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THE SONOMA COUNTY REPORT

SONOMA COUNTY SYSTEM PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

Prepared by Focus Strategies

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BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Sonoma County Community Development Commission (CDC) engaged Focus Strategies to assist community leadership and key stakeholders to evaluate, align, and improve the countywide response to the local crisis of homelessness. In the first phase of the project, Focus Strategies conducted a qualitative Baseline System Assessment, completed in August 2020. The Baseline Assessment identified strengths and challenges in the community's current response to homelessness and preliminary recommendations for system improvement.

In the second phase, Focus Strategies conducted a series of data analyses designed to complement the qualitative analysis completed in Phase One by assessing project and system performance. This report presents our approach to the quantitative analysis, the methodology used, and the system performance results. We also provide further recommendations for system improvement that are informed by this data analysis and findings from the Baseline Assessment.

A second study conducted in Phase Two is an analysis of affordable housing inventory, with a particular focus on housing for people with extremely low incomes. The housing market analysis is presented in a separate report. Taken together, these three reports produced in Phase One and Two provide a contextual and analytic foundation that community leaders and key stakeholders can use to develop a new Strategic Plan to reduce homelessness in Sonoma County.

APPROACH TO QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

To conduct the quantitative analysis, Focus Strategies used the Base Year Calculator (BYC) from our System-Wide Analytics and Projection (SWAP) tools, a joint project of Focus Strategies and the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH). SWAP is designed to help communities use local data to understand what their current system is accomplishing and to plan and prioritize changes to bring about the greatest possible reduction in homelessness. The BYC also helps users assess whether their Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data is of sufficient quality and accuracy to support meaningful performance measurement. This report presents the results of the BYC analysis.



A. Base Year Calculator (BYC) Overview

The BYC produces an assessment of Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data quality as well as an analysis of project and system performance. The data quality assessment generates an easy-to-digest analysis of data quality for each project in the system, allowing the CoC and community leadership to assess: (1) whether there are systemic data quality problems, such as a widespread level of incomplete data entry for particular data elements; and/or (2) data quality issues limited to particular projects or project types.

Current system performance is assessed at a project-by-project level, which is then summarized by project type. Five dimensions of project performance are produced: (1) the extent to which project resources (beds) are fully utilized; (2) the proportion of people entering homelessness response system projects that are literally homeless when they enroll; (3) the length of time people remain in each type of project; (4) the rate that people leave projects with stable housing; and (5) the estimated cost for projects to help people obtain stable housing.

Successful implementation of the BYC requires coordination across the system to access and understand the data necessary for the analysis. For this project, Focus Strategies coordinated with the staff of the Sonoma County Community Development Commission (CDC) to collect the primary sources of information for the BYC:

- The community's inventory of emergency shelter, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing beds and units as documented in the *2019 Housing Inventory Count (HIC)*¹ submitted to HUD;
- Client data exported from the community's *Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)* for the period from January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019; and
- *Project budget data* collected by CDC staff directly from homeless program providers, including the total annual operating cost of each project, revenue sources, and amounts.

¹ "The Housing Inventory Count (HIC) is a point-in-time inventory of provider programs within a Continuum of Care that provide beds and units dedicated to serve people experiencing homelessness (and, for permanent housing projects, where homeless at entry per the HUD homeless definition), categorized by five Program Types: Emergency Shelter; Transitional Housing; Rapid Rehousing; Safe Haven; and Permanent Supportive Housing." <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/hdx/pt-hic/>.



B. Projects and Households Included in the BYC Analysis

The BYC analysis incorporates projects in Sonoma County that provide housing and shelter to people experiencing homelessness to better understand performance at the project and project type level. There are five project types analyzed: (1) emergency shelter (ES),² (2) transitional housing (TH), (3) rapid rehousing (RRH), (4) permanent supportive housing (PSH),³ and (5) other permanent housing (OPH).^{4,5} The scope of the analysis is limited only to these five project types and does not include homelessness prevention assistance for people at-risk of homelessness, or other types of safety net assistance or mainstream system services provided to people who are homeless. To conduct a valid BYC analysis, each project had to meet three criteria to be included:

1. Be on the community's Housing Inventory Count (HIC);
2. Enter data in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS); and
3. Have at least one full year of data available.

Appendix A provides a list of the projects included in this analysis.

The HMIS system gathers data on households that access beds in homelessness response system programs in the community. It does not include data on people who are experiencing homelessness but who do not enter shelter, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, or permanent supportive housing. HMIS data is therefore a much different type of data than the bi-annual Point-in-Time Count, which attempts to gather data on all people experiencing homelessness (whether or not they are currently accessing a homeless program) on a given day. The HMIS data provides rich information on the subset of people who access homelessness response system programs and is gathered on an ongoing basis. However, there are likely many households that experience homelessness whose information is not captured.

² Annual shelters (ES-YR) are separated from seasonal shelters (ES-S).

³ Scattered site projects (PSH-S) are separated from single site projects (PSH). PSH scattered site projects that master lease units were analyzed as single site since their capacity does not fluctuate.

⁴ HMIS administration in Sonoma County recently reclassified PSH projects based on disability requirements; those that do not require a disabling condition are classified as OPH rather than PSH.

⁵ Two joint TH/RRH projects were not included in the performance analysis. TH/RRH projects provide a safe place for people to stay with financial assistance and wrap around supportive services determined by program participants to help them move to permanent housing as quickly as possible. Stays in the crisis housing portion of these projects should be brief and without preconditions, and participants should quickly move to permanent housing. Because there were only two of these projects and both were operated by the same agency, there were not sufficient data available to analyze.



C. Methodology

HMIS, HIC, and budget data were uploaded into the Base Year Calculator (BYC), a customized web-based application developed by Focus Strategies. In July 2020, the CDC and Focus Strategies jointly met virtually with each service provider who had a project included in the analysis to discuss the performance of their projects. The purpose of the individual meetings was to understand project operations and workflow, surface and answer provider questions about their data, and provide guidance useful for cleaning up data quality. For these meetings, Focus Strategies produced individual reports that presented results at the project level. Each project level report was accompanied by a series of graphs illustrating de-identified results of all projects of that same type. For example, each shelter saw their own performance as well as the performance of other shelters in the system, although they could not identify the other shelters.

During these meetings, providers and Focus Strategies staff identified concerns about data quality, including not enrolling all clients into programs (indicated by an insufficient number of active clients in HMIS), not exiting clients from HMIS after they leave the program (indicated by too many active clients in HMIS), inaccurate or missing data elements (particularly prior living situation and exit destination), and incorrect bed/unit information on the HIC. Following these meetings, and prior to the final data extract, providers were given the opportunity to clean up their data and address identified data quality issues. Data was re-extracted from HMIS for Focus Strategies to analyze again at the end of August 2020. The results summarized in this report reflect our analysis of the data from the August data extract.

