California Child Welfare
**Co-Investment** Partnership

# Housing Insecurity and Child Welfare

The issue of homelessness among families with children first became an area of concern in the 1980s, when this demographic began rising at a disproportionate rate in comparison to single homeless adults, and by the end of that decade comprised one-third of the national homeless population.[1] Current studies now estimate that nationally, 25% of children who are homeless either have or will experience foster care, more than thirty-four times the rate of children in the U.S. generally.[2] While many factors contribute to child welfare involvement, housing insecurity, a term that encompasses both housing instability and homelessness, has traditionally been one of the least studied.

**This issue of *in*sights includes the following:**

• Data and studies on California's housing insecure families, and how housing challenges factor into their trajectory of child welfare involvement both at the front end with family maintenance interventions and removal decisions, as well as case planning for reunification.

• Examples of policies and programs that offer important learnings to improve outcomes for families with housing insecurity.

• Opportunities and recommendations to address the challenges of housing insecurity with the goal of improving outcomes for California's children and families.

> " Stable housing should be considered a right, and far too many families and transition age youth in California are struggling with homelessness. I am encouraged by the statewide momentum to solve this problem especially for the families, children, and youth at risk of system involvement."
>
> ***State Senator Scott Wiener, District 11***

> " We know that even short-term homelessness increases a child's risk of involvement in our child welfare system. With new resources provided by Measure H, we are hopeful that we can prevent families with children from falling into homelessness, and find solutions for families with children now experiencing homelessness, including those at risk of going into foster care."
>
> ***Supervisor Sheila James Kuehl, Los Angeles County Third District***

1  J. Culhane, Webb, Grim, Metraux, D. Culhane, September 2003, Prevalence of Child Welfare Services Involvement among Homeless and Low-Income Mothers: A Five-Year Birth Cohort Study

2  CSH, Current Supportive Housing Needed by State: Family Homelessness

### What Is Homelessness?

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) homelessness is defined as:[5]
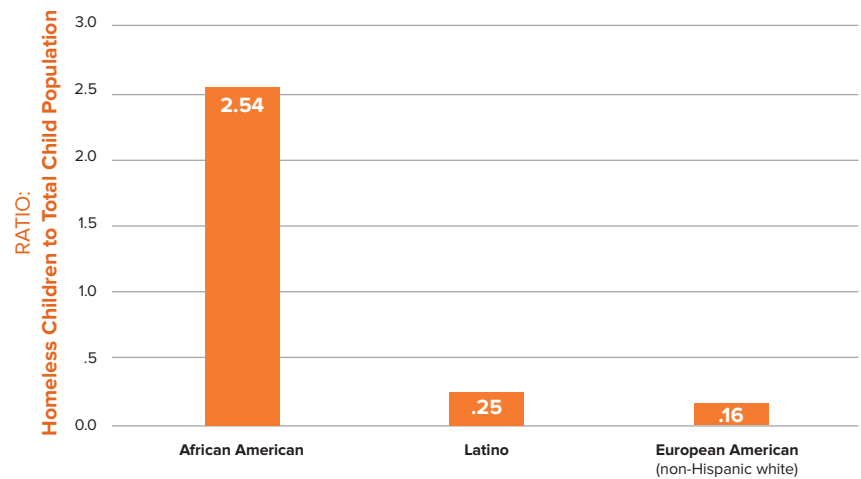
1. People who are living in a place not meant for human habitation, in emergency shelter, in transitional housing, or are exiting an institution where they temporarily resided.

2. People who are losing their primary nighttime residence within 14 days and lack resources or support networks to remain in housing.

3. Families with children or unaccompanied youth who are unstably housed and likely to continue in that state.

4. People who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, have no other residence, and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.

## Homelessness by the numbers

In the 2017 Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) national point-in-time study, 553,742 individuals were experiencing homelessness. Of these individuals one-third (184,661) reported that they were in families with children. Of the individuals in families with children, 60% were under the age of eighteen. California accounts for 12% of the population of homeless families with children, ranking second highest of all states in the nation.[3]

A more detailed look at homelessness uncovers demographic inequities and generational links that further complicate its impact. A Los Angeles County meta-analysis of homelessness shows the disproportionate burden of homelessness among African American adults begins in childhood. African American children experience homelessness at two and a half times the rate of the overall child population, and the rate of homelessness for African American children is thirteen times greater than the rate for European American (non-Hispanic white) children.[4]

### Ratio of Homeless Children to All Children by Ethnicity: Los Angeles County



Sources: Weighted average of 2017 demographic survey, and HMIS data 2013 - 2017; general population data is from the American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample, 2010 - 2014.

