

At The Crossroads

NEWSLETTER

At the Crossroads, a program of the San Francisco Foundation Community Initiative Funds

Winter, 2005

For this newsletter, At The Crossroads decided to focus on the theme of housing. In a city where finding housing is a challenge for almost everyone, it is particularly daunting for people who are homeless and trying to change their situation.

FOR MANY AT THE CROSSROADS CLIENTS, acquiring stable, long-term housing is a large goal that takes years to achieve. Even for those clients who have a plan and a strong desire to make the effort to get into housing, the process can still be arduous. This is the story of just one ATC client and how she got into housing for the first time in 10 years. We'll call this client Paula.

Weeks Two and Three - The Initial Application

ATC counselor Shawn Garety set up a meeting with Paula to fill out the initial application – 20 pages of paperwork, covering everything from her mental health issues and current living situation to her rental history and her SSI status. Paula had to detail how she has been homeless since she was 16 after she left the foster care system, and how since then she has lived on and off the streets and gone in and out of domestic violence shelters. She used sex work to make money to pay for temporary places to stay. Filling out the application was completed at night in a BART station, a place Shawn and Paula agreed to meet where

Paula's Story – From Homeless to Housed

"Every time I got good news, something else would come up and fail."

Week One - The Phone Call

Paula had already been trying to find a stable place to stay when At The Crossroads received a call from Shelter Plus Care (SPC), a federally funded program that places homeless individuals and families with special needs in 567 units of permanent, supportive housing across San Francisco. These units are often single rooms in long-term residential hotels, and tenants are charged 30 percent of their income. In addition to the room, a client can receive supportive housing services through a social worker provided by SPC. This social worker can sometimes connect clients with other services, such as a primary care doctor, a therapist, or other professionals, all of whom are accessible to the client from where they live.

SPC told ATC that it had a room available for an individual with a single diagnosis for either mental health or substance abuse issues or HIV. We had approximately three days to find a client who we thought could qualify for the room.

We thought of a handful of clients, one of whom was Paula. At the time, Paula was living with relatives of her boyfriend, paying rent with some of the money she receives from Social Security Insurance (SSI) for her mental health issues. Paula had bounced between living in more than a dozen places, including hotels, a domestic violence shelter, a hospital, and the streets.

Luckily for Paula, we were already meeting with her on a regular basis; the three-day window to claim a housing spot can be daunting for organizations that work with clients who do not have a reliable way of being contacted. (To its credit, SPC is willing to try to accommodate organizations that let them know they have a client who fits but might take longer than 3 days to reach.)

Paula could afford to go and still feel safe outlining her entire life. In addition, Paula also had to have an ID, her social security card, proof of her SSI income, and proof of her mental health diagnosis – all of which she had obtained through years of working with ATC.

The application was faxed into the SPC office, and Paula was approved for the next phase. It had only been three weeks since the initial call came in to ATC, and it seemed, as one of her counselors put it, that things were happening boom, boom, boom, and Paula should get into housing in a few more weeks.

Week Six - Meeting with the Hotel

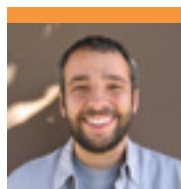
The next step was to meet with a woman from the Tenderloin Housing Clinic (THC) who handled the details of the room at the residential hotel in the Tenderloin. The day of the THC meeting, Paula and her counselor headed over to the hotel to meet with the hotel property manager.

Although SPC handles the applications and provides the support for the housing, it is the property managers themselves that control who is ultimately given a room. Paula was at first hesitant about sharing her full rental and work history, for fear that the property manager would use this information to judge her potential as a tenant. As it turned out, the property manager appreciated Paula's candor, and sent Paula on to fill out paperwork with the hotel's on-site case manager. This paperwork then had to be taken back to the Tenderloin Housing Clinic, but even going through so many hands the process still seemed on track to get Paula her own place.

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Letter from the Director

Rob Gitin



Sometimes I hear residential hotels referred to as an important component of San Francisco's *affordable* housing market. While these rooms make up a huge part of housing for poor people in our city, there is nothing "affordable" about them.

Some of our clients live in residential hotels in the poorer neighborhoods of San Francisco. Let me tell you one client's experience in these hotels. James lives in a room on one of the most dangerous blocks in the city. In his small room, he has no kitchen, meaning no refrigerator to store food, no stove or oven for cooking, not even a sink where he can get a glass of water. Sometimes James sees roaches on his walls, sometimes mice walk across his bed and over his body while he is sleeping. The carpet is bloodstained, as is the mattress. There is one bathroom on the floor, which he shares with about twenty other people. This bathroom is never clean, and sometimes is completely unusable, covered in human waste. There is often garbage in his hallways. He cannot have visitors over, unless he wants to pay extra for them to come in.

And every 28 days, because his landlord wants to kick him out before he establishes residency and the rights that go along with it, James is forced to move to another hotel room. This is known as the hotel shuffle. Every month, he has to uproot his life, pack his belongings, and start over. For the privilege of living here, James pays \$45/night. This adds up to about \$1,350/month, more than some one-bedroom apartments, even in San Francisco's expensive housing market. Not especially affordable, especially considering what you get for the money.