RESULTS

The sections below present the results of the BYC analysis of homelessness response system performance. We first address the HMIS data quality findings and then introduce the number of people served in homelessness response system programs between January 1, 2019 and December 31, 2019 to provide context and descriptive information about the system and the people who are accessing it. Following these two sections is a discussion of performance results by project type.

The table below shows projects from the 2019 HIC that were included in the analysis. Providers were asked to provide the most recent total annual operating budget, broken down by funding source (HUD CoC, HUD ESG, other public funds, private funds). The analysis included a total of 59 unique projects comprised of 980 beds for single adults, 67



seasonal beds, and 163 units for families. The total reported annual operating budget for all projects in the analysis is over \$14 million dollars.

Projects Included in Analysis				
Project Type	Total Projects	Total Adult Beds	Total Family Units	Operating Budget Reported by Provider
Emergency Shelter - Seasonal	3	67 Seasonal Beds		\$235,963
Emergency Shelter - Annual	12	402	43	\$5,460,146
Transitional Housing	10	101	0	\$1,463,926
Rapid Rehousing	10	188	44	\$1,999,810
Permanent Supportive Housing	19	255	5	\$4,187,436
Other Permanent Housing	5	34	71	\$1,308,283
Total	59	1,047⁶	163	\$14,655,564

Not all projects on the 2019 HIC were included in the analysis. Reasons for project exclusion included: 1) project does not enter in HMIS (15 projects); 2) project has since closed (7 projects); 3) project does not have a years' worth of data entered (3 projects); 4) HIC errors (1 project); 5) project was not dedicated to serving people experiencing homelessness (2 projects); and 6) project had no similar projects to group with (3 projects). It is concerning that 15 of a total of 90 projects on the HIC were not included in the performance analysis because of non-participation in HMIS. Of the fifteen projects, six were emergency shelter (320 adult beds), 3 were transitional housing (75 adult beds, 3 family units), and six were permanent supportive housing (316 adult beds and 42 family units⁷). Increasing participation levels in HMIS will be critical for improving the community's ability to conduct ongoing performance analysis and to use performance data to inform strategies and policies to improve system effectiveness.

Focus Strategies requested an annual operating budget from all projects on the 2019 HIC regardless of inclusion in the analysis; however, seventeen projects excluded from the analysis did not provide one. The table below shows the projects that were on the 2019 HIC and excluded from the analysis.

⁶ Seasonal beds are included in total adult beds.

⁷ Of the permanent supportive housing inventory, two projects representing 296 adult beds and 40 units are funded by HUD-VASH. As of January 2021, HUD has provided a method for CoCs to incorporate HUD-VASH data into their HMIS.



Projects on 2019 HIC, Excluded from Analysis				
Project Type	Total Projects	Total Adult Beds	Total Family Units	Operating Budget Reported by Provider
Emergency Shelter - Seasonal	3 ⁸	185 Seasonal beds		\$232,435
Emergency Shelter - Annual	8 ⁹	95	3	\$1,010,756
Transitional Housing	9 ¹⁰	103	16	\$270,000
Rapid Rehousing	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Joint TH/RRH	2	7	66	\$825,014
Permanent Supportive Housing	9 ¹¹	350	65	\$354,787
Other Permanent Housing	0	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	31	767 ¹²	150	\$2,692,992

A. HMIS Data Quality

A key precondition to a successful system performance assessment is the availability of high-quality data. In particular, it is important to have robust data for prior living situations and exit destinations for each household served in any homelessness response system project. The data element for prior living situation documents where the household was staying upon entry to a homeless project (e.g. outside, in a car, in their own apartment), while the data element for exit destination shows where the household went when they left a project (e.g. back to being unsheltered, to stay with friends, to a housing unit, etc.). Taken together these two data elements are crucial to understand how people enter and exit the homelessness response system and whether the system is effective at helping people secure housing.

The BYC produces assessments of data quality for each project type, including the amount of “missing” data and the amount of “unknown” data (see Table 1). Understanding the difference between “missing” and “unknown” data is key in supporting data quality improvement efforts. “Missing” data is information that is simply not recorded in HMIS, which usually means that project staff are not entering these elements into the data system. Our analysis found that seasonal shelters have the highest rate of missing prior living and

⁸ One seasonal emergency shelter did not provide an operating budget.

⁹ Five annual emergency shelters did not provide operating budgets.

¹⁰ Six transitional housing projects did not provide operating budgets.

¹¹ Five permanent supportive housing projects did not provide operating budgets.

¹² Seasonal beds are included in total adult beds.



destination data, with 8% of entries missing prior living and 16% of exits missing destination. This is cause for concern and should be addressed.¹³

“Unknown” data, on the other hand, reflects the percent of entries and exits that are not meaningful or useful responses for assessing performance. Unknown data includes: “data not collected,” “client doesn’t know,” “client refused,” “no exit interview conducted,” and “unknown.” Higher percentages of unknown responses, therefore, suggest that data is not reflected in HMIS in a useful manner (i.e., responses are not useful for informing performance measurement and system improvement). The Sonoma County homelessness response system is showing low rates of unknown prior living and destination data elements across all project types.

Unknown and missing data are a crucial part of data quality and measuring outcomes. While the table below shows seasonal shelters have an opportunity for data clean-up and improvement, all other project types appear to be collecting useful prior living and destination data.

Table 1. Missing and Unknown Prior Living and Exit Destination by Project Type

Missing/Unknown (% of all Households)						
Project Type	Total Entries	% Missing Prior Living	% Unknown Prior Living	Total Exits	% Missing Destination	% Unknown Destination
Shelter - Year-Round	2,091	2%	<1%	2,065	<1%	2%
Shelter- Seasonal	365	8%	4%	281	16%	0%
Transitional Housing	268	2%	<1%	272	2%	2%
Rapid Rehousing	509	<1%	0%	467	1%	1%
PSH - Scattered Site	31	0%	0%	19	0%	0%
PSH - Single Site	76	4%	0%	63	0%	0%
Other Permanent Housing	49	0%	0%	46	4%	2%
Total	3,389	2%	1%	3,213	2%	2%

¹³ One seasonal shelter provider in particular has adopted the practice of entering clients the day they begin at the shelter and subsequently completing a full enrollment with all required HUD data elements. The issue becomes that the first enrollment is never closed out in HMIS and thus duplicates the number of clients served and generates data errors due to missing information.