According to the same meta-analysis, 30% of adults experiencing homelessness have also been in foster care, creating a cycle that is often hard to break.

3  HUD Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, 2017
4  D. Flaming, P. Burns, J. Carlen, Underwritten by The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, Meta-Analysis of Homelessness in L.A.
5  National Alliance to End Homelessness

## The impact of housing insecurity on child welfare entry and reunification

### NATIONAL

There is no "typical" path to homelessness for a family, with many factors potentially playing a role, including job loss, medical bills, domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse disorders, evictions, institutional racism, and biased housing policies. What homeless families do clearly have in common is an inability to secure housing in their geographic area, no matter what the contributor. And, according to recent studies,[6] there is also resistance from landlords to rent to households with children, or to families who have a criminal record and/or frequent evictions. As a result, many low-income families are forced to live in unsafe and unstable situations.

Over the past two decades, research has shown a significant correlation between housing insecurity and child welfare involvement. While not California-specific, the most conclusive studies show the following:

- **Homelessness, more than income level, increases risk for child welfare involvement.** One study followed three cohorts from the same Pittsburgh neighborhood: 1) mothers who have experienced at least one episode in a shelter, 2) low-income mothers who have not experienced homelessness, and 3) a reference group of all others. Children of mothers with at least one homeless episode had a nearly seven times greater risk of involvement with the child welfare system than did mothers in the reference group. In contrast, those in the low-income but never-homeless group had only a one and a half times greater risk for system involvement.[7]

- **Homelessness is a barrier to family maintenance and reunification.** A study of families involved in the Milwaukee child welfare system found that families who had experienced homelessness were more likely to have their children removed than families who were stably housed, and the same families were almost half as likely to regain custody.[8]

- **Homelessness compounds the issues that can lead to child welfare involvement.** An analysis of over 8,000 homeless children in New York City found that 18% received child welfare services over the five-year period following their first shelter admission, and more than 4% became system-involved within the first year.[9]

> " When a child is removed from the home, CalWORKS benefits can be removed if they were being provided to the family. That can often be a huge financial burden on the parents, and the tipping point into homelessness, making it more difficult for them to reunify with their child."
>
> *Linda Jenkins, Manager, Community Development Commission/Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles*

6  Desmond, Matthew, *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, (New York, Penguin, 2016)

7  J. Culhane, Webb, Grim, Metraux, D. Culhane, September 2003, Prevalence of Child Welfare Services Involvement among Homeless and Low-Income Mothers: A Five-Year Birth Cohort Study

8  Courtney, McMurty, Zinn, October 2004, Housing Problems Experienced by Recipients of Child Welfare Services

9  Park, Metraux, Bordbar, D. Culhane, October 2004, Child Welfare Involvement Among Children in Homeless Families

> " The stress of homelessness can cause parents to react in ways that lead to neglect and abuse. They want to be good parents, but the situation is so difficult that the stress often interferes with their intentions. But we also see a lot of resilience among our families."

**Martha Ryan, Founder & Executive Director, Homeless Prenatal Program**

> " Many of our relative caregivers may find themselves suddenly taking in a sibling set, and may not have the resources to secure housing with enough space, particularly in counties with high housing costs. As a consequence, we have siblings split up and children placed out of their counties."

**Diana Boyer, Senior Policy Analyst, County Welfare Directors Association of California**

## CALIFORNIA: LIMITED DATA CHALLENGE

In California, housing insecurity is not a legal cause for removing children from their family (WIC Section 300b), but it may be noted as a contributing factor recorded during in-person investigations of reported neglect or abuse. However, California's statewide child welfare case management system does not consistently track corollary factors, such as homelessness, making it difficult to draw empirical conclusions about the relationship between housing insecurity and child welfare involvement.

One source of data for this correlation is the Structured Decision Making (SDM) Family Risk Assessment Tool, which provides a partial view into how housing instability might be associated with child welfare involvement. The SDM Risk Assessment data shows that in 2017, 4.7% of completed assessments statewide had housing (physically unsafe or homeless) identified as a risk factor. That noted, the SDM data is also limited because: 1) the tool was not implemented in all California counties until 2016, 2) actual county practice with the SDM assessment tools may vary considerably, and 3) there may be practice changes within counties that impact the way caseworkers document housing issues.