James is not unique among our clients. Many of the young people we work with are stuck in the cycle of non-permanent housing. They are not able to get out of it and pay for a stable apartment, for one of a few reasons:

- They cannot get together the money necessary for move-in costs
- They work "under the table" or in the street economy and can't list their job for a landlord
- Because of how they look, dress, or because they are young, they are not considered desirable tenants

The Catch-22 is that until they can get into a stable, more affordable housing situation, they will be constantly hustling to pay rent, unable to focus on anything else. Sooner or later, they will probably get arrested doing something to make rent money. And with a criminal record, getting into a stable apartment becomes an even more distant dream. Even if they avoid the justice system, with all of their money going to rent and eating out (remember, no kitchen) there is very little possibility of saving the money necessary to get out of this cycle.

Fortunately, there are free or affordable rental housing opportunities that also offer supportive services to accommodate the unique needs of people on the streets. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of this housing, and it often requires years of waiting. Until San Francisco makes a commitment to significantly increasing the number of units of affordable, supportive housing, clients like James will continue to do the hotel shuffle, unable to reach the elusive goal of gaining stable housing.

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Director, At The Crossroads

At The Crossroads

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ATC Mission Statement + Core Values

Mission Statement

At the Crossroads reaches out to homeless youth and young adults at their point of need, and works with them to build healthy and fulfilling lives.

Core Values

- Prioritizing meeting the needs of our clients first
- Making services as accessible as possible
- Supporting empowerment
- Respecting individuality

What We Do – The Basics

- ▶ ATC is on the streets four nights a week in two areas of San Francisco; Downtown and the Mission. We hand out basic necessities like food, condoms, socks, tampons, and hygiene items.
- ▶ We build trusting, non-judgmental counseling relationships, help clients identify personal goals, and support them.
- ▶ We meet with some clients 1-to-1, in a public space of their choosing. We listen to them and provide tailored referrals to other services.
- ▶ We do not exit our clients if and when they leave the streets. We continue to work with clients through this transition, for as long as they want.
- ▶ We work closely with other organizations, connecting our clients with services such as jobs, housing, education, health care, and mental health services.
- ▶ We support other programs in their efforts to work with homeless youth through dialogue, trainings, and helpful documents.

Get Involved with At the Crossroads

Make a donation to ATC.

You'll experience a sense of happiness and fulfillment that you've never known. You'll want to do it again and again. In all seriousness, the future of At The Crossroads depends on the generosity of individuals who believe in our work. **Checks should be made payable to: "At The Crossroads, SFFCIF"**

Or make a credit card donation at www.atthecrossroads.org.

Volunteer your skills.

Donate items on our Wish List.

When people donate items on our Wish List or their time and skills, we are able to keep program costs down and put more of our funds into the direct work with clients. Could you donate tech. support, web design, legal, or accounting skills? Other ideas? Find our Wish List on our website:

www.atthecrossroads.org.

Volunteer to go on street outreach.

Volunteers accompany Counselors on the street – carrying supplies like drinks and socks. Find out about the process on our website. Email **Kelly** at kellyb@atthecrossroads.org

Join our Supply Prep Team!

Help us prepare supplies for outreach to our clients by making candy packs, bunching socks, and bagging soaps and Q-tips. Prep Nights are scheduled on every last Wednesday of the month. If you would like to be notified about upcoming prep nights, email **Rob** at rob@atthecrossroads.org.

Expand our network.

Please let others who might be interested in ATC know about our work! If you'd like, we'll provide you with a packet of information – or pass on our newsletter and/or direct people to our website: **www.atthecrossroads.org**.

Be creative.

We're open to hearing your ideas for supporting ATC. Any questions, please feel free to contact us through email (getinvolved@atthecrossroads.org) or phone (415-487-0691).



In Memory

*The past few months have been a difficult time for ATC and our clients. Three people that we worked with passed away this summer. ATC would like to say goodbye to **Jabari, Face, and Brandon.***

***Jabari** will always be remembered for his huge smile and his even bigger hugs that he gave our counselors, leaving them with a face full of jacket against his tall frame.*

***Face** loved traveling, his faithful dog Carrion, and chewy fruit snacks, and always had a good story to tell.*

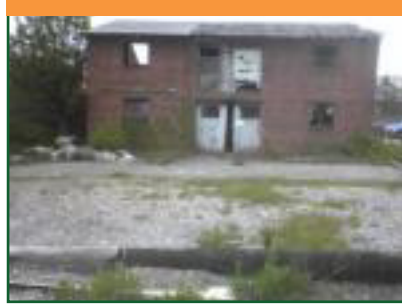
***Brandon** loved giving his friends tattoos, and had hoped to open a tattoo parlor.*

Each one of them will be sorely missed; we are lucky we had a chance to know them while they were here.

WHO DO YOU CONSIDER HOMELESS??

One of the biggest challenges in trying to create a cohesive continuum of support for homeless people is trying to define the word “homeless.” Every program has its own definition, which can dictate who it will and won’t work with, making things very confusing to navigate for people trying to access services for the homeless. Take a moment, and ask yourself how you use the word “homeless,” and how you define the word in your own head.