B. Heads of Households Included in the Performance Analysis

Table 2 shows the total number of unduplicated heads of households served in projects included in the analysis between January 1, 2019 and December 31, 2019. Over the course of one year, the projects served 2,800 unique households. Of these heads of households, 89% were adults 25 and older, 10% were transition age youth (TAY) ages 18 to 24, and 1% were children. The number of TAY being served in the system is relatively high and is consistent with what has been found in recent Point-in-Time Counts. The 2019 PIT found 657 homeless youth and young adults, an increase of 23.5% from 2017. As there are very few youth-specific programs in the community, the majority of these youth are being served in programs designed for adults (or, if they are parenting youth, in programs for families).

Table 2. Unduplicated Heads of Households Included in the Performance Analysis

Total Unduplicated Heads of Households		2,800	
		#	%
Age	Adults 25+	2,496	89
	TAY 18 - 24	276	10
	Children	15	1
	Error age <0	13	<1

Tables 3 and 4 show the unduplicated number of head of households served in the same timeframe by project type. Households who received services from more than one project type are reflected more than once (i.e., in each of the service types they received). Project types with short lengths of stay tend to serve a larger number of households than those with longer or unlimited lengths of stay, which explains why the majority of the people served were in emergency shelter.

Table 3. Unduplicated Heads of Households Included in the Performance Analysis of ES, TH and RRH

Total Unduplicated Heads of Households		ES 1,759		TH 298		RRH 633	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
Age	Adults 25+	1,579	90	280	94	581	92
	TAY 18 - 24	158	9	17	6	50	8
	Children	11	<1	0	0	1	<1
	Error age <0	11	<1	1	<1	1	<1



Table 4. Unduplicated Heads of Households Included in the Performance Analysis of PSH and OPH

Total Unduplicated Heads of Households		PSH Scattered Site		PSH Single Site		OPH	
		102		198		141	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
Age	Adults 25+	88	86	166	84	84	60
	TAY 18 - 24	14	14	32	16	51	36
	Children	0	0	0	0	6	4
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0

C. System Performance

The primary output of the BYC is an assessment of project and system performance on a series of measures that are designed to help communities understand how effectively they are assisting people experiencing homelessness to secure housing. The goal is to identify areas of strong performance as well as areas where targeted improvement is needed.

In recent years, federal homelessness policy has shifted to look at how well communities are performing in their efforts to reduce homelessness. To further these objectives, HUD has strongly encouraged communities to evaluate the effectiveness both of individual projects, as well as the overall system, in meeting specific performance measures. Focus Strategies utilizes a set of performance metrics that build upon HUD’s system performance measures and policies as articulated in the HEARTH Act and Home, Together: The Federal Strategic Plan to End Homelessness. While the measures we use are aligned with HUD’s goals and system performance measures, we also incorporate cost effectiveness so that communities can understand performance in relation to the level of investment.

This section presents our analysis of Sonoma County homelessness response system performance on five measures:

1. Bed and Unit Utilization Rate (UR)
2. Project Entries from Homelessness
3. Lengths of Stay in Projects
4. Rate of Exit to Permanent Housing
5. Cost per Permanent Housing Exit



Performance measure results are often presented by population (i.e., single adults, families, transition aged youth) to understand differing dynamics of homelessness response system use seen in the populations. For example, transition aged youth often have longer lengths of stay in projects than single adults due to their stage of development and resources needed for housing stability. Combining data across populations may mask dynamics important for interpretation of findings.

The results presented in this section are provided at the project-type level and do not differentiate projects serving different populations. Population specific results are not presented because depending on specific project type, too few projects served each population, making it difficult to protect anonymity of individual projects when presenting data at the population level. Although separating the population types is the preferred method, analyzing the data across population types nonetheless provides valuable insight into system performance.

1. Bed and Unit Utilization Rate (UR)

This metric uses HMIS data to assess the average daily occupancy of projects in the system. Maximizing the use of available bed capacity is essential to ensuring that system resources are being put to their best use and as many people experiencing homelessness as possible are being served with the existing inventory. Figure 1 presents the utilization rate (UR) for emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, and other permanent housing.¹⁴ The measure uses bed utilization for single adult projects and unit utilization for family projects (sometimes a unit in a family project might have unfilled beds simply due to housing a smaller sized family than the unit is designed to accommodate).¹⁵ The data indicate that the UR for seasonal emergency shelter is erroneously high while UR for all other project types is low; typically, UR of more than 90% is desired. The apparent extreme over utilization of seasonal shelters is due to the data quality issue of clients being entered more than once, resulting in the appearance of those projects serving more people than they have capacity for. It is possible to show an annualized utilization rate greater than 100% when overflow beds or units are used; however, the 295% as shown in the figure below is indicative of data entry error in HMIS. Low UR for all other project types shows that the system is not utilizing all resources to their fullest capacity. During our meetings with provider agencies to

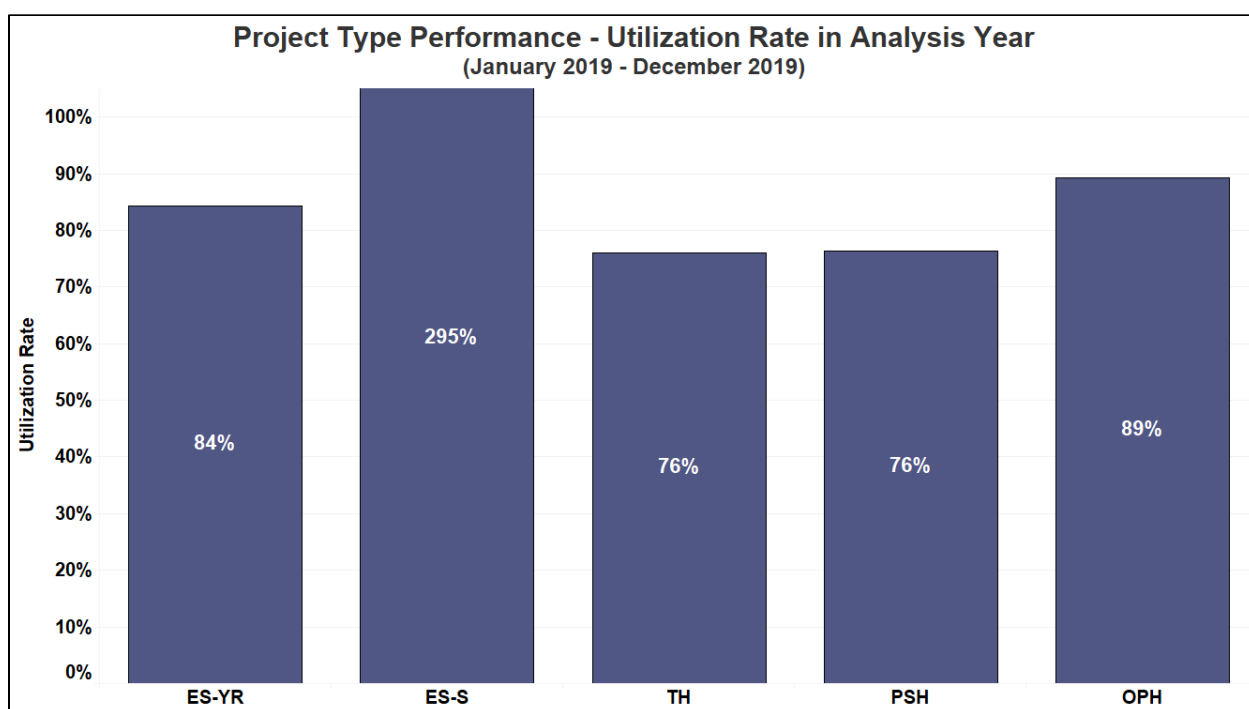
¹⁴ Note: Rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing scattered site projects are not included in this analysis because the project types do not have a fixed bed capacity; the methodology applied to the other project types does not generate a comparable result.