While statewide data is limited, San Francisco County offers additional recent data points. In 2017, homelessness was reported for 26% of all children who had a child welfare case opened, and for 34% of those children who went into foster care.[10] A longitudinal study conducted by the San Francisco Human Services Agency also showed that children who were homeless when they entered foster care were 30% less likely to reunify. These data are more closely aligned with national studies than the statewide SDM data, and reflect the complex housing problems often associated with large, expensive cities like San Francisco.

### Why this matters for housing insecure families

The experience of housing insecurity significantly increases the likelihood of child welfare involvement and further undermines child well-being. Without a safe or secure place to live, families face greater challenges resolving day-to-day stressors and providing safety and stability for their children. The chaos of shelter living, or stress of not having a known place to live, can also trigger trauma, exacerbate substance use or episodes of mental illness, and/or compound developmental issues for children.

Children whose families experience homelessness are not only more likely to be removed from their parents, but are also less likely to be reunified. Often relatives and resource families, particularly in cities with high costs of living, are also constrained by housing costs, which limits placement options and too often leads to children being moved out of county and away from their families and support networks.

10  San Francisco Human Services Agency Planning Unit

## Homelessness & Transition Age Youth

Transition Age Youth too often bear the brunt of the complex relationship between homelessness and foster care.

California reported the largest number of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness (15,458 people), which represents

# 38%

of youth experiencing homelessness nationally.[11]

More than half –

# 52%

– of the youth in Transitional Housing Placement (THP)-Plus have experienced homelessness prior to entering the program, and nearly a third –

# 31%

– enter the program directly from homelessness or unstable housing.[12]

According to a report from San Francisco's Larkin Street Youth Services,

# 37%

of youth who utilize their services report prior involvement in the foster care system.[13]

> "People are starting to pay attention to the connection between homelessness and child welfare involvement, but we need better data to quantify how often housing instability is at play in a child welfare report so we can make the case for more housing resources."
>
> *Lisa Bates, Deputy Director, Financial Assistance, California Department of Housing and Community Development*

11  HUD Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, 2017
12  John Burton Advocates for Youth 2016 - 2017 THP+FC & THP-Plus Annual Report
13  Larkin Street Youth Services, 2018 Report on Incidence and Needs

# Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| **Bridge Housing** | Short to medium term rental payments to stabilize housing for individuals or families. |
| **Continuums of Care (CoC)** | Local planning bodies responsible for coordinating the full range of homelessness services in a geographic area, which may cover a city, county, metropolitan area, or an entire state. Learn More |
| **Coordinated Entry System (CES)** | Streamlines the process of finding housing for those who are homeless, with the goal of housing the most vulnerable people first. |
| **Family Unification Program (FUP)** | A program under which Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) are provided to families for whom the lack of adequate housing is a primary factor in either: 1) the imminent placement of the family's child or children in out-of-home care, or 2) the delay in the discharge of the child or children to the family from out-of-home care. Also available to qualifying youth between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four. Learn More |
| **Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)** | Enables a community to collect information from projects serving homeless families and individuals to use as part of their needs analyses. The HEARTH Act of 2009 required that all communities have an HMIS with the capacity to collect unduplicated counts of individuals and families experiencing homelessness, which enables HUD to collect national-level data to inform policy change. |
| **Housing First** | A homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, and is guided by the belief that people need basic necessities like food and a place to live before attending to anything less critical.[14] |
| **Housing Insecurity** | An all-encompassing measure that covers a variety of characteristics, including housing instability, housing affordability, housing safety, housing quality, neighborhood safety, neighborhood quality, and homelessness.[15] |
| **Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)** | An evidence-based housing intervention that combines non-time-limited affordable housing assistance with wraparound supportive services for people experiencing homelessness, as well as other people with disabilities. |
| **Rapid Re-Housing** | A housing model designed to provide temporary rental assistance coupled with intensive case management to people experiencing homelessness, moving them quickly out of homelessness and into permanent housing. |
| **Transitional Housing** | Typically provides homeless people with up to twenty-four months of shelter and supportive services. |
| **VI-SPDAT (Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool)** | A survey administered both to individuals and families to determine risk and prioritization when providing assistance to persons who are homeless and at risk of homelessness. Learn More |

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14 National Alliance to End Homelessness, Housing First Fact Sheet
15 Cox, Rodnyansky, Henwood, Wenzel; Measuring population estimates of housing insecurity in the United States: A comprehensive approach, Washington Center for Equitable Growth; December 2017

Historically, housing support for child welfare – involved families required successfully completing months of services before being referred to an overburdened community housing program, or handed a Section-8 voucher with little guidance on how to navigate finding a home. As mandated by SB 1380, more agencies are using a Housing First approach and offering housing support at the onset of child welfare involvement, with the goal of helping families stabilize so they can focus on working with a caseworker to find their best-fit housing solution.