Do you consider someone homeless if:



The little joys of home

For those clients who now have a place they think of as home, little things bring pleasure, things that people who never experienced homelessness might take for granted.

Cleanliness – Art stays in a hotel that provides him with a shower and a place he can rest without anyone waking him up or telling him to leave.

Support - For David, who lives in a residential rehab program, it’s the “home-cooked meals, people around that treat each other like family. The good things and the bad things, like misbehaving and being appropriate and just sticking up for one another.”

Storage - Beth and Mike are looking to move up into low-income permanent housing, but their current home in a hotel has its advantages: they don’t have to carry everything they own with them all the time. “We don’t have to worry about what’s going to happen to our stuff anymore,” said Mike. “And I don’t have to worry about her [Beth] when I’m not there.”

Regular life - Said Kimberly simply, “It makes me feel more normal.” Added Bradford, “It’s really nice to have a place to go to no matter what. No matter who pisses you off or what happens – “You can always go home,” chimed in Kimberly.

Togetherness - For those clients who live together or with someone they love, there is also the home-making effect of what Mike called simply “each other.”

1. She lives in a van	2. He stays with his girlfriend because he would be on the streets otherwise	3. She sleeps in a bathtub in an overcrowded apartment
4. He stays on the floor of a hotel room that he shares with three other friends	5. She stays in an abandoned building that has electricity and running water	6. He lives in a hotel room three days a week, and couchsurfs between friends and family four days a week
7. She stays in a temporary shelter where she shares a room with ten other women	8. He stays with a John, but only can stay there if he continues to have sex with the John	9. She stays with a friend, but knows she has to leave in a month
10. He lives in a residential drug treatment facility, where he can stay for up to six months	11. She stays in a tent in the park	12. He is in jail, and does not have a place to go when he gets out

The Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development rules that only numbers 1, 5, 7, and 11 qualify a person as homeless. This is a critical distinction, because there are many free or affordable housing options that you can only qualify for if you are considered “chronically homeless,” which means you have been homeless for a year or more, or have had four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

Limiting the definition of homeless to such narrow parameters ensures that there will always be a huge number of hidden homeless people who do not receive the support that they need. By the way, all 12 of these are examples of the living situations of past or current ATC clients.



A Place Called Home

For this article, we talked to a sample of ATC clients about the idea of home. We found that in the past year alone, some clients report having anywhere from one to 30 different living situations. Many have stayed in hotels for a time, maybe a couple of nights, maybe several months. Some have been in jail for similar stretches of time. Many more have stayed with family and friends, and some turn to their sexual partners for a place to rest. (Whether these partners are considered boyfriends or girlfriends or the relationship is more professional, the basic relationship is defined as a place to stay in exchange for sex.) Some have found housing in more off-beat places, such as a fishing boat in Alaska, and plenty have made the nooks and crannies of the streets their home — in alleyways, under bridges, or in abandoned buildings.

Realities of street living

“You think, oh my God, I’m going to die on these streets, and nobody’s going to care and nobody’s going to notice me,” described Kimberly, who lived along Polk street in downtown San Francisco for several years. For many clients, living outside easily qualifies as the worst place they’ve lived in the past year. Being subject to the whims of the weather can make the streets particularly unpleasant, in addition to the harsh realities of no security, privacy, nor immediate way to fulfill hunger needs.

“The side of the hill when it rains,” said Mike, recalling on of the six places he and his girlfriend Beth have stayed over the past year. “That was a real drag.” They also point out that living on the streets is often linked to when they’re feeling the lowest generally— when they’re strung out, when they’ve lost everything, when they feel there is no hope for their future.

Sean, who lived by the side of the 280 Freeway for most of the past year before being kicked out and forced to move to a driveway on Portrero Hill, has a lot of complaints about where he stays now. There are the rats who run over his

sleeping bag, and the woman who decided to empty her RV toilet tank within feet of where he was sleeping. Yet he feels that living on the streets beats the stress of finding a more traditional place to live.

“Yes, I would like to live indoors,” said Sean. “But you know what? If I lived inside I’d have probably 100% more stress than I already have.”

Superstar DJ Trixie also worries about the stress of housing. “I’ll be accountable for all those bills, have to budget my money, which I don’t know how to do. But still, now I’m pretty much out all day. I can’t go home and regroup. It’d be nice to have my own space. To have more serenity.”

Housing Hustle

Those clients that have decided it’s worth the effort to try to get more permanent housing know the struggles that come with the search. A large part of this struggle is completing all the applications and providing proof of qualification that the private and public agencies require. (For a further look inside some of these different housing options and their requirements, see the article, “Housing Options in San Francisco.”) This is added to the fact that many of our clients know their rental history — if they have any at all — might put off any potential landlord.

“Before, housing wasn’t even a priority. My main focus was on drugs,” said Kristine, who is currently living in a residential treatment program. “But now I’m kinda nervous to even go and look for a place, because I’ve had evictions. I don’t know what it’s going to be like.”

