

HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS

WOMEN AND FAMILIES WITH NO PLACE TO CALL HOME



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Hidden Homelessness: Women and Families with No Place to Call Home

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Summary: A study of the extent, causes and experience of homelessness for women and families, and possible solutions, in general and in the San Diego, CA region specifically.

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PREFACE

January 2015 – Amikas, the organization I had founded five years earlier to help homeless women and their children, had proven that it's possible to house women and children outside of the bureaucratic maze of HUD directives and detached decisions made in meetings ten stories above the streets where our clients live. That should have been sufficient to get the funding we needed to not only sustain our innovative housing programs, but to grow them. It wasn't.

Amikas wasn't just "young", we were bucking a system that didn't want to hear what we were saying – that there are thousands of women and children in the San Diego region, including veteran women, who are not being counted and are struggling to survive without a place to live. While funders and legislators can justify spending tax dollars and donations on making the visible homeless go away, they choose to neither see nor help the most vulnerable - the homeless people you don't see.

In the process of exposing the ugly underbelly of homelessness, Amikas brought together some of the most enterprising and compassionate people I've had the honor of knowing. Together, we offer in this book, the unique insights gleaned from this experience, in the hope that we will provoke a fundamental shift in the way that homelessness of women and families is seen and addressed, and to incite a fierce determination in the community to create and fund programs that will assure that every woman and child has a safe place to call home and the services they need to remain permanently housed.

For this reason, this book is not meant to be a handbook for service providers, but rather a pipe clanging over the bars that separate the housed community from those who are experiencing homelessness. As much as possible we have tried to avoid the vernacular and acronyms used by the homelessness bureaucracy, or where necessary, to explain it. We are certain that if you only knew what is going on, you would be as eager as we are to do something about it.

Back in 2009, I had just assumed that our country, state and city had programs in place to help women and children who were at risk of losing their housing or had actually become homeless. How could any civilized society *not* have programs to help the most vulnerable of our community? Then, one chilly November evening, I came face-to-face with reality: women and young children are sleeping on the streets of San Diego every night.

I was leaving an event in the old Central Library in downtown San Diego, when I noticed that people were rolling out large sheets of cardboard on the sidewalk in front of the well-lit entrance to the library. At first I thought they

were part of a protest, or some sort of library campout. That's how far removed I was from the possibility that people were sleeping on our streets. Like most people who don't have a reason to go downtown at night, I didn't realize there were human beings in our city who slept on the sidewalks, in the park, and tucked into the doorways of office buildings. I would later learn that people chose that spot by the library to bed down because the all night lighting made it safer.

I started walking with my friends toward a favorite Mexican restaurant when I noticed that just around the corner, on 9th Ave., some people had set up little pop-up tents. Apparently even sidewalk real estate has its hierarchy of more or less desirable locations. In addition to lighting and safety, there are considerations like how far away the spot is from the only 24/7 restroom downtown, at Civic Center, and where the police were most forcefully rousting street sleepers to appease complaints from local businesses and housed residents, hauling "transients" off to jail or even dumping them in East County where it might take them a few days to make their way back downtown.

Pausing at the corner to take in the situation, I noticed a young woman coming across the street to join the sidewalk campers. Like some of the others, she carried a rolled-up piece of cardboard that would serve as her mattress. Clutching other hand was a little boy, perhaps four or five years old, who seemed to be straining to keep up with his mom as she hurried to claim a precious spot on the historical tiles that marked the entrance to the library.

The terrified look in that woman's eyes still haunts me. The realization that she was going to put her child to sleep on a public sidewalk changed my view of the universe and the direction of my life. To me, it is simply unacceptable for mothers and children to have to sleep on the dangerous streets in my city and I knew I had to do something about it.

A few months later, along with my husband and some friends who shared my determination to house homeless women and children, we founded Amikas, a non-profit with that mission. Some of our initial group, including veteran Maurice Martin, had actual experience being homeless, but most of us were as green as they come to the world of homelessness and the entrenched group of non-profit providers who serve them. That was both an advantage (we were looking for solutions from a fresh perspective) and a disadvantage (we had no idea that we were up against a system that didn't appreciate anyone upsetting the status quo).

