




Office of the City Manager

ACTION CALENDAR
November 18, 2014

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From:  Christine Daniel, City Manager
Submitted by: Jane Micallef, Director, Health, Housing & Community Services Department
Subject: Centralize Services for Transition Age Youth

RECOMMENDATION

Incorporate services for transition age youth (TAY) between the ages of 18 – 25 into the proposed Housing Crisis Resolution Center which was identified following a comprehensive analysis of current homeless services provided in Berkeley.

SUMMARY

City Council made a referral to the Homeless Commission in June of 2013 to develop recommendations regarding the service needs of homeless and transition age youth. The Homeless Commission is recommending the consolidation of resources to fund a centralized service center. This report presents the staff's response to the Homeless Commission's recommendation.

FISCAL IMPACTS OF RECOMMENDATION

The Homeless Commission's recommendation would fund centralized services for homeless transition age youth (TAY) by defunding all existing TAY services with the exception of transitional housing. This includes funding for the YEAH shelter.

CURRENT SITUATION AND ITS EFFECTS

In June of 2013 when adopting the FY15 Budget, City Council made a referral to the Homeless Commission and the Children and Youth Recreation Commission to "develop a suggested proposal for City Council's consideration to address possible services for homeless youth." At the same meeting Council authorized City staff to hire consultants to design a new coordinated assessment/intake process for the homeless services delivery system in Berkeley.

In March of 2014, the Commission invited representatives of agencies serving Berkeley youth to attend the Commission meeting to provide input into the recommendations. At that meeting, City staff presented information about City funding for homeless TAY programs, available data on the TAY population, and an overview of best practices for outreach, services and housing models. Representatives from the Fred Finch Youth Center, YEAH!, Youth Spirit Artworks, and the Youth Suitcase Clinic also spoke at the

meeting. Most of the speakers identified affordable housing as the most critical need. Subsequently, the Homeless Commission passed a recommendation to allocate \$100,000 annually for rental subsidies for homeless TAY, which went to Council on September 16, 2014. Following the City Manager's recommendation to consider expansion of funding for homeless TAY in the context of the coordinated assessment and intake re-design process and in consideration of the funding needs in the homeless services delivery system overall, the Council took no action.

The Commission appointed a subcommittee to develop additional recommendations to address gaps in services for homeless TAY. This subcommittee developed a proposal for the City to consolidate funding for a centralized service center that would include the following activities: emergency shelter for as many months of the year as possible, a drop-in center, one to two meals per day, mental health services, legal advocacy, medical services, vocational services, on-site storage, and recreational activities. A quorum of the Commissioners approved the recommendation of the subcommittee on September 10, 2014. [Ayes: Becker, Gresher, Marasovic, Peterson. Noes: Bastone, Della-Piana, Sempari. *Abstain*: None. *Absent*: None.]

Simultaneous to the Homeless Commission's deliberations, City staff has undertaken a planning process to develop a system for coordinated entry and assessment for homeless services in Berkeley. The effort is being undertaken to fulfill a HUD mandate that is intended to improve coordination of services, minimize duplication, and promote interventions that are most likely to resolve a person's housing crisis or homelessness. While the Commission's recommendation to centralize services is consistent with the City's goal to develop a more coordinated service system, the recommendation does not address how this new center would effectively assist youth to obtain housing and resolve their homelessness. Nor does the recommendation appear to have broad support. There was dissent among the Commissioners, with the vote split 4 to 3, and none of the youth or representatives of the community agencies in attendance at the March meeting identified the creation of a centralized service center as a critical need. And finally, the actual cost of operating the centralized service center as proposed is likely to exceed the amount of funding currently allocated for services targeting TAY. Staff recommends that the needs of the TAY population be considered alongside the needs of the general homeless population, and any allocation of additional resources is consistent with the recommendations resulting from the planning process.

BACKGROUND

The City has struggled for years to develop strategies to address the needs of homeless youth. In 1998, the City's Mental Health Department was asked to submit a report to the City Manager on the subject of homeless youth, primarily in the Telegraph Avenue corridor. The report recommended that the City fund a drop-in center, emergency shelter, medical services, and case management and other support services.

Based on the most recent homeless survey conducted in Alameda County in January of 2013, youth between the ages of 18 and 24 comprise approximately 10% of the homeless population in the County. According to a 2009 survey of the homeless in Berkeley, 4.6% of the homeless population of Berkeley was TAY. The City currently invests about 13.5% of the total amount of homeless funding in programs that serve TAY.

The City allocates over \$383,886 for services and housing targeting transition age youth who are homeless. This amount includes \$86,655 for transitional housing provided by Fred Finch Youth Center; \$109,115 for a 25-bed emergency shelter operated by YEAH during the winter months; \$9,828 for the Suitcase Clinic that is open on Monday evenings; and \$50,000 for Youth Spirit Artworks supportive services for Berkeley Unified School District homeless youth.

The Homeless Commission is recommending that funds currently allocated for TAY services, with the exception of the funds for transitional housing, be consolidated to fund a centralized services site instead of funding services at separate sites. Excluding the funding for transitional housing, the current allocation is approximately \$297,231. In addition to consolidating the services at one site, the Commission recommends expanding the array of services provided to include meals, mental health services, recreational activities, and vocational services. The cost of operating a drop-in center with the proposed scope of services is likely to require additional resources. While funding one site instead of three may be more cost-effective if administrative costs can be reduced, the proposed service center would likely result in a significant increase in facility and operating costs. Furthermore, it is not certain that all of these services are best provided out of one location or whether a suitable site could be identified.

Drop-in centers like the one the Homeless Commission envisions can provide many benefits for youth, including the provision of a safe alternative to the streets during the day. And for youth motivated to seek services, the centers provide an opportunity to build therapeutic relationships with the youth and connect them with services. Based on prior experience in Berkeley, however, when funds allocated through the Public Commons for Everyone Initiative expanded drop-in services for TAY, the drop-in center did not attract many of the transient youth on the streets into services. Moreover, the drop-in program did not provide housing options and did not effectively reduce the prevalence of homeless youth on the streets either during the day or at night.

Through the planning process for a coordinated system of entry and assessment, the City is undertaking a strategy to develop services that are focused on resolving homelessness for people entering the homeless system. The Homeless Commission's proposal does not address this goal. While increasing the array of services could benefit some of the homeless TAY population in Berkeley, it is not clear how the center would help end homelessness among the youth on the streets in Berkeley.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

There are no identifiable environmental effects or opportunities associated with the subject of this report.

RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Considering whether to fund a centralized service center for homeless TAY should be undertaken in the context of the coordinated assessment and entry re-design process and in consideration of the funds needed for the overall homeless services delivery system.

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS CONSIDERED

City staff and the Homeless Commission will review the final recommendations resulting from the planning process to implement a coordinated intake and assessment system for homeless services. Alternative actions regarding TAY services may result from this process.

CONTACT PERSON

Andrew Wicker, Community Services Specialist II, HHCS, 981-5418