“I think they could do something like peer advocacy,” said Kimberly about getting housing. “Having somebody who’s been there to go through it with you, show you the different places, take you there...At The Crossroads showed us a bunch of alternative things that we could do and try. It was nice because it felt like somebody had our back.” Kimberly, who lives with

her husband Bradford, is currently going to school with an eye on helping other young people on the street fulfill their housing goals.

A person to have your back is also important in terms of having someone who can vouch for you and your suitability as a tenant, described Art. “People saying, yeah, this guy will pay his rent, he doesn’t run out on the first and last,” he said.

A Sanctuary

Even for our clients who don’t have a place they think of as home, that doesn’t mean they don’t have strong ideas and memories about what home means to them.

“Home is somewhere you feel safe,” said Sean. “Safe to sleep. Somewhere you can return to, always.”

“I need to have my own place,” Kristine described. “If there are a lot of other people who live there, it’s kinda hard for it to be home. And I want to grow some roots. A place to lay my head. A place that’s like my sanctuary from all the chaos that goes on outside.”

Added Maya, who is currently subletting with a friend, “Home is where I get back and there’s people who worried about me all day and are interested in hearing what the hell I did with my day. If I had a home, I’d stay home, stay out of trouble.”

A home for life

The benefits of having a place to call home also extend beyond a secure roof overhead.

“When you improve your environment and better your environment, it does a lot for your self esteem,” said Kimberly. “It doesn’t cure everything and make everything perfect after that, but it’s really nice to go from absolutely nothing and screwing up everything in your life to being in a place where people actually care about you and treat you like you’re another human being.”

A Snapshot of San Francisco Homelessness

Homelessness seen through a handful of numbers from the San Francisco Department of Human Services and the National Low Income Housing Coalition:

- 6,248** Total number of people homeless in San Francisco
- 606** Number of total homeless families
- 1,754** Number of homeless people in shelters
- 1,141** Number of homeless people in transitional housing and treatment
- 192** Number of homeless people in resource centers
- 415** Number of homeless people in jail
- 91** Number of homeless people in SF General Hospital
- 2,655** Number of homeless people on the street

San Francisco Department of Human Services Homeless Count 2005, conducted in January 2005

\$1,539 Average fair market rate for a two-bedroom in San Francisco in 2004

\$21.24 2004 California Housing Wage (This is the amount a full time (40 hours per week) worker must earn per hour in order to afford a two-bedroom unit at the area's Fair Market rent. Afford, according to Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development Guidelines, means that housing costs no more than 30% of your total net income.)

\$29.60 2004 San Francisco housing wage

175 Number of hours you would need to work at a minimum wage job (\$6.75/hour) each week to afford a two-bed unit in San Francisco

168 Number of hours in a week

\$95,000 Median income in San Francisco

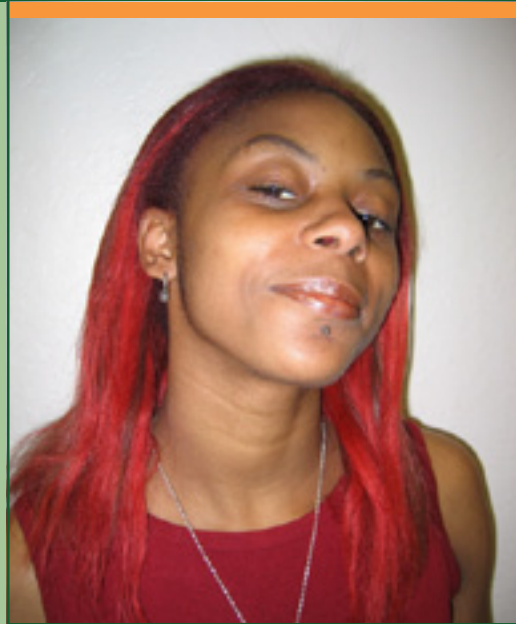
\$64,100 Salary you earn or are below earning to qualify as low-income in San Francisco

Professions with salaries that qualify as low-income:
 elementary school teacher
 emergency dispatcher
 computer technician support

\$40,500 Salary you earn or are below earning to qualify as very low-income in San Francisco:

Professions with salaries that qualify as very low-income:
 medical assistant
 janitor
 child care worker

[National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) Housing Report: Out of Reach 2004]



“Home is where I get back and there’s people who worried about me all day and are interested in hearing what the hell I did with my day. If I had a home, I’d stay home, stay out of trouble.”

- Maya

For more of our clients talking about homelessness, read

A Place Called Home on page 5.

“I gotta find a new place to live.”

It’s a phrase ATC counselors have heard countless times, in some form or other – “I need a place to stay,” “I want to move out,” “I have to stop living on the streets.” These are just a handful of the many ways in which the young people we meet on outreach start to talk about housing. That is, if they’re talking about housing at all.

One of the first skills ATC counselors are taught is how to determine when a client asks about housing as a means to talk about something else. For a lot of our clients, when they talk about moving, what they really want to talk about is where they are – the boyfriend or girlfriend who abuses them, the parent or guardian who doesn’t trust them, how safe or unsafe they feel. They don’t want counselors to focus on listing off all their housing options, but instead to focus on listening to them.