¹⁵ The formula used for calculating Utilization Rate (UR) is: number of beds nights used in HMIS data/number of bed nights available per HIC capacity ((beds for single adults + units for families) x 365).



discuss their results, some suggested that they are unable to stay at full capacity due to ineligible referrals from the Coordinated Entry System (CES). The Baseline Assessment report found some challenges relating to the implementation of CES, specifically that there are communication and workflow issues between the CES operator and service providers, as well as a lack of community consensus about prioritization criteria. The Baseline report also noted that there is inconsistent alignment to Housing First principles across the system, with some programs having high barriers to program entry. This may also be part of the explanation for low bed utilization rates.

Figure 1. Utilization Rate by Project Type



2. Project Entries from Homelessness

This measure assesses the degree to which projects are serving people with the most acute housing needs, namely those who are literally homeless (i.e., are living outdoors, in a vehicle, or in an emergency shelter). While certain funding sources (local, state, federal) may allow projects to serve people who are living in other situations (i.e., those at risk of homelessness), successfully reducing homelessness depends on prioritizing those with the highest need for available units. This measure reflects the federal policy goals of ending chronic homelessness and prioritizing literally homeless people for permanent housing. To create a “right sized” system in which there is an appropriate housing intervention for each household



experiencing homelessness, those who are not literally homeless should be diverted¹⁶ from entering the homelessness response system to begin with, thereby making resources available for those with nowhere to live while preventing additional homelessness from occurring.

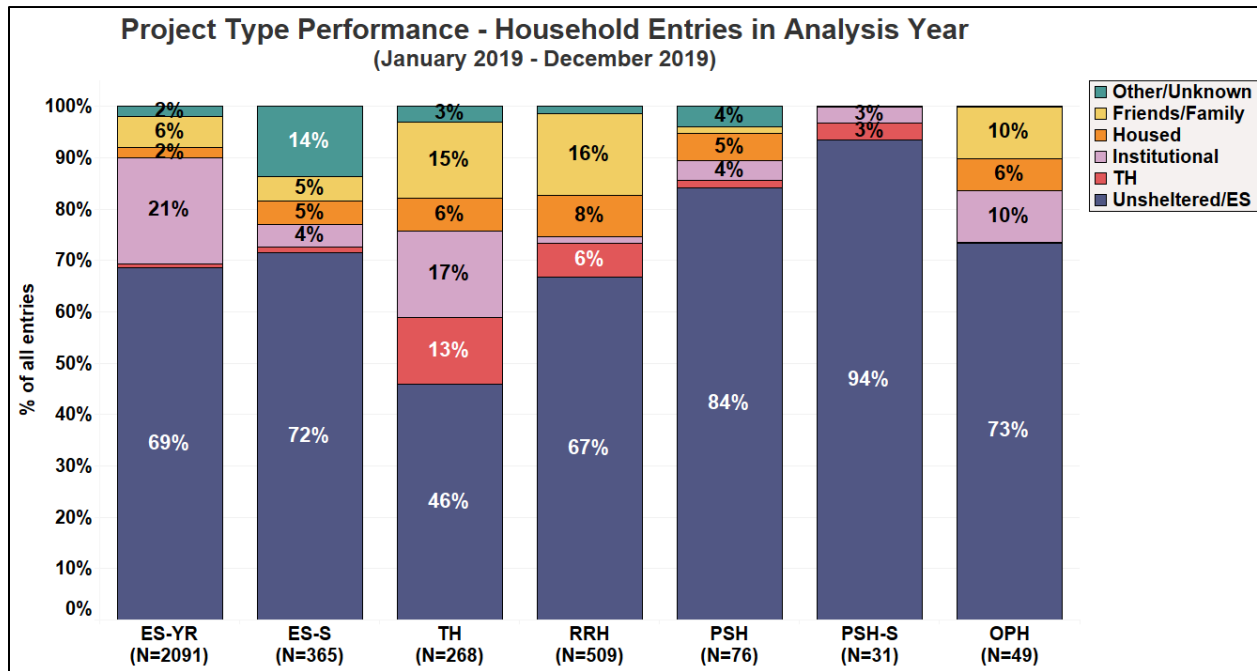
Figure 2 shows the prior living situations of households entering emergency shelter, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing, and other permanent housing between July 2018 and June 2019 (Appendix B provides the specific HMIS categories that comprise each of the prior living situations reflected in the graph). The transitional and rapid rehousing data indicate a significant number of households are entering from non-homeless situations. Transitional housing admitted 21% of households from housed situations while rapid rehousing admitted nearly a quarter of households (24%) from housed situations. As noted above, the Baseline Assessment identified misunderstandings and lack of buy-in to Housing First principles as a challenge for some providers in Sonoma County, which is reflected in this relatively high rate of enrolling households that are not literally homeless at time of entry. Although benchmarks for the proportion of housed households entering the system should reflect local context as well as national best practices, one goal Focus Strategies recommends is to reduce the proportion to fewer than 10%.

The entry rate into shelter by people who are unsheltered is only 69%. However, another 21% of entries were from institutional settings, which reflects partnerships that some shelters have developed with local hospitals to provide beds for people being discharged who do not identify a stable housing option. While this is a common practice in many places, emerging best practices in the field suggest it would be more effective to develop a strategy to support “upstream” partner systems (health, jails, treatment programs) to identify housing solutions for people leaving their systems, and prioritizing shelter beds for people who are living outside.