The following summarizes three of the most significant national and California state programs that are starting to prove the impact of a Housing First approach. These programs and pilots are also designed to better understand which housing interventions best meet the complex needs of housing insecure child welfare – involved families. See the graphic on pages 10-11 for more details.

### Keeping Families Together (KFT): Local Pilot, New York City

The Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), a national organization with a twenty-year track record of researching and implementing supportive housing solutions, developed the Keeping Families Together (KFT) pilot project[16] in New York City with several agencies, experts, and nonprofit organizations experienced in providing supportive housing for families. The pilot ran from August 2007 through June 2009. Although serving just twenty-nine families, this pilot is often credited with launching the supportive housing model which has shifted practice towards more comprehensive, long-term, and collaboratively implemented services for vulnerable families at the intersection of homelessness and child welfare.

An evaluation at the end of the KFT pilot program found that more than 60% of child welfare cases among the families were favorably resolved, and overall reports of maltreatment dropped substantially (by 87%). Participating families also demonstrated positive outcomes in the areas of family stability, functioning, and self-sufficiency, including an increase in school attendance among children. The vast majority of families served by KFT still had stable housing three years after the pilot ended.

> " The path to homelessness is complex and varies *so* much by family. Forty-seven percent of the families that come to us have jobs, but the pay is so low that one economic or medical crisis can lead to homelessness. Domestic violence is often involved. And we see so much extreme, often multi-generational poverty, where even if we find housing for the families it is hard to keep them housed. Our work is focused on disrupting this cycle of poverty and working with families to find long-term stability so they can thrive."
>
> *Tomiquia Moss, CEO, Hamilton Families*

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16 Keeping Families Together pilot project brochure

# Promising Programs

> **The Administration on Children, Youth and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services heard about the results of the Keeping Families Together pilot, visited the site, and developed a federal demonstration program based on the learnings. That's how it all started, and the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, the Corporation for Supportive Housing, the Urban Institute and others came together to make it happen."**
>
> *Andrew Johnson, Senior Program Manager, One Roof Initiative, CSH*

## Partnerships to Demonstrate the Effectiveness of Supportive Housing for Families in the Child Welfare System:[17] Federal Demonstration Program, San Francisco

In September 2012, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services launched a five-year national demonstration program and awarded a total of $25 million to five jurisdictions, San Francisco being one of the sites. In San Francisco, the program was called Families Moving Forward (FMF).

Building from the successes of New York City's Keeping Families Together pilot, the goal of the federal demonstration project was to test the effectiveness of supportive housing for particularly vulnerable families involved in the child welfare system. In addition to providing more than five hundred families across the five sites with supportive housing and wraparound services, the demonstration is intended to strengthen partnerships between child welfare, housing, health care, employment, and other local systems, in order to reduce bureaucratic barriers and improve outcomes for the highest-need families. Targeted outcomes included reducing rates of child maltreatment, out-of-home placements, and overall involvement with the child welfare system.

### A Bringing Families Home Success Story

Rennie is thirty-three years old and was recently reunified with her nine-year-old daughter, Ava. When Rennie was sixteen she was on her own, and has battled addiction and homelessness ever since.

> **I tried so hard to stay clean, but I just couldn't do it when I was homeless. Being homeless was just so stressful. I was so used to Ava being with me, even when she shouldn't have been. Losing her was my real wake-up call. I had a job but it didn't cover our rent. We probably wouldn't have made it without the support of the Bringing Families Home program. I want people to know that my past doesn't define me. I want happiness, success, and stability for my family, just like everyone else."**

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17 Partnerships to Demonstrate the Effectiveness of Supportive Housing for Families in the Child Welfare System

The federal government will be releasing the final planning and implementation evaluations in early 2019, however five years of implementing in San Francisco has yielded significant preliminary learnings:

- **Cross-system collaboration and program management are essential.** All entities must buy into the goals and metrics and commit to regular meetings to correct course quickly.