But for those clients who actually are ready to look for a new place to live, ATC counselors are there to provide them the support they need. This support can prove crucial in what is usually a long, involved, often confusing process of sifting through options that can take several months, if not several years.

Not enough space

The central obstacle in alleviating San Francisco’s homelessness problem is simple: there is a lack of housing stock in the city. This shortage affects people who can afford to live here, let alone low-income people (low income is defined in San Francisco as anyone making less than \$64,100). So when the city beefs up its housing programs with new SROs – single room occupancy hotels – for homeless people, the reality is that the “new” SROs are really existing SROs that the city just takes over. Nothing is done to actually increase the overall number of housing units. Studies by the Nonprofit Housing Association of Northern California have shown that in order to meet the housing needs of all the people in the Bay Area, an additional 220,000 units would need to be built every year for the next 15 years. Right now the rate hovers around 150,000, setting the stage for the housing problem to get worse, not better.

Trickle down housing

There is wide agreement that one way to solve the housing stock issue is to build new housing in the neighborhoods where poorer people live, such as Bayview/ Hunters Point, Western Addition, and Mission Bay. And these neighborhoods, along with a handful of other areas singled out as “urban blight,” are all under the planning control of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA).

For the past eight years, the SFRA has provided the majority of local funding for developing and constructing new affordable housing. While much of this housing is financially out of reach for homeless people, there is hope that increasing the overall stock in the city will indirectly lead to more units available for people looking to get off the streets or out of subpar homes.

Yet the promise of this housing – which will inevitably be delayed with years of squabbling and political in-fighting – does nothing to help the immediate needs of homeless people.

Reasonable expectations

In addition, the issues clients faced on the street – drug dependency, domestic abuse, past traumas, mental health struggles, racism – won’t just go away once someone gets a roof over their head.

“If you’re going to target homeless people then you have to have expectations that they’re not going to be the best tenants in the world,” said Johnny Baskerville, Unit Director of Health and Social Services for Swords to Plowshares. “You have to anticipate problems.”

These problems are often made worse by the fact that much of the housing for homeless people is in the Tenderloin, where they feel surrounded by the issues they’re trying to escape.

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Housing Options in San Francisco (at least, some of them)

Shelters

For clients who really are looking for an immediate place to stay off the streets, the first and most direct option is often one of approximately 20 city or privately run emergency shelters that house anywhere from 1,350 to 1,800 people on any given night.

For many of our clients, the shelter system is a mixed housing alternative at best. Thanks to a new centralized shelter access system, clients have to find a bed through one of five resource centers in the Tenderloin, Mission, Hunter’s Point and South of Market areas. Yet if someone in the Mission does not get to the local resource center by 7 p.m., they have to travel to one of the other centers before they even know if there is a bed available that night. After the hour of 9 p.m. only the South of Market and Bayview centers offer shelter services, and are not easily accessible by public transportation. There is also the reality that most days all the beds are claimed before someone who finds themselves homeless that night has a chance at them.

Another issue is the state of the shelters themselves. While the city has gotten credit for improving shelter conditions overall, many young people, even if they are over the age of 18, still do not feel safe spending the night in a large group of unknown adults, away from the group of peers who have been helping them survive on the streets.

Yet for the handful of ATC clients who do decide to stick it out in the shelter system, they often do so to move up a city-held list that increases their chances of getting into one of the city’s Single Room Occupancy Hotels, or SROs.

The City’s SRO Housing

SROs - either those run through contracts with the city or through private entities - make up the majority of permanent housing for homeless people in San Francisco. On the whole, the roughly 1,000 SRO units run by the city are regarded as nicer, cleaner, and safer places to live than private SROs. They are also significantly cheaper than regular hotels, as the city offers a General Assistance (GA) cash subsidy to everyone in their housing programs. Many of the city SROs also have case managers on site, and offer access to a variety of supportive services such as job placement and food pantries.

However, in order to access city-run SROs, homeless people need to have a case manager who has contacts with a city program to refer them or must go through the General Assistance program. While some case managers do have special connections and the GA program holds the promise of housing, the reality is that for the vast majority the only real way into the

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“I had one client who got into a hotel [in the Tenderloin] and then left,” described Susan Shensa from the St. Anthony Foundation. “He told me, ‘The hotel was fine, the room was clean, they had good case management there. But I felt so threatened. Every time I had cash on me, everybody became my best friend and wanted something. I moved over to a shelter, and I think that’s really going to be better for me.’ He said he felt like a prisoner. He said he just couldn’t take it anymore.”

“Only” 4,000 applications for 50 units of available housing? A slow day.

Supply and Demand

The programs that are more tolerant and understanding of the realities of homeless people are often full. If they take an application at all, it is to get on a waitlist that could take months, often years to ever produce a home. (It is not uncommon for a housing program to advertise openings complete with tests of timing and stamina in order just to get the application, such as handing out the paperwork to the first six people who line up outside their office doors by 7 a.m.) Even some shelters operate on the waiting list model, an approach that runs counter to the idea of a shelter being available to meet someone’s needs immediately. One housing officer referred to 50 units of available housing “only” getting 4,000 applications as a slow day. Case managers are forced to come together and battle it out for their client, to “try to prioritize that one person to have this one opportunity,” described Johnny Baskerville.