The obvious reason why Amikas couldn't sustain our housing programs is that we had no money. We started with no money and over the next five years we were unable to raise sufficient funds to sustain. Despite the

countless hours of dogged effort and zeal we invested in applying for grants and begging for donations, we failed to secure more than a few thousand dollars here and there – not even enough to pay minimum wages for one full-time staffer.

Even though I served as Executive Director as a volunteer, without the funds to cover the many times our clients couldn't pay their rent, my primary occupation had become dialing for dollars. I lay awake most nights worrying about how we were going to keep the program running, when what I really wanted to be doing, and needed to be doing, was working with our clients, learning from them and helping them over the hurdles that were keeping them from joining the happily housed community.

The explanation for why we were unable to keep the Amikas housing programs going goes deeper than insufficient funds. There are some very well-funded agencies missioned to end homelessness in San Diego, but the numbers of homeless people continues to grow. Tragically, existing service providers are overwhelmed just trying to support and house the people out on the streets. The last thing anyone wants to hear is that, like an iceberg, the part you see is only a fraction of the problem. But ignore the total problem at your own peril. Eventually, it is what is hidden that will sink your ship.

Has San Diego been truly oblivious to the numbers of women and families who are living with housing insecurity or has there been this wistful thinking that if ignored, they will somehow manage to take care of themselves? In either case, the lack of sufficient services for this population is appalling. When I get a call from a mother who is suddenly homeless, often the only available resource I can suggest is a program that provides a safe, legal place to park her car at night. If she doesn't have a car, she is often simply out of luck.

It is my intention here to draw back the tarps that have been making it too easy to pretend these vulnerable and destitute people don't exist. And in the revelation, hopefully inspire sufficient public outcry to do something, because no civilized society can carry on when so many are living in such destitute conditions without any hope for the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

In this book, I am offering my observations and perspectives from my seven years in the trenches as founder / executive director / president of Amikas, a San Diego non-profit dedicated to helping women and children get housing, with a focus on veteran women. I've also included insights from others who work daily with impoverished women, and the women themselves who have experienced homelessness firsthand.

The first part of the book examines the situation as it currently is, primarily in San Diego, including interviews and case histories (unless I have permission, the names and identifying features have been changed), to literally put human flesh and blood on the bare bone facts. I have also invited people who have a deeper insight about a particular area, to contribute to this book in order to provide different perspectives.

Most studies of homelessness, while not gender specific, address the conditions and issues faced by homeless men. This book attempts to first shed light on the existence of homeless women and children and to clarify how they experience homelessness, the impact it has on them and their children and ways we can successfully help them to transition back to being sustainably housed.

Recognizing a problem is the first step to solving it. Next, we need to be open to innovative ways of solving the problem and then to get about the hard work of actually creating the change necessary to solve the problem. So the second part of this book throws out some ideas that, because they are different than what has been done "since the beginning of time" and are unproven, are meeting with considerable resistance. Where some of these solutions might seem obvious, I offer explanations for why they are not or cannot be implemented and proposals for overcoming those road blocks.

Hopefully the light this book shines on hidden homelessness will generate the necessary stimulus to take action and get this unserved population permanently housed. Most of the proposed solutions depend on having the political will and precious funding to implement programs that don't necessarily fit into the HUD homeless campaign *du jour*.

Homeless programs tend to suffer from the "squeaky wheel syndrome" – the problems that we see are the ones we fix. The numbers of visibly homeless people continue to grow despite well financed and intentioned efforts to stem the tide. It's little wonder that there is no proclivity for thinking about the homeless people we don't see. But the numbers are overwhelming, and ignoring the problem is feeding it. It isn't enough to boast that if we do this or that, we can house the 100 most visible homeless individuals, when there are 100 times 100 homeless families needing help who unless helped will not only

become visible and chronically homeless, but because of the permanent impact trauma has on young brains, multi-generational.

Rather than becoming so overwhelmed that we throw up our hands exclaiming that nothing can be done, I hope that what is revealed here will motivate the community to think and act boldly, to demand that legislators and those who hold the purse-strings, step away from their podiums and their grandiose 10-year plans, and actually do something that will house, not just 100 individuals, but the thousands of women and families in San Diego County who are currently without housing.

