

JULY
MID-YEAR REPORT
2016



HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY:
**Looking Ahead
2015-2020**

Vision

All San Mateo County residents enjoy a healthy, safe, prosperous, and collaborative community.

Mission

Enhance the well-being of children, adults, and families by providing professional, responsive, caring, and supportive service.

GOAL 1: CUSTOMERS

Achieve and Sustain a Healthy, Safe, and Productive Life

GOAL 2: WORKFORCE

Enhance Employee Skills to Support Excellence

GOAL 3: OPERATIONS

Enhance Internal Infrastructure to Optimize Outcomes

GOAL 4: INNOVATION

Harness Creativity and Interconnectedness as a Leading Human Services Agency

GOAL 5: COLLABORATION

Cultivate Community Partnerships to Achieve Shared Goals



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Hello,

I'm delighted to launch this first issue of the Human Services Agency's Mid-Year Update, which was created to keep our partners and community informed about significant developments in the County's social services programs. By shining a spotlight on some of our efforts, we aim to share our perspective, inspire ideas, uncover opportunities and further empower our partners.

Through the development of the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, the Agency created overarching goals and a framework to guide each of our programs, branches and employees in realizing our vision of a healthy, safe, prosperous and collaborative community. All subsequent efforts are aligned with these goals. Whether new developments in social services are initiated through regulatory policy (such as changes to the foster care system), our Board of Supervisors' own initiative (ending homelessness), or our own needs (data analytics and modernization of training), the Agency's strong culture of collaboration ensures that we are always seeking the support of our partner organizations and community. As we navigate the changing landscape of laws and regulations, local conditions, and community priorities, we commit to being transparent and to determine where we, as a local government, can best serve.

In this issue, we'll provide a view into our collective solutions to end homelessness, explain the changes that will reshape the foster care system statewide, and outline how we've been restructuring our foster program to best serve our kids. We'll also reveal how our newly structured Veterans Services Office helps individuals, families and the local economy. Lastly, we'll tell you about a new program that helps migrants settle and stabilize—a historical first for our County and many others in the state.

In addition, behind-the-scenes improvements at the County's Human Services Agency are focused on two areas:

Data analytics: We are building capabilities for improved data reporting. We'll use this information to prioritize and target our efforts to better connect homeless clients to the services they need. Parts of this system are already showing benefits: for example, we are able to look at data from across all of our programs to see that 70% of our homeless clients have Medi-Cal. Building on this, we'll soon have the capability to identify gaps and address them faster. Our staff will be able to create their own reports and data dashboards, and use this information to more effectively bring services to our diverse range of clients. Additionally, a geo-mapping effort of CalFresh (food assistance) eligibility combined with the implementation of two new mobile offices will help us bring services to where they are needed most. Watch out for our new vans later this fall!

Superior performance: We have begun using data to track and improve our staff's knowledge base. We also are deploying a cutting-edge training curriculum and a continuous quality improvement program across the agency. These components, together with regular quality assurance reviews, will guide changes to our practices so that we provide the highest value to our clients and partners.

Certainly, we still face sizeable challenges, including the County's increasing cost of living, housing shortage, and a growing "working poor" sector. However, we are working to position ourselves as well as possible by being laser-focused on improving our core services and in engaging in transformative community partnerships.

I am inspired by the great potential of our current initiatives and look forward to seeing their exciting, future results.



Iliana Rodriguez
Agency Director

HOMELESSNESS

OUR VISION

Within the next five years, homelessness will be a rare, brief, and one-time occurrence.

RARE: Whenever possible, the system will prevent vulnerable individuals and families from falling into homelessness.

BRIEF: A system will be in place to ensure that any household experiencing a crisis of homelessness returns to housing within 30 days.

ONE-TIME: Individuals and families that secure housing through the crisis response system will not return to homelessness.

HOMELESSNESS IN SAN MATEO COUNTY*

1,772

Individuals homeless per night

775

unsheltered individuals (40% fewer than 2013); most living on the streets, with some in cars, RVs or encampments

35

unsheltered families

43%

unsheltered individuals have at least one disability, such as behavioral health or chronic health problems

3,500

households experience homelessness over the course of a year—an estimate based on the homeless count

* These counts reflect the estimated number of homeless people as of 1/22/15.