“People will say a homeless person is unhouseable when they’re put in housing and end up being homeless again in a short period of time,” said Dr. Barry Zevin, Medical Director of Tom Waddell Health Clinic. “And more often than not we end up pointing the finger at that individual and saying they failed housing. As if somehow it was their fault that this did not work for them. We don’t often enough say, as we need to say, we don’t have the right model of creating a home for that person that can actually work for them. It doesn’t exist in San Francisco. It doesn’t exist anywhere, perhaps – it hasn’t been invented.”

Secrets of success

Some housing advocates also accept the idea that completely getting rid of homelessness is impossible. But for the homeless person who believes that they can climb out of their current situation, that first stable place off the streets is a crucial step. What steps do you take to help clients find housing? One of the keys is to keep knocking on doors and making phone calls.

“You need constant communication,” said Susan Shensa. “You need to keep up not just with clients, but with the property manager too, even if it takes six, seven phone calls before they get back to you. Finding housing is a long process, and it takes a good two-three months. You never know what is going to happen.”

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city-run SROs is to stay at one of the city shelters for several months before you get high enough on the waiting list to get in. As already discussed, the shelter system is not an attractive option for many of our clients, who prefer to find the money to stay at non-city SROs.

The quality of these SROs can range wildly, and most do not provide young homeless people safety and security. The regular SROs are also more expensive than city-run SROs, and that can lead youth to take up and maintain illegal street activity, such as sex work or drug dealing, in order to pay the bills. If they start to consider other, legal work, they know that a smaller paycheck may put them back out on the street.

Support + Housing

Another potential problem with SROs is that while they do get people off the streets, they don’t provide enough support to help people deal with the issues beyond housing that landed them on the streets in the first place. There are some city-run programs designed to offer homeless people not just housing but the tools to examine their lives. The city’s Department of Public Health runs the Direct Access to Housing (DAH) program, which offers housing to people who suffer from mental illness. DAH has a relatively low threshold for entry - the application process is kept lighter to get people into supportive services as quickly as possible. The Department of Human Service’s Shelter Plus Care (SPC) program targets homeless people with disabilities.

“It all depends if they get housing that matches their needs,” described Daya Johnson, a peer counselor at Center for Special Problems. “If they end up in a place that has a lot of people with substance abuse problems, and they’re not dealing with that, then obviously that is not the end of the problem. But it does make a really big difference for a lot of people just to have some kind of stable place.”

Non Profit Housing

There are a number of housing programs around the city owned and operated by nonprofits, including the Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation, Bernal Heights Neighborhood Center, and Community Housing Partnership, among others. While not all of these offer detailed supportive services, nonprofit housing options are still widely regarded as effective, safe alternatives to living on the streets. However, there are restrictions that make nonprofit programs a tricky fit for the majority of ATC clients who are looking for housing. Many of the units available require tenants to have a minimum income that’s above most of our clients’ means. There are also restrictions against felony convictions and evictions.

“We put people in housing and expect them to be model citizens,” said Susan Shensa of the St. Anthony Foundation. “All their problems are supposed to disappear.”

Mental Health Services Act

In 2004, California voters passed the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), creating a new tax on income over \$1,000,000 that would go to fund mental health services throughout the state. **Unfortunately, the initial estimates that San Francisco would receive 50 million dollars were incorrect. Instead, San Francisco will only receive about 5.3 million dollars to fund services.** This was a blow to San Francisco, which has a large population of poor and homeless people with mental illnesses. Despite this disappointment, San Francisco continued to move forward with an extensive community planning process to develop a three-year plan for how to use this funding. Hundreds of organizations, consumers, health experts and other individuals participated in this process, including At The Crossroads. The exciting news for our clients is that transitional age youth (ages 16-25) were a focus area, and in this age range, homeless youth were deemed to be a top priority. To learn more about how the MHSA will be implemented in San Francisco, go to www.sfdph.org.

San Francisco Homeless Outreach Team is coming to the Mission

In 2004, as part of his homelessness initiatives, Mayor Gavin Newsom reorganized homeless outreach workers under various city departments into the Homeless Outreach Team, under the Department of Public Health. The goal of SFHOT is to engage chronically homeless people in services in order to help them stabilize and get off the streets. The SFHOT is currently doing outreach in the Tenderloin. In early 2006, the SFHOT will be expanding its reach into three new areas, including the Mission (one of our two outreach neighborhoods). This was in response to a lack of culturally specific services and high concentration of homeless people in these areas. SFHOT has tapped into neighborhood-based organizations in order to try to modify its services to meet the unique needs of the homeless people in the Mission. ATC and other Mission-based organizations have been able to play a role in this process, providing input into the design of the job description for the assistant director who will oversee the Mission operations, as well as helping interview candidates for this position. We hope that the presence of the SFHOT will enable more of our clients to get connected with resources that can help them achieve their goals.