Given the opportunity, I am certain that most homeless women have the courage and tenacity to overcome the traumatic impact that their experience has had on them. It is our job to give them that opportunity, along with the tools, compassion and inspiration they need to persist when so much is stacked against them.

It would be so much easier to actually end homelessness for women if we could prevent the traumatic experience of being homeless from ever happening. Knowing that trauma makes their journey back home so much more complex than it is for most men, homeless prevention for women and families should not be relegated to an afterthought, as it is now. Our investment in homeless prevention and rapid re-housing, particularly for women, is a far more judicious investment in time and resources than all of the Band-Aids we currently apply.

A SAN DIEGO PERSPECTIVE

Most of the observations and statistics offered here are based on the situation in San Diego County, California. The region currently has the dubious distinction of having the fourth highest rate of homelessness in the country. (The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2015) Despite countless enthusiastic campaigns to end homelessness, the numbers continue to grow. What's more, the statistics being used by our legislators and planners are not accurately representing the women and families who have no housing security. In the book, I'll be demonstrating that the situation is actually much worse than anyone wants to admit.

PART I

Women and families with no place to call home

“America has the largest number of homeless women and children in the industrialized world. It’s a depressing statistic exacerbated by a housing crisis that forced thousands of families out onto the street.”

– The Best Way to End Homelessness, Alana Samuels, Citylab.com July 13, 2015



WHO ARE THE HIDDEN HOMELESS?

WHO ARE THE HIDDEN HOMELESS?

The United States has the largest number of homeless women among industrialized nations and the highest number on record since the Great Depression. (The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011) As I will explain in the next section (Bad data in – Bad funding out), these numbers most likely reflect only a fraction of the number of women who are homeless in the nation.

Before I explain how it is that tens of thousands of homeless women and children are not being counted and served, let's start by identifying who these homeless women and families are, who are hiding in the shadows. While anyone who chooses daily activities and sleeping arrangements that make it difficult to identify them as being homeless, can be considered part of the hidden homeless. By and large those who find it necessary to keep hidden are families with children, who most often consist of a single mother with one or more children; unaccompanied children; single women, and transgender persons.

HOMELESS FAMILIES

Every year, hundreds of thousands of American families become homeless, including more than 1.6 million children. These families are hidden from our view. They move frequently, and many are doubled-up in overcrowded apartments with relatives or friends. Others sleep in cars and campgrounds or send their children to stay with relatives to avoid shelter life. Once in shelter, despite the efforts of dedicated staff, life can be noisy, chaotic, and lack privacy. Homelessness increases the likelihood that families will separate or dissolve (AIR Health and Social Development Program, n.d.).

Traumatic stress in the lives of families experiencing homelessness is extraordinarily high. Often these families have experienced on-going trauma in the form of childhood abuse and neglect, family disruption, domestic violence, community violence, involvement with the foster care system, and the trauma associated with the loss of home, safety and sense of security. Ongoing exposure to traumatic stress, particularly exposure from a younger age, can impact all aspects of people's lives, including physiological, emotional, and cognitive functioning; social interactions/relationships; and identity formation. (AIR - The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2015)

Among industrialized nations, the United States has the largest number of homeless women and children. Not since the Great Depression have so many families been without homes (The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011). According to the Annual Point-in-Time count conducted in January 2014, homeless families comprise 37 percent of the total homeless population in the country. Only New York had more homeless people in families than

California in 2014. 11% of all homeless people in families were located in California. California had the largest number of people in families with chronic patterns of homelessness — 2,878 people or 12% of the state's homeless family population (The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014).

THE BIG MYTH ABOUT HOMELESS FAMILIES

Here is a direct quote of what was told to providers at a 25 Cities to End Homelessness meeting: Fortunately, homelessness among families is typically not a long-term experience. About 75 percent of families who enter shelter are able to quickly exit with little or no assistance and never return.

WHAT IS A HOMELESS FAMILY?

According to the Monarch School that serves homeless kids, about 40% of San Diego's homeless are in families. From 2008 to 2010 the San Diego region experienced an 83% increase in children reported as homeless by the annual school homeless count. And the numbers continue to grow. In 2014 there were 22,189 homeless public school students in San Diego County – up from 15,685 in 2011 according to the San Diego County Office of Education (San Diego County Office of Education, n.d.).