¹⁶ Diversion includes problem solving conversations with a trained Diversion Specialist or Case Manager to collaboratively brainstorm and consider housing solutions outside of the homelessness response system and within the client’s natural pool of resources and/or social network. To assist households in achieving an alternative housing solution, diversion assistance may include conflict resolution or mediation with landlords or friends/family members; help accessing mainstream benefits; and light-touch financial assistance to keep a client in their existing housing situation or pay for utilities or move in costs.



Figure 2. Project Entries from Homelessness



3. Lengths of Stay in Projects

Achieving relatively short lengths of stay in emergency shelter, transitional housing, and rapid rehousing projects is essential to ending homelessness. Every day a person is homeless has an associated cost and reducing lengths of stay results in a higher rate of exit and a lower cost per exit, which in turn allows more people to be served. The HEARTH Act established a goal that no one be homeless longer than 30 days. While this aspiration has not been codified in any HUD requirements, the required HUD performance metrics are intended to drive the length of time people experience homelessness down. To increase effectiveness and reduce homelessness, the entire system must strive for the shortest stays needed to successfully assist people to secure permanent housing.

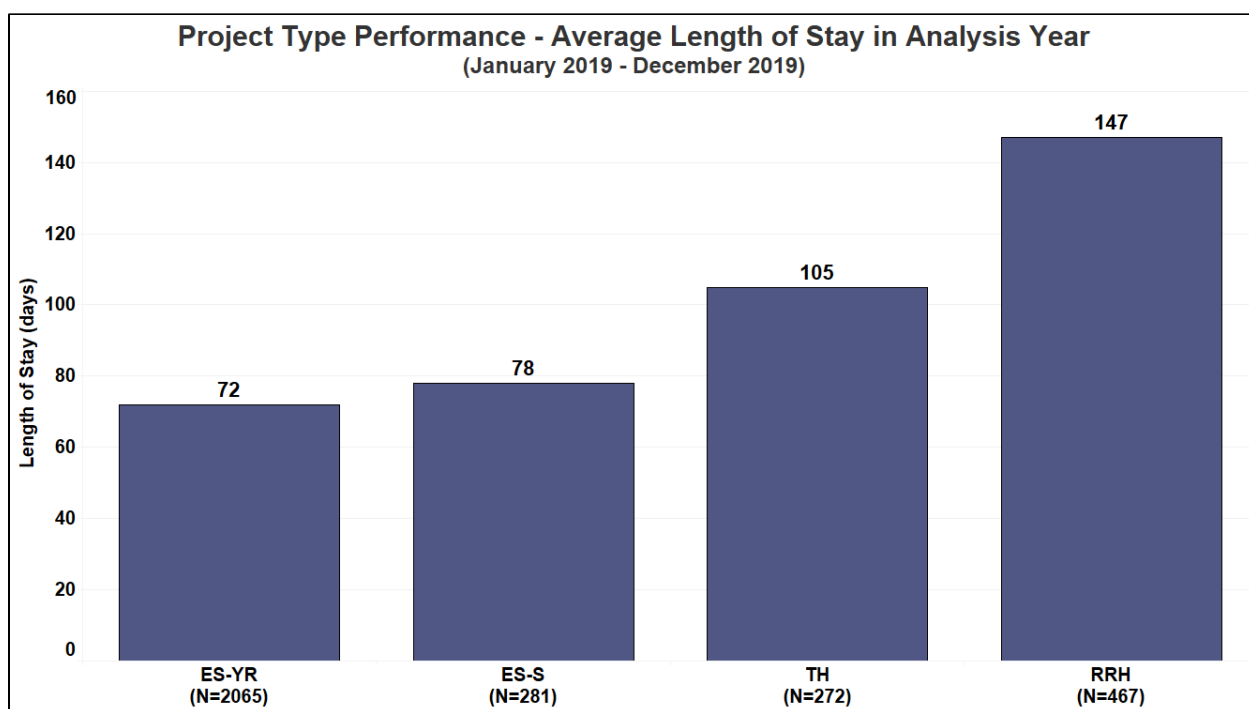
Length of stay in Sonoma County homelessness system response projects was calculated based on the entry and exit dates for each project stay recorded in HMIS. Data in Figure 3 show that emergency shelters have an average length of stay of 72 days for year-round shelters and 78 days for seasonal shelters. While these lengths of stay are much longer than the HUD recommend 30 days, which is optimal for system functioning, they are common for West Coast counties with high housing costs and minimal vacancy rates.



Transitional housing and rapid rehousing stays are 105 and 147 days, respectively. These are lower than the 120 to 180 days we typically recommend for communities striving to become a high performing system. For transitional housing, the short stays are concerning when considered in relation to their low rate of exit to permanent housing (see section below).

While lengths of stay for all other project types show good performance, this measure should be considered alongside other measures such as where households are entering from and where they are exiting to. Increasing both entries from literal homelessness and permanent housing exits may result in slightly longer lengths of stay but will also help successfully house more households experiencing homelessness.

Figure 3. Length of Stay in Projects



4. Rate of Exit to Permanent Housing

While helping households exit shelter and transitional housing quickly is a key strategy to end homelessness, it also important to establish that they exit to stable, permanent housing rather than back to homelessness. The rate of exit to permanent housing is a very important metric and one that HUD has asked communities to report on for several years. The rate of exit to permanent housing measures the percentage of clients the project successfully moves to a stably housed situation.



Figure 4 shows the rate of exit to permanent housing in the Sonoma County homelessness response system.¹⁷ For this measure, “permanent housing” includes any housed situation that is not time-limited, such as a market rate apartment, a subsidized housing unit, shared housing with a roommate, or staying permanently with family or friends (Appendix C provides the specific HMIS categories that comprise each of the exit destinations reflected in the graph). The graph shows that the rate of exit to permanent housing for year-round emergency shelters is 16%, which reflects only fair performance. Although a 16% permanent housing exit rate is greater than the percent of households entering from housed situations (8%), there is room for significant improvement. As noted in the Baseline Assessment report, the community has devoted significant resources to expanding a range of emergency response strategies, including outreach, safe parking programs, and emergency shelter in recent years. The resolution of the large encampment on the Joe Rodota Trail, for example, was accompanied by a major investment in both temporary shelter and housing solutions for the individuals living there. Yet the community lacks an overall system-level strategy for ensuring that all people in shelter have a pathway to secure housing upon exit. Improving the effectiveness of the shelter system in supporting people to secure housing will be critical to achieving significant reductions in homelessness.