- **Housing First helps families stabilize and focus.** A Housing First approach is essential for families so they can focus on addressing their other economic, educational, physical, and psychosocial needs. However, the first thirty to sixty days of a new child welfare case is chaotic, and sometimes it is not even evident which family members should be involved in the case plan. Giving the family and caseworker time to begin working together on a case plan before introducing housing supports is consistent with the Housing First approach while also acknowledging the complexities of the situation.

- **Bridge housing is essential to a successful search.** For these most vulnerable families, finding housing is a full-time job that may be very challenging to complete if they don't have the resources of a stable short-term home.

- **Need deeper financial support for high security deposits**. Federal vouchers cannot be activated when high security deposits are unattainable. These "hidden costs" of housing are often the hardest to find funds to cover.

- **It's all about the relationships.** Some of the most historically challenging barriers—unwilling landlords, voucher shortages, etc., may be overcome with strong working relationships.

> " Under FMF we were housing first but not fast; it took about nine months, on average, for families to be housed. Under BFH, that has sped up quite a bit."
>
> *Bridgette Lery, Director of Research & Evaluation, San Francisco Human Services Agency*

> " In the beginning of FMF, our team spent a considerable amount of effort helping families who did not have stable shelter find a place to stay every night. When Holloway House opened, we were able to shift away from crisis management because parents had a safe and reliable place to stay while working to find housing of their own with our support."
>
> *Kylie Woodall, Lead Housing Specialist, Homeless Prenatal Program*

# Promising Programs

## Applying Federal Learnings to a California Housing First Pilot — Bringing Families Home (BFH)

**Objective:** Reduce the number of families in California's child welfare system experiencing homelessness, increase family reunification, and prevent foster care placement by providing evidence-based housing interventions of Rapid Re-Housing and supportive housing.

**Funding:** Created by Assembly Bill (AB) 1603 in 2016, BFH allocates $10 million across twelve counties that committed to providing a 1:1 match of funds starting January 2017 through June 2019.

**Model:** Counties are required to use a Housing First approach with either Rapid Re-Housing or Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), depending on the family's need.

There is no control group and all qualifying families referred to the program will receive services.

**Structure:** Each county is structuring the program slightly differently, within the requirements of the legislation. The following provides a snapshot of a subset of implementing counties.

> **The California Department of Social Services has been practical and communicative in the implementation of BFH. This has translated into us being able to deliver better services while also still holding us accountable for outcomes."**
>
> *Regina de Melo, Program Development Manager, Sonoma County, Children, Youth and Family Services*

### Los Angeles County

- Of the fifty-three homeless initiatives in LA County, two are dedicated to child welfare — involved families experiencing homelessness: the Family Reunification Housing Subsidy (called B6), and BFH.

- B6 is not a Housing First approach program, however it has successfully focused on housing supports for families in reunification. Launched full scale in January 2017, as of March 2017 the program has worked with 123 families, 50% of whom have been successfully housed.

- With BFH, LA County has the opportunity to fill a service gap by applying the Housing First approach to focus on family maintenance cases to help keep families together despite homelessness. With a goal of housing two hundred families in 2018, only five months into the program and 155 qualified families have been referred with five successfully housed. The challenging housing market and shortage of FUP vouchers is an ongoing struggle that is reflected in these numbers.

> **Child welfare has traditionally been separate from housing. We are now collaborating with LA Housing Authority and the partner nonprofit organizations who are helping to implement B6 and BFH, and we have seen over $3 million in cost savings by housing families so they can be together versus kids being in out-of-home care. That said, we have families who are doing well and we just don't have housing to help them remain stable."**
>
> *Ed Fithyan, Division Chief, Los Angeles Department of Children & Family Services*

### Santa Cruz County

• Launched BFH in Fall 2017 with a goal of serving thirty families total. They are just over one-third of the way into the program and have housed six families, 20% of the goal. They are getting more efficient with the process and estimate the time to housing will decrease. All families are starting off in Rapid Re-Housing and the county is saving FUP vouchers for the most complicated and vulnerable families where it is nearly impossible for them to maintain an income to cover housing.

