel/motel, allowing a family more time to find permanent housing;
- Rental Subsidy: Up to \$250 for four months to subsidize families' rents once they find permanent housing after receiving permanent Homeless Assistance or Moving Assistance; and
- Emergency Housing: Supplementation for the County's emergency shelter/voucher program to provide additional shelter for CalWORKs families while they seek permanent housing.

Status: The Homeless Assistance+14 and the Rental Subsidy programs are being expanded in April 2005, utilizing FY 04-05 PI-NCC funds. Providing additional funding to LAHSA for emergency housing will require an amendment (to an existing contract) which is targeted to be effective in July 2005. Subject to Board approval of the CalWORKs Stakeholders' recommendations for FY 05-06 PI-NCC funds, it is DPSS' intent to sustain these three programs through FY 05-06.