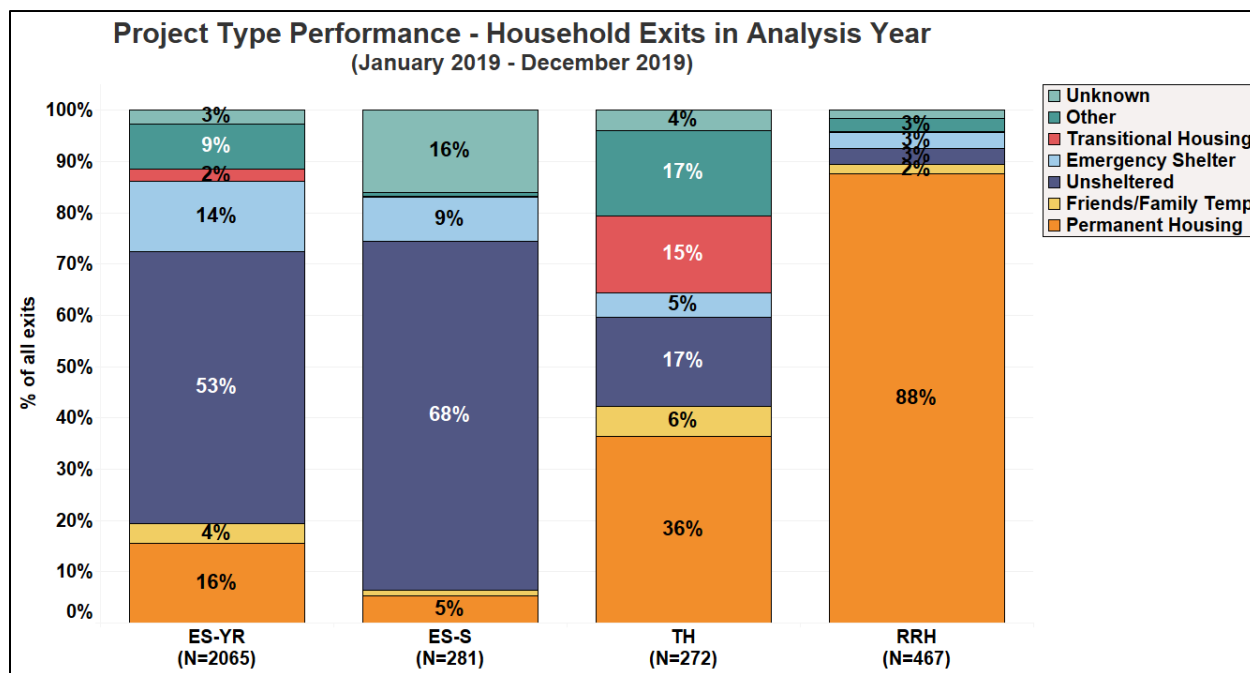
Transitional housing projects are performing poorly on this measure with only 36% exiting to permanent housing with 21% entering from housed locations. The 36% exit rate to permanent housing is well below what would be expected in a high performing system or in relation to the 80% benchmark established by HUD. This performance should be considered in relation to the relatively short length of stay and raises questions about why so many participants are exiting before stable housing has been achieved.

Rapid rehousing projects are performing well at 88%, which is higher than the NAEH’s suggested target of 80% to 85% permanent housing exit rate.

¹⁷ We do not include permanent supportive housing or other permanent housing projects in this measure, since PSH/OPH is not intended as a time-limited intervention and is designed for people to stay as long as they require support.



Figure 4. Rate of Exit to Permanent Housing



5. Cost Per Permanent Housing Exit

To create a more effective system, it is essential that investments are aligned with the strategies and outcomes that are shown to meet the objective of ending homelessness. Cost per permanent housing exit is a key performance measure because it assesses whether a project is successful in helping clients move to permanent housing in a way that maximizes the number of households housed with the resources available. As funds are shifted from expensive projects (that are not achieving the same rate of exits to permanent housing as more efficient programs) to those that are more cost effective per household served, system capacity will increase and the numbers of people who will re-gain stable housing will increase.

Figure 5 shows the average cost per permanent housing exit for all project types. These calculations use the total project cost, utilization of beds/units, and household length of stay.¹⁸ The average cost per permanent housing exit is low for all project types in relation to other communities where Focus Strategies has done SWAP analysis and information nationally on program costs.

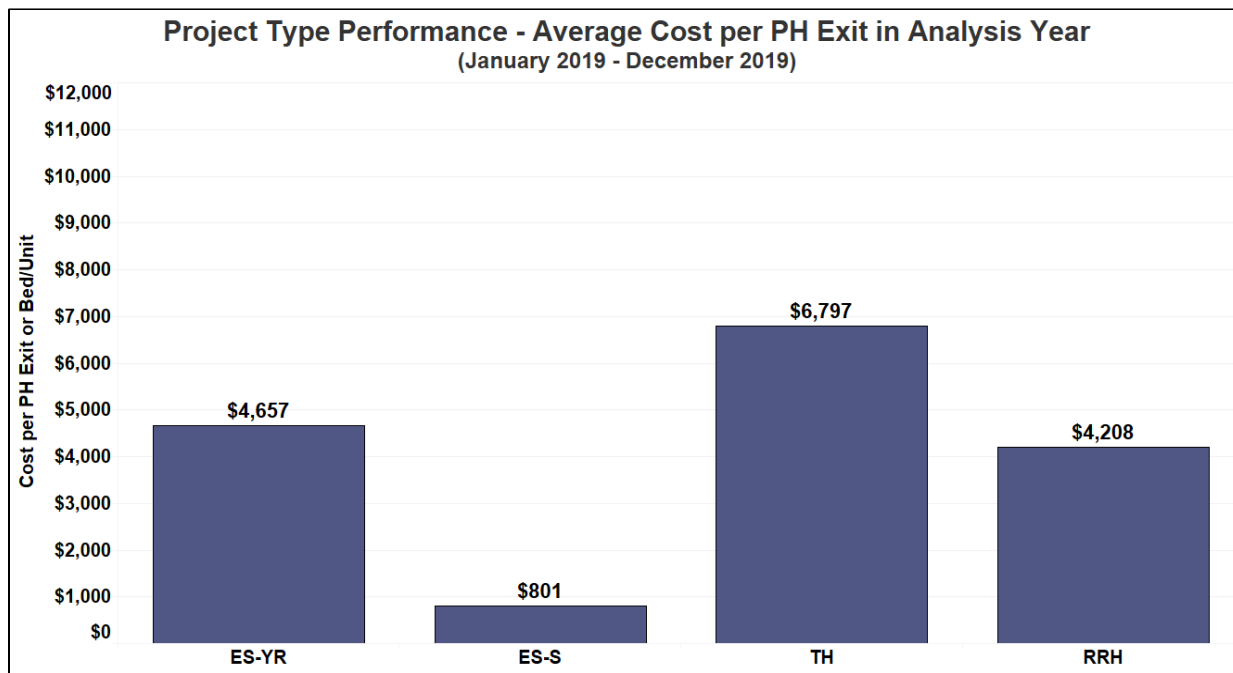
¹⁸ The formula used to calculate Cost Per PH Exit is: (1) Calculate cost per bed night = total budget divided by number of bed nights used in HMIS data; (2) Multiply cost per bed night and length of stay to get household stay cost; (3) Average household stay cost for all households that exited to permanent housing.