• Collaboration is at the core of BFH and it is really making a difference for families, as shown by this example. A local shelter had a rule that children had to be with their family at least half the time in order for the parents to stay in the shelter. One family did not meet this requirement, but needed housing so they could start overnight visits with their child as required by their case plan. The housing case manager met with the head of the shelter and they made it work. Overnight visits happened, and the family is on a path toward reunification.

> " We went and talked to child welfare caseworkers and asked how many had families that could benefit from BFH. They all raised their hands. Housing has been a nightmare for the caseworkers...and the housing support through BFH is huge."
>
> *Jessica Scheiner, Senior Human Services Analyst, County of Santa Cruz Human Services Department*

### Sonoma County

• In 2016 the county launched a *Housing Assistance & Permanency Program* (HAPP) to provide housing support for families in the stages of family maintenance or reunification who were also experiencing housing instability or homelessness. They submitted for BFH because there were not enough resources through HAPP to support the high level of need in the county. With both programs in place, HAPP now primarily serves family maintenance cases, and BFH focuses on reunifying families. Key results from HAPP and BFH:

• FUP voucher utilization has gone up considerably due to a closer working relationship with the housing authority, and case management supports to clear criminal records and manage paperwork.

• 107 families have gone through the HAPP and BFH programs, with sixty-two families successfully obtaining permanent housing (three of whom are BFH families).

• Of the families that have obtained permanent housing, forty-three (69%) have been able to end their housing case management services and maintain housing stability. Within this group of families, **61% have successfully reunified with their children, versus 37% of Sonoma County's general child welfare caseload that didn't receive housing services**.

> " BFH has been a culture shift for the caseworkers who traditionally feel there are many other things to focus on in the beginning of a child welfare case other than housing. We communicated to caseworkers that families benefit when housing is the foundation, not the reward."
>
> *Regina de Melo, Program Development Manager, Sonoma County, Children, Youth and Family Services*

> ❝ A challenging housing climate does not change our belief that everyone deserves safe and stable housing. This is particularly true for child welfare – involved homeless families who are some of the most vulnerable families in our communities. Stable housing can relieve extreme stress and enable families to resolve barriers more quickly."

**Ali Sutton, Branch Chief, Housing, Homelessness and Civil Rights Branch, California Department of Social Services**

> ❝ Child welfare system-involved families are one of the most complex and vulnerable families experiencing homelessness. For this reason, CSH argues that this population should almost always receive supportive housing."

**Sharon Rapport, Associate Director, CSH**

### Housing First Approach: Make housing the foundation, not the reward.

There is a large and growing evidence base demonstrating that Housing First is an effective solution to homelessness. Consumers in a Housing First model access housing faster[18] and are more likely to remain stably housed.[19] This is true for both PSH and Rapid Re-Housing programs.