KEY TERMS TO KNOW

Chronic Homelessness: Someone with a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for a year or more or has had at least four episodes of homelessness in three years.

Functional Zero: Our goal is to reduce homelessness to “functional zero” or as close to zero as possible. To achieve this, any homeless individual or family who enters through the coordinated entry system and cannot be diverted will be offered interim housing and quickly connected to permanent housing.

A New Strategy to End Homelessness in San Mateo County

“We are committed to ending homelessness in the county by 2020.”

A steep challenge, but one that the County of San Mateo Human Services Agency (HSA) feels confident it can achieve. The Agency's optimistic position is guided by recent federal policy and a comprehensive data analysis that was completed to understand how the County's overall system has been performing, who is or is not being served by the system, and what strategies and programs have delivered the best results most cost-effectively. The result is a new strategic plan, which replaces the 2006 HOPE 10-Year Plan. The plan can be viewed on the HSA website: hsa.smcgov.org/center-homelessness.

Collaboration with and reliance on our partners will be critical as homelessness is affected by many factors including housing supply, cost of living, employment, health services, probation/criminal justice re-entry, and more. We particularly appreciate our partners on the front lines: the homeless and safety net providers who do such difficult and essential work. We look forward to working with all of our partners to develop new programs and relationships—and learning from other jurisdictions' successes.

Going in a New Direction

There has been a shift in federal policy and funding to promote “Housing First.” Housing First is a proven approach for ending homelessness that offers individuals and families access to shelter and housing. By improving access for people already living on the streets, keeping those at risk of homelessness out of shelters, and investing in more rapid re-housing programs that help people move to permanent housing as fast as possible, it's expected that we can reduce homelessness relatively quickly. In addition, we will maintain a strong focus on analyzing data and results in order to decide what approaches to invest in and how to improve effectiveness.

Rapid re-housing programs help people find housing and provide short-term case management services focused on keeping people in housing. Studies show that rapid re-housing programs result in significantly fewer people and families returning to homelessness, and cost much less.

In San Mateo County, we found that shelters and transitional housing programs are far more costly than rapid re-housing programs. In addition, we found that the rate of return to homelessness from transitional housing programs is 11% for single adults and 1% for families. In comparison, we found that rapid re-housing programs demonstrated an even better performance, with rates of return of only 1% for both single adults and families.

COST PER PERMANENT HOUSING EXIT (JULY 2014 – JUNE 2015)





By improving access, keeping those at risk out of shelters, and helping people move to permanent housing as fast as possible, it's expected that we can reduce homelessness relatively quickly.

Highlights of the 2016-2020 Strategic Plan

The strategic plan creates a new system which streamlines how clients navigate services. Coined a 'coordinated entry system,' it will better meet each person's needs, maximize the use of permanent housing, include a pilot project for landlord recruitment and housing location services, and focus on helping people at risk of homelessness stay in their current situation or move directly to other housing.

Other elements of the plan include ending Veteran homelessness, offering priority access to assistance for unsheltered families, prioritizing homeless youth, including former foster youth, and supporting individuals exiting institutions.

Ready for the Challenge?

It's a big change and a lot of work. But we think our goals are realistic and attainable. The data and success stories from other jurisdictions are compelling and show us it can be done. To support our partners, we have already been working to provide information and targeted funding opportunities/RFPs to implement strategies in the new strategic plan. Please check hsa.smcgov.org/center-homelessness for updates and meetings. We look forward to working with you.

For more details about the new strategy to end homelessness in San Mateo County, read the full strategy document available at hsa.smcgov.org/center-homelessness.

CURRENT EXIT RATES TO PERMANENT HOUSING

The rate of exit to permanent housing from emergency shelter programs in San Mateo County is low:

17% for single adults

27% for families

It's better from transitional housing:

48% for single adults

70% for families

Rapid re-housing performs best:

58% for single adults

79% for families



Imagine a child not only losing her home, but her community as well. Let's keep our kids in San Mateo County.

Continuum of Care Reform

The biggest challenge?

High cost of living. Even with all of our efforts, approximately 45% of our children moving from out-of-home care to foster homes are placed outside of the County, where larger family homes are more affordable.