The cost data in Sonoma County are likely lower than is typical because lengths of stay are short and the proportion of households entering from housed situations tends to be high; this combination of factors suggest that those who successfully exit to permanent housing may require low service levels to be successful. In the Baseline Assessment report, we noted that many providers indicated they felt additional funding was needed to have more service-rich programs and create the capacity needed to serve clients with high service needs in a Housing First model.

Considering the relative costs of different project types, transitional housing (\$6,797) is higher than rapid rehousing (\$4,208) which is consistent with national averages, in which RRH typically is significantly less expensive per housing exit than transitional housing due to RRH's less intensive service model. Of course, cost is not the only critical performance measure and should be considered in relation to performance on all other measures.

Figure 5. Cost Per Permanent Housing Exit



SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report summarizes the quantitative analysis of Sonoma County's response to homelessness by analyzing project and system performance. Below we summarize the main findings and, where relevant, how they relate to the conclusions in our Baseline Assessment Report.



- Data Quality: Our examination of HMIS data found very strong data quality across all program types, with the exception of seasonal shelter. There are relatively low rates of missing and unknown data for critical data elements in year-round shelter, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing programs, including data for prior living situation and exit destination. However, seasonal shelters have high rates of missing and unknown entry and exit data, and a large number of duplicated client records. This is common for programs of this type which have high turnover and short stays. Identifying strategies to improve data for these beds will be important to have accurate and complete data to support performance analysis and system improvement. We also advise some further technical work to address inconsistencies between the HMIS system and the HIC, particularly as it relates to distinguishing OPH and PSH.
- HMIS Participation: A greater concern than data quality is the number of programs in the community that are not participating in the HMIS system. Of the 90 programs listed on the HIC, there are 15 that do not participate. Engaging with these providers and providing support to bring them into the HMIS system will provide system leadership and key stakeholders with a much more complete picture of overall system performance.
- Program Accessibility and Prioritizing Households that Are Unsheltered: The BYC analysis revealed low bed utilization rates across all program types and high rates of entry into transitional housing and rapid rehousing by people who are housed. These findings seem to be consistent with the results of the Baseline Assessment Report, which identified inconsistent adoption of Housing First principles such as low-barrier access across all programs in the system. The Baseline Assessment also found that many stakeholders report that unclear CES policies and workflow problems create delays in referrals to programs. Further, an unnecessarily large number of rejected referrals by receiving agencies was reported as a challenge to effective CES operations. As noted in the Baseline Report, enhanced training and accountability for service providers on Housing First and low barrier approaches is recommended, as well as a review and refinement of CE policies and processes to streamline and expedite the movement of people experiencing homelessness into available housing programs. Diversion, which is a practice that helps prevent entry into homeless system programs, is already a component of the CE flow. However, providing additional training and scaling up of this practice to reduce inflow could be a component of the overall CE refinement. We also noted that 21% of people entering shelter are coming from institutional settings (hospitals).



Exploring alternative strategies that prevent institutional discharge from “upstream” systems into shelter will help free up shelter beds for people who are living outside.

- Effectiveness of Programs in Supporting Exits to Permanent Housing: Another important finding from the BYC analysis is that both emergency shelter and transitional housing are underperforming on the rate of exit to permanent housing, with shelters achieving a successful exit rate of 16% and transitional housing at 36%. Achievement of a measurable and sustained reduction in homelessness will require that all the interventions in the system, and particularly temporary housing programs, are strongly oriented towards helping all households experiencing homelessness to secure a housing solution. As noted in the Baseline Report, the community has significantly ramped up investment in services and shelter for people living outside (and particularly for those who are living in large encampments), but lacks an overall coordinated strategy to ensure that the shelter system, in particular, is adequately resourced and equipped to provide housing-focused services and supports to all residents. Based on qualitative feedback from key stakeholders gathered as part of the Baseline Assessment, shelters would benefit from expanded staffing, capacity and training to support alignment to Housing First principles and improve their ability to work with residents to identify housing solutions. At the same time, as noted in our Housing Market Analysis, expanding the supply of housing affordable to people with Extremely Low Incomes will be essential. While some improvements in permanent housing exit rates can be made through more robust services and supports in shelter, the fundamental problem is the lack of housing for people to move to when they leave.

- High Numbers of Youth Experiencing Homelessness. Finally, our data analysis found that 10% of the heads of household accessing programs that report into HMIS were transition age youth (TAY). This is a surprisingly large number and particularly so given that there are relatively few programs that exclusively serve youth in the community. This means that youth are accessing programs designed for adults at high rates. The Point-in-Time Count also found a large number of unaccompanied, unsheltered minors. We would recommend exploring the development of a more fully-developed youth system and setting a goal of leveraging youth-specific resources such as HUD’s Youth Homeless Demonstration Program (YHDP).



APPENDIX A: PROJECTS INCLUDED IN THE PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

Table 1 shows all projects included in the analysis with their organization name and project type as represented on the 2019 HIC.