### Permanent Supportive Housing is the best fit for our most vulnerable families.

CSH estimates that nationally, 18% (40,117) of the 222,871 families with children placed in foster care are in need of supportive housing. For California, CSH estimates 5,897 units of supportive housing are needed for this population. The primary differences between PSH and Rapid Re-Housing are: 1) length and intensity of case management for housing search and maintenance supports, and 2) level of financial housing subsidy.
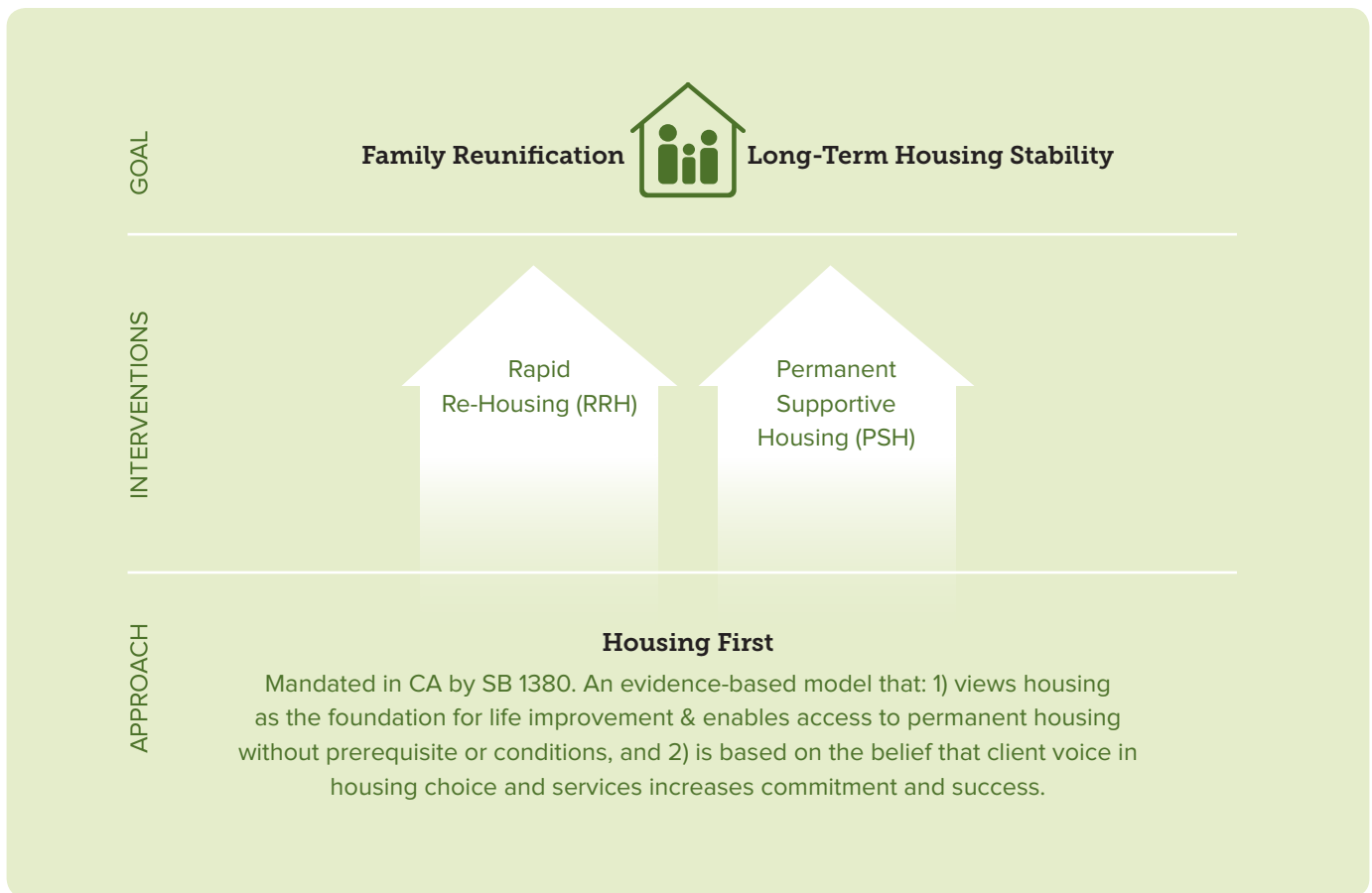
PSH provides extensive housing supports, both case management and financial (often with a Section 8 or FUP voucher), for as long as the family needs it. The goal of Rapid Re-Housing is to exit the family from housing case management and supports as soon as they demonstrate the ability to maintain stable housing on their own, but on average services last between six and twelve months. In expensive cities where affordable housing options are limited, this may mean moving the family outside of the county and away from their safety nets.

The high cost of PSH minimizes availability, and sometimes it just comes down to what type of housing is available. The BFH pilot is partnering with Children's Data Network to structure rigorous testing on both Rapid Re-Housing and PSH to more definitively identify best fit housing solutions as California looks to scale programs for homeless child welfare–involved families.

18 "Housing, Hospitalization, and Cost Outcomes for Homeless Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities Participating in Continuum of Care and Housing First Programs." Gulcur, Stefancic, Shinn, Tsemberis, & Fisher, 2003.
19 Pathways to Housing: Supported Housing for Street-Dwelling Homeless Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities. Tsemberis & Eisenberg, 2000.

# Reimagining the Path to Stable Housing for Child Welfare Families



**GOAL**

**Family Reunification**    **Long-Term Housing Stability**

**INTERVENTIONS**

Rapid
Re-Housing (RRH)

Permanent
Supportive
Housing (PSH)

**APPROACH**

**Housing First**
Mandated in CA by SB 1380. An evidence-based model that: 1) views housing
as the foundation for life improvement & enables access to permanent housing
without prerequisite or conditions, and 2) is based on the belief that client voice in
housing choice and services increases commitment and success.

## Moving from silos of expertise to cross-system collaboration.

Housing programs and pilots for child welfare families experiencing homelessness implemented in the past decade all have one thing in common: robust cross-system collaboration that leverages multiple types of expertise and does not place the burden of housing case management at the feet of child welfare. The collaborations include key players from both the child welfare and housing arenas, coming together under one agreed-upon set of metrics and with a commitment to shared oversight, to ensure that no family falls through the "program cracks."