Holiday Season at ATC

Last year, Tori (ATC Outreach Counselor) sat down with a client, Jeff, at the Downtown party, and asked him how he is doing. He responds, "I'm perfect. I am eating a free meal; I just got a holiday gift, and a new pair of gloves. What else could I ask for?"

The holiday season is one of our favorite times of year: we host two parties for our clients, share food, give out gifts, and just hang out. Last year's parties were amazing! We had clients come by whom we hadn't seen in a year, who heard of the party through word of mouth. Clients who had never met each other before, who come from very different backgrounds began to bond. At both parties, clients were effusive in their appreciation. While our clients generally show us a good amount of love, I think that every staff member was truly touched by the words of different clients who expressed how much they valued the parties and our organization.

This year - we're again having two holiday parties, one Downtown and one in the Mission, on December 20th and 22nd. We are having a wrapping party on Wednesday December 14th, for volunteers to come by the office and help wrap presents for our clients. Each year, ATC and our clients are very grateful to all of the wonderful people who donate money to support our parties, bring gifts for our clients, help us wrap them, and bake holiday treats. Our parties could not happen without this outpouring of support.

At last year's parties:

- 125 clients attended
- 105 gift certificates were purchased for clients
- 125 hats, gloves, and movie tickets given out
- \$4,900 raised in special holiday donations, enough to cover the entire cost of the two parties
- Approximately 85 burgers, 20 chicken sandwiches, 90 French fries, 110 soft drinks, 10 salads, and 30 pieces of pie or cake consumed.
- About 400 homemade cookies and brownies wolfed down
- Can't wait to see what this year is like!



New Staff

We'd like to introduce you to our newest counselor, Danielle Bendorf. During her youth in San Jose, she was obsessed with The Cosby Show. More recently, Danielle spent four years as a special education aide for high school students. Danielle has always surrounded herself with people from different cultures, and also made this her topic of study in college, where she focused on Race, Class, & Gender studies.

Danielle felt that the more she learned about ATC, the more she felt like her personal philosophy of how to work with people matched up with our organizational approach to working with kids. She enjoys the "combination of oddballs" that she works with, seeing how each one of us is "crazy in our own way," enabling us to connect with a diverse range of clients.

We are thrilled that Danielle has joined our team, bringing with her a confidence and comfort with herself, a deep passion for young people, and an inquiring, thoughtful mind. Even though it took her three days to figure out how to open our front door, we still believe in her. She loves going on outreach and we look forward to seeing her impact the lives of our clients.



Cooking up delicious food at Ali Baba's Cave, Hussein and Wesam.



Thank You

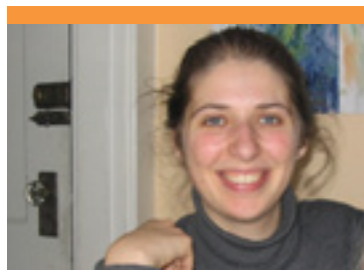
Since the summer of 2004, **Ali Baba's Cave**, on the corner of 19th and Valencia, has been a warm, kind and peaceful environment for At The Crossroads Outreach Counselors to get a breather from outreach. Owner Hussein not only allows us to take our break at his Mediterranean restaurant every night we are on outreach, but also offers us delicious food and something to drink, on the house.

"You are nice people, and kind people and you always have been," said Hussein. "You help the poor and this is our way of thanking you for your work. We support what you do."

We couldn't ask for a better break spot or nicer company. So thank you Hussein, Wesam and all the other wonderful Ali Baba's staff.

To enjoy Ali Baba's Cave's food or to find out more about the restaurant, visit them at 799 Valencia Street or call (415) 863-3054.

Substitute outreach volunteers (Otherwise known as ATC Heroes!)- This summer, we went through a period of time where we had the combination of an open counselor position and a staff already operating at full capacity. The consistency of our outreach could have been threatened had it not been for four individuals who helped fill the void by stepping in as volunteers on short notice with limited training. **Sara Bursac, Gregory Gooden, Andrew McClelland** and **John Sorrenti** all get a big gold star for their performance! Gregory, Andrew, and John had already been volunteering for ATC at our monthly outreach supply prep nights, and Sara had done a weeklong internship at the beginning of this summer. Both our staff and our clients are grateful for the role they played in making sure that our services maintained their consistency during this period. You saved our butts!



Sara Bursac- This year, the holidays seemed to come early for ATC. For a week (and then some extra time), we received a gift of an intern named Sara Bursac. Sara was in San Francisco as a summer intern for the Pottruck Family Foundation, a supporter of ATC's work. The majority of her internship was spent with one of our community partners, the Center For Young Women's Development, but we were lucky enough to snag her for some time at the beginning of the summer. Sara gave her intelligence, work ethic, and sense of humor to ATC, helping out Lori with her collaborative work and Molly with her development tasks. After her week was finished, Sara voluntarily continued to come by our office, working on her projects, and filling in on outreach when we were in a bind. While she felt a huge sense of disappointment over not being able to fix our broken copy machine (she only got preoccupied with this for about three hours), we feel that overall, her time with us was a smashing success. When she finishes grad school, we'll be happy to have her come back and once again work full time for free.

thank you! 2005 Donors (so far)

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¹ Administered through San Francisco Foundation's Donor Advised Funds.