Foster Care's New Direction Depends on You

We are in the midst of one of the most sweeping changes to child welfare programs in California's history. It's an exciting time, and also a challenging one. The San Mateo County Human Services Agency's Children & Family Services (CFS) is in the process of modifying its processes and programs to comply with new state laws, including Assembly Bill 403, by January 2017. But we can't do it alone! We need your help. We will rely on our partners and our community to work with us to bring the new strategy to life—in particular, to recruit new foster families and provide them with the support they need to successfully care for a foster child.

What's Changing?

In a nutshell, the new State legislation requires child welfare agencies to reduce the length of time children reside in residential treatment facilities (group homes). The State wants to ensure that children move into a family setting as soon as possible. To achieve this, we need to find more family homes for youth in foster care. This is something that the County has been working towards for years; however, the new legislation is serving to speed up the process. One of CFS' primary goals is to keep children in San Mateo County and to ultimately get them into long-term homes, whether it's back with their parents, with relatives or with adoptive families.

FOSTER CARE

New Programs and Resources in San Mateo County

The County is in the process of implementing the programs that will bring the necessary tools and skills into the homes of existing and future foster families so that they can successfully support children in foster care.

This year, all Foster Family Agencies (FFAs) and group homes in California will have to begin the process to become accredited. In 2008, the San Mateo County Human Services Agency became the first public service agency to be fully accredited by the Council on Accreditation (COA), which ensures agencies use best practices to help their clients. Our foresight has put us on track to implement new processes and set up and operate our programs, including the following:

FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY (FFA)

Our Foster Family Agency (FFA) supports both the child and the family. The benefit of operating it ourselves is continuity and less trauma: kids can be supported by the same social worker throughout their care. We offer foster parent training, foster parent support groups, and one-on-one support for new foster parents from long-term foster parents. We also work to recruit new foster families, and the State is providing more funding for recruitment and retention. To boost our recruiting efforts for older youth, we have recently partnered with a local community-based organization, Star Vista.

INCREASED SUPPORT FOR FOSTER FAMILIES

The State is providing more funding for foster family support. We will use these funds to augment our current services, including more in-home support such as respite care for caregivers, enrichment activities for kids, increased home visits by specialists and basic-need services, such as transportation to help take kids to appointments and activities.

What We Need

Reducing the number of kids placed in group homes and increasing the availability of longer-term, home-based placements requires an integrated, focused effort to recruit more foster parents and families. We are looking to work with organizations that can help us with recruitment. Without more homes, we can't move forward. We also are committed to making a significant investment in new programs and services to support these foster families—for instance, services that can be provided in-home to keep more kids out of an institutional setting.

Work with us! For more information about San Mateo County's Foster Care program, visit <http://hsa.smcgov.org/foster-care-program>.

Questions? Interested in being a foster parent/family? Contact us: (650) 655-6216 or adogan@smcgov.org

SHORT-TERM RESIDENTIAL THERAPEUTIC PROGRAM (STRTP)

As we move towards greater reliance on foster families, we'll need to provide more robust support. Under the legislation, group homes will become short-term, specialized and intensive treatment providers that house kids temporarily until they can return to their foster homes. We are planning to operate our own short-term residential therapeutic program (STRTP) to ensure our children can get intervention services and mental health treatment within the County—so they can continue to access their local support networks.

HOMES FOR NON-MINOR DEPENDENTS

We provide young adults formerly in foster care (ages 18-21 years) an optional "safety net" to help them successfully transition to adulthood. We are supporting foster families who can provide former foster youth with a home while finishing high school, finding employment or applying for college or training programs. Without this support, approximately 36% of California foster youth are homeless within 18 months of discharge.



"Foster parenting has been very gratifying for me and my family through the years. It is heartwarming to see a family succeed in being able to get their children back home. I have had the joy in participating in that experience."

Diane

San Mateo County foster parent

STATE ASSEMBLY BILL (AB) 403: IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

- Makes major reforms in foster care placement processes and options
- Implements recommendations from the California Department of Social Services' (CDSS) 2015 report, California's Child Welfare Continuum of Care Reform
- Went into effect January 1, 2016
- Implementation deadline is January 1, 2017

SAN MATEO FOSTER CARE BY THE NUMBERS*

24

San Mateo County children are in group homes

Up to 75%

of those are placed outside of the County

81%

of San Mateo County foster youth graduated high school in 2016, compared to 50% nationally

70%

of our foster youth enroll in college or vocational school, compared to national average of 10%

* Counts as of June 1, 2016

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Making Healthcare Coverage Available for All San Mateo County Residents

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) set in motion a whole new chapter in the Human Services Agency's (HSA) role in helping more San Mateo County residents get healthcare coverage. As the county agency responsible for determining eligibility for Medi-Cal, it was a mammoth effort to put in place additional infrastructure to enroll the thousands of county residents who were newly qualified.