> **Our caseworkers are constantly challenged in supporting families who need housing and it's essential that county housing providers are truly engaging the families, in partnership with child welfare, to achieve the families' goals."**
>
> *Frank Mecca, Executive Director, County Welfare Directors Association of California*

> " While we are seeing an increasing number of states and counties replicating supportive housing for child welfare – involved families using the Keeping Families Together approach, there is a great deal of anticipation for the five-year federal demonstration project final report to come out in early 2019 to significantly add to the evidence base that supportive housing works for these high needs families. We anticipate the data will continue to support the large-scale national housing effort that we are engaged in with this population."
>
> *Andrew Johnson, Senior Program Manager, One Roof Initiative, CSH*

• **Scale programs that have shown success for housing insecure families.** Make the case that successful interventions need to be applied to full-scale programs that can reach more families who are struggling with housing insecurity and therefore more susceptible to child welfare involvement. Research shows this is a cost-effective and humane investment for the new funds/resources addressing homelessness.

• **Increase permanent supportive housing options for child welfare– involved families in state and county plans** to address housing affordability and homelessness. Based on CSH estimates, there are about 6,000 units needed, an achievable goal given the scale and scope of some of the state and local proposals.

• **Improve data collection and reporting.** Add the ability to document housing instability and homelessness to the Child Welfare Services-California Automated Response and Engagement System (CWS-CARES), with reporting through the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) to identify when homelessness is a contributing factor to removal and a barrier to permanency. Enabling the collection of more robust and disaggregated data on the occurrence and impact of housing instability and homelessness on child welfare–involved families will support development of better policies and programs for this highly vulnerable population.

• **Ensure child welfare has a voice in significant state spending on homelessness.** In 2016, California state law created the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council to inform state and local decision-making on how housing monies are allocated. The newly passed Senate Bill 850 elevates the state homeless council to an agency-level entity within the Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency, and states that the council will administer the approved $500 million Homeless Emergency Aid program. Appointees include a representative from CDSS, as well as a youth who has experienced homelessness. We recommend that the council continue to find ways to incorporate the views of county child welfare agencies and nonprofit housing service providers to adequately advocate for child welfare – involved families experiencing housing insecurity. Advocacy efforts on behalf of these families must include experience-based data in support of scaling programs that work.

• **Increase child welfare's involvement in local Continuums of Care (CoC).** CoCs are designed to promote local community wide commitment with the goal of ending homelessness (definition p. 6). We recommend that child welfare agency representatives and stakeholders (particularly those with lived experience) work with local CoCs to determine how best to assess vulnerability and risk of homelessness through a child welfare lens, and participate in discussions on how new funds are allocated to solutions for families facing housing instability.

- **California State Auditor: Homelessness In California.** Requested by the Joint Legislative Audit Committee, a comprehensive audit report concerning homelessness in California and the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority's (Authority) administration of public funds.
Learn More

- **Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH).** A national organization providing a comprehensive set of services to cities and states to help develop and implement service-supported housing for those most in need.
Learn More

- **National Alliance to End Homelessness.** A nonpartisan, nonprofit organization committed to preventing and ending homelessness in the United States.
Learn More

- **National Center for Housing and Child Welfare (NCHCW).** Links housing resources and knowledge to child welfare agencies in order to improve family functioning, prevent family homelessness, and reduce the need for out-of-home placement.
Learn More

- **National Center on Family Homelessness.** Provides research, training, and resources to support and inform policymakers and practitioners in ending family homelessness.
Learn More

- **The Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative.** A dynamic countywide movement to combat and prevent homelessness.
Learn More

- **The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).**

  The Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, 2017.
  Learn More

  Family Options Study: 3-Year Impacts of Housing and Services Interventions for Homeless Families.
  Learn More

> "There will be hundreds of millions of dollars flowing down to the local Continuums of Care to address homelessness at the community level, and there will be a lot of flexibility on how it is spent. A natural tendency might be to put the money toward more shelters when other prevention or permanent solutions may be preferable. Make sure the right people are representing child welfare when these decisions are made so programs can be funded to keep families stably housed and together."

*Zach Olmstead, Deputy Director, Housing Policy Development, California Department of Housing and Community Development*