Appendix A Table 1. Projects Included in the Performance Analysis

Organization Name	Project Name (from HIC)	Project Type
Buckelew Programs	Boulevard Apartments	Permanent Supportive Housing
	Henry House	Permanent Supportive Housing
	Samaritan FACT	Permanent Supportive Housing
	Sonoma SHP - SCIL	Permanent Supportive Housing
	Family Support Center Winter Shelter	Emergency Shelter
	Family Support Center	Emergency Shelter
	Nightingale House (Brookwood)	Emergency Shelter
	Samuel Jones Hall (City Encampment HOST)	Emergency Shelter
	Nightingale House (Samuel Jones)	Emergency Shelter
	San Jones Hall Emergency Shelter	Emergency Shelter
Catholic Charities	Transitional Resident Program	Transitional Housing
	RRH Local ESG	Rapid Rehousing
	RRH State ESG	Rapid Rehousing
	RRH SRCity Host	Rapid Rehousing
	PSH #2 - Tenant-Based, Scattered Site - Mill Court	Permanent Supportive Housing
	PSH #2/#3 Site-based, Single Site	Permanent Supportive Housing
	PSH #3 - Tenant Based, Scattered-Site, Kenton Court	Permanent Supportive Housing
	Sloan House	Emergency Shelter
	Aston Avenue Apartments	Other Permanent Housing
	Opportunity House	Emergency Shelter
Community Action Partnership	Bridges	Transitional Housing
	Grand Avenue	Permanent Supportive Housing
	Sanctuary House	Permanent Supportive Housing
	Stony Point Commons	Permanent Supportive Housing
	Kids First Family Shelter	Emergency Shelter
	Mary Isaak Multi-Service Center	Emergency Shelter
	RRH (RCU/Tipping Point)	Rapid Rehousing
	RRH (City of Rohnert)	Rapid Rehousing
	RRH (ESG)	Rapid Rehousing
	PSH - MIC	Permanent Supportive Housing
COTS	PSH Singles	Permanent Supportive Housing
	Integrity Houses	Other Permanent Housing
	Transitional Living Program	Transitional Housing
DAAC	Transitional Living Program	Transitional Housing
	Bonnie	Transitional Housing



Interfaith Shelter Network	Carina	Transitional Housing	
	Mariposa	Transitional Housing	
	Meadow Lane Women	Transitional Housing	
	Meadow Lane Men	Transitional Housing	
	Moorland	Transitional Housing	
Nation's Finest	Stewart	Transitional Housing	
	HCHV/EH Hearn House	Emergency Shelter	
Reach for Home	SSVF 1722	Rapid Rehousing	
	Short Term Subsidy (Rapid-Rehousing)	Rapid Rehousing	
	PSH - RFH	Permanent Supportive Housing	
	Winter Shelter (SAY)	Emergency Shelter	
	Dream Center ES	Emergency Shelter	
	Stepping Stones	Emergency Shelter	
	RRH Housing First Program	Rapid Rehousing	
	Sponsor Based Rental Assistance	Permanent Supportive Housing	
	Cream Center PH	Other Permanent Housing	
	Tamayo Overflow	Other Permanent Housing	
Social Advocates for Youth	Chronically Homeless with Chronic Health Problems (SPC10 SNAP)	Permanent Supportive Housing	
	Continuum of Care Tenant Based Rental Assistance for Homeless Persons with HIV/AIDS (SPC1)	Permanent Supportive Housing	
	Continuum of Care Project Based Rental Assistance for Homeless Youth with Disabilities (SPC6)	Permanent Supportive Housing	
	Continuum of Care Tenant Based Rental Assistance for Chronically Homeless Individuals with Mental Illness (SPC7)	Permanent Supportive Housing	
	Winter Shelter (WCCS)	Emergency Shelter	
	RRH (WCCS)	Rapid Rehousing	
	Mill Street Supportive Housing	Permanent Supportive Housing	
	Park Village PH	Other Permanent Housing	
	West County Community Services		



APPENDIX B: ENTRIES

Collapsed Values for Prior Living

Prior Living	
HMIS Value	Collapsed Value
Emergency shelter, including hotel or motel paid for with emergency shelter voucher	ES
Interim Housing	ES
Transitional housing for homeless persons (including homeless youth)	TH
Host Home (non-crisis)	TH
Place not meant for habitation (e.g., a vehicle, an abandoned building, bus/train/subway station/airport or anywhere outside)	Unsheltered
Foster care home or foster care group home	Institutional
Hospital or other residential non-psychiatric medical facility	Institutional
Jail, prison or juvenile detention facility	Institutional
Long-term care facility or nursing home	Institutional
Psychiatric hospital or other psychiatric facility	Institutional
Residential project or halfway house with no homeless criteria	Institutional
Substance abuse treatment facility or detox center	Institutional
Hotel or motel paid for without emergency shelter voucher	Housing
Owned by client, no ongoing housing subsidy	Housing
Owned by client, with ongoing housing subsidy	Housing
Permanent housing (other than RRH) for formerly homeless persons	Housing
Rental by client, no ongoing housing subsidy	Housing
Rental by client, with VASH subsidy	Housing
Rental by client, with GPD TIP subsidy	Housing
Rental by client, with HCV voucher (tenant or project based)	Housing
Rental by client in a public housing unit	Housing
Rental by client, with other housing subsidy (including RRH)	Housing
Staying or living in a family member's room, apartment or house	Friends/Family
Staying or living in a friend's room, apartment or house	Friends/Family
Safe Haven	Other
Other	Unknown
Client doesn't know	Unknown
Client refused	Unknown
Data not collected	Unknown



APPENDIX C: EXITS

Collapsed Values for Destination

Destination	
HMIS Value	Collapsed Value
Emergency shelter, including hotel or motel paid for with emergency shelter voucher	ES
Transitional housing for homeless persons (including homeless youth)	TH
Moved from one HOPWA funded project to HOPWA TH	TH
Place not meant for habitation (e.g., a vehicle, an abandoned building, bus/train/subway station/airport or anywhere outside)	Unsheltered
Permanent housing (other than RRH) for formerly homeless persons	Permanent Housing
Moved from one HOPWA funded project to HOPWA PH	Permanent Housing
Owned by client, no ongoing housing subsidy	Permanent Housing
Owned by client, with ongoing housing subsidy	Permanent Housing
Rental by client, no ongoing housing subsidy	Permanent Housing
Rental by client, with VASH housing subsidy	Permanent Housing
Rental by client, with GPD TIP housing subsidy	Permanent Housing
Rental by client, with other ongoing housing subsidy	Permanent Housing
Rental by client, with RRH or equivalent subsidy	Permanent Housing
Rental by client, with HCV voucher (tenant or project based)	Permanent Housing
Rental by client in a public housing unit	Permanent Housing
Staying or living with family, permanent tenure	Permanent Housing
Staying or living with friends, permanent tenure	Permanent Housing
Staying or living with family, temporary tenure (e.g., room, apartment or house)	Friends/Family Temp
Staying or living with friends, temporary tenure (e.g., room, apartment or house)	Friends/Family Temp
Deceased	Other
Foster care home or foster care group home	Other
Hospital or other residential non-psychiatric medical facility	Other
Jail, prison or juvenile detention facility	Other
Long-term care facility or nursing home	Other
Psychiatric hospital or other psychiatric facility	Other
Residential project or halfway house with no homeless criteria	Other
Substance abuse treatment facility or detox center	Other
Hotel or motel paid for without emergency shelter voucher	Other
Safe Haven	Other
Other	Other
No exit interview completed	Unknown
Client doesn't know	Unknown
Client refused	Unknown
Data not collected	Unknown