Despite initial technical glitches at the state level that caused some frustrating backlogs and delays, overall the County's efforts to educate the community about healthcare eligibility and assist with enrollments has been successful, as we steadily reduce the numbers of low-income residents without health insurance. We wouldn't be where we are today without our community enrollment partners and the County's Health System that were a critical part of our efforts and the enrollment process.

New Operational Enhancements

As we prepared for ACA, it became apparent that our existing processes for administering public assistance eligibility would not be able to scale to manage the expected influx of applications and subsequent annual renewals. We saw this as an opportunity to re-engineer our processes to reduce the immediate and growing backlog of applications. To determine the best model we looked to LEAN principles of engaging staff in assessing what was working and not, and how to streamline processes. LEAN is a methodology of collaborative team efforts to iteratively and continuously improve performance and processes. First introduced in the private sector in 2002 and increasingly applied in governmental settings, HSA adapted this methodology for determining healthcare coverage eligibility and saw early success. We conducted small-scale, three-month experiments to monitor outcomes and adjust tactics as necessary as we built our new model.

One example of the results of our process was the creation of a 'one-stop eligibility shop' in the Health System's Health Coverage Unit and the HSA Redwood City office, which consisted of cross-training Health System benefits workers in all Medi-Cal programs, as well as CalFresh (food assistance). Additionally, HSA workers stationed at the HSA Redwood City office were trained in the Health System's Access to Coverage for Everyone (ACE). This solution reduced client trips, client wait time and potential frustration inherent in being transferred from one agency to another for different health coverage plans. The pilot began in early 2015 and currently consists of seven full-time staff that can offer clients a single assessment process for health coverage and food assistance programs available throughout the County.

Although we've made significant strides, we're continuing to work to improve the system into the future.

...Overall the County's efforts to educate the community about healthcare eligibility and assist with enrollments has been successful.



Looking Forward

After three years of managing ACA enrollments, we have a good picture of what's working and how to prioritize what needs to be improved. For example, we're looking at how we can streamline annual renewals and the process of updating client records.

We're also working to transition the 3,000 children in the County's Healthy Kids program to Medi-Cal, based on new legislation (State Bill 75) that provides full coverage for all minors regardless of their immigration status. For undocumented adults in our community, the county continues to provide preventive healthcare coverage through the ACE program and emergency services through a "restricted" Medi-Cal program.

We look forward to continuing to work with our partners to ensure healthcare coverage for all San Mateo County residents! For any questions, or to enroll in Medi-Cal, visit <http://hsa.smcgov.org/health-coverage>.

Every resident of San Mateo County qualifies for healthcare coverage. Our job is to help residents determine which coverage they qualify for and help them get it.



Veterans Services Office

Our Veterans Services Office aims to reach every one of the 30,000 veterans in the County and promote the many valuable and lesser-known services and benefits available to veterans and their families, such as tuition assistance and home loans. This past year has brought new staff members, the formation of a Veterans Commission, and the launch of the Veteran of the Year program. Our ambitious team has been conducting extensive outreach; through email, mailings, and outreach events such as the Veterans Resource Fair, we have connected with over 3,700 veterans! The office is proficient in helping veterans prepare claims for the VA; since July 2015, our staff has helped residents claim a collective \$3.5 million in retroactive payments and over \$320,000 in monthly payments.



Office of Immigrant Support and Coordination

Our new Office of Immigrant Support and Coordination (OISC) explores the Agency's role in supporting immigrant residents' navigation of resources within San Mateo County. This office aligns with the County's vision of a prosperous community in assisting foreign-born county residents to connect to local services and support in order to successfully integrate and thrive. Along with Supervisor Warren Slocum and the International Institute of the Bay Area, we have co-hosted three citizenship events to date, offering 760 attendees free citizenship application support, legal consultations, and a fee waiver. This partnership engages a robust network of legal providers, law students, local agencies, and many volunteers. A resource guide and summit are planned for the fall; more information is available at <http://hsa.smcgov.org/oisc>.



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