² Donors who gave in honor of the birthday of an anonymous donor. This donor matched each gift. We are incredibly grateful to this donor and her friends for their generosity!

³ Donors who gave in honor of the wedding of Megan Laurance and Bob O'Connor.

⁴ Donors who gave in honor of the Yehuda Lapovsky Youth Fund.

⁵ Donors who gave in honor of the wedding of Jenn Guitart & Kevin Boyd.



On the morning of September 14th, Bertha Berk passed away at the age of 96. She came to America as a young adult, leaving behind brothers and sisters in Poland, most of whom died in the Holocaust or pogroms. She lived the rest of her life in Brooklyn, raising two children, Rena and Alvin, on her own. She made an impact on all who knew her with her intelligence, charisma, and courage. Bertha will be remembered as a powerful, fiercely independent woman; she was a survivor. In addition to her children, she leaves behind five grandchildren, including Rob Gitin, director of ATC. Alvin and Rena decided to make ATC the beneficiary of any donations in her honor. We wanted to acknowledge and thank the individuals or groups who have contributed in her memory:

Charlie & Sandi Brown
Cheerie Nolletti
Departments of Facilities Management & Development, Management Systems, & University Police at SUNY Downstate Medical Center
Lisa Zbar & Ernst Mohamed
Jonathan Berk
Alvin & Judy Berk

Bertha (or B.B., as she was known to some in her family) will be remembered forever by those who had the privilege to know her. Her spirit lives on in those who loved her.

Paula's Story – from homeless to housed

continued from front page

Week Seven... through Week Eleven

However, a week later, Paula was still without a lease, even though she had the approval of Shelter Plus Care, the Tenderloin Housing Clinic, *and* the hotel manager. It turned out she had to meet with the San Francisco Housing Authority, to sign documents acknowledging the various rules and regulations associated with publicly funded housing.

When all this paperwork had been signed, and Paula's counselor had twice faxed over Paula's bank statement, they then discovered that Paula could not move into the room until it had been inspected by the Housing Authority.

It turned out the room had to be inspected twice – the Housing Authority had required the hotel to change the room's carpet. By then, the first of the month, when Paula had been expecting to move in, had long since passed.

The weeks of waiting for housing were beginning to get to Paula. Her primary ATC counselor was taking some needed time away from work, leaving Paula without her main support person, who was most intimately aware of what was happening on a week-to-week basis. Paula started to doubt whether all this effort was really worth it, and started to worry that she would never have the money to pay the deposit to finally move into a home of her own.

"I can't say there was a day I didn't feel frustrated," recalled Paula. "I felt like every time I got good news, something else would come up and fail."

It seemed to the counselors who were working with her that the process of finding a place to live went from everything working to everything falling apart.

Week Twelve - Getting Back on Track

In order to help Paula keep focused on her goal, ATC counselors began looking into programs that would help her cover her deposit and rent until her SSI check came through. They discovered Season of Sharing, a program supported by the San Francisco Chronicle that helps homeless, low-income, and down-on-their-luck people to pay for things such as back rent and unpaid bills.

Paula's ATC counselors applied through the Salvation Army – one of the places that administers the Season of Sharing program – hoping to get the financial support in time for move in, the 7th of the month. Yet it soon became clear that the money would likely not come for several weeks, and although Paula would be reimbursed, she would have to find another way to cover her

move-in costs.

Paula was yet again overwhelmed by how she was going to meet her immediate needs while also planning for this huge step in her life. By working with Season of Sharing, the Tenderloin Housing Clinic, and the hotel, along with Shelter Plus Care, Paula's ATC counselors were able to help ensure that even though she did not have the means to move into the room on the 7th, it would still be available for her in the coming weeks.

Week Eighteen – In Her New Home

And indeed, the following month, the room that Paula had first started working towards more than three months before was hers.

Looking Back

All of the organizations involved in securing Paula's housing admit that this process was longer than most. Paula recalls it taking more than one hundred hours of work on her part; ATC's time was approximately 50 hours. The average time is around one month from submitting the application to getting keys. Paula's previous living situation, the room not being ready for occupancy, the number of people and bureaucracies involved, along with other reasons, all contributed to weeks of unusual delay.

Yet there are issues that came up that many homeless people face when they decide to try

for housing:

- Saving money for a deposit and rent while also having to spend money on immediate survival needs
- Taking the time needed to fill out copious paperwork
- Finding the support to navigate a several-layered housing system

And stable housing doesn't mean an end to other challenging life issues. Paula continues to work on her mental health needs and her relationships. She had started thinking about going back to school, but has put this plan on hold as she learns to balance her new freedom with the responsibility of how she wants to shape her life. She continues to struggle with making sure she has the money she needs at the beginning of every month to stay in her new home.

But, since she moved in, Paula has been consistently seeing her therapist for the first time in a long while. She has been in contact with family that she hasn't spoken to in years. And she has enjoyed the simple pleasure of being able to leave her home whenever she wants for as long as she wants.

"I think it's worth it," said Paula of the SPC process. "Because you can call it your own. It's your own, and you have the keys to the door and no one else does."