Schools define homeless students differently than HUD. Legally, homeless children or youth are those who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. This includes children and youth who:

- are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason
- may be living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, shelters, or awaiting foster care placement
- have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings
- are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings, or
- qualify as homeless because they are children who are living in similar circumstances listed above (San Diego County Office of Education, n.d.)

WHO ARE THE HIDDEN HOMELESS?

What the Public Needs to Know

Posted on January 31, 2015 by Heather Poland (A teacher's perspective)

-Heather Poland

<https://ateacherspointofview.wordpress.com/2015/01/31/what-the-public-needs-to-know/>

I teach in a low-income school that is located in the Barrio Logan area of downtown San Diego. This area is rich with art and culture, a fascinating neighborhood and people, and also located near homeless shelters.

This school year, we had a huge increase in our homeless population. We now have 25% homeless kids attending our school. This was such a marked increase from last year, I wondered what was going on. Of course, the economy, jobs, etc. No big surprise except people who do not work or live around the homeless population really do not see it.

I have worked in many different schools, mostly low-income. But I did not truly understand the plight of homeless students until I came to my current school, about 3 years ago.

Some things I didn't know about homeless shelters:

There are many different types of shelters, all with their own rules

The rules at all the shelters are very strict, and not usually good for the kids

People are homeless for many, MANY different reasons

I also thought, because what a friend had told me, that if you were a single mom with kids, the city would find and put you in housing. Not true. SO not true.

*The homeless population at my school would even be higher, but right around the corner is a county run school, specifically for homeless kids. They have many resources for the families there, but also limited space, and a tendency to suggest kids with IEPs go elsewhere. My school has almost no resources for the families. I don't know why we are not getting more resources from the district. **It is like we are an invisible school, with invisible homeless kids.***

I wanted to share with everyone a bit about one of my students we will call M. There are so many misconceptions out there about homeless families, I need people to know the truth.

M is a seventh grade girl who came to class at the beginning of the year. She decided to come to this school after trying out the county run school. She didn't like it. She has amazed me with her positive attitude, and eagerness to learn. She is a normal 12-year-old girl, with many more challenges than most of us can imagine. She has some younger brothers and sisters, including a newborn sister. They live at a nearby homeless shelter.

I assumed, wrongly, that this shelter was like another I knew about. I thought they gave families a room and they could keep their stuff in that room. I was wrong. Not at this shelter. My student's family has to get in line for the shelter at 4 pm. School ends at 3:30. They start letting people in around 4:30 and the rule says that the whole family must be there, together, to be let in. Therefore, when I asked her to come to my after-school reading program, she could not. She and her siblings, cannot get the extra help they need. This broke my heart, but it doesn't stop there.

At this shelter, once they are inside, kids are given a very short time to do homework. When homework time is over, they do chores, and then go into a large room where everyone sleeps. It is lights out at 7:30 pm. 7:30! This means, if she is struggling with math homework, which she is, like everyone else because it is the new Common Core math, she cannot spend the time she needs to on it. It also means her other homework does not get done. And she can't stay after school to complete any of it.

And it doesn't stop there. I thought, ok, maybe she can have a flashlight and secretly read or do some homework. Nope. First of all, they have to leave their backpacks outside of the room they sleep in. Second of all, the people come around and check to make sure the people are sleeping. Yes, they actually come around and literally poke people to make sure they are asleep. If they are not, they kick them out!

In the morning they wake up early to do chores. They "randomly" select individuals to do the chores, but M says they always seem to pick her mom. This means that she has to go outside with her brothers and sisters, including the newborn, and wait while her mom does chores. This is also why she is frequently late to school. It also explains why she told me she probably could not come in early before school to get help.

Everything is stacked against her. Yet, she still has to take the SBAC and be scored against her "peers". All students in low incomes have so many things stacked against them, and the homeless kids just have even more in their way. Arne Duncan doesn't care about this. He cares about Accountability. We must make sure every child is reaching "rigorous" standards while being hungry, tired, and stressed. Makes perfect sense, doesn't it?

WHO ARE THE HIDDEN HOMELESS?

Many people also assume they know why people are homeless. There are so many different reason why. M is the perfect example. They used to live in Los Angeles with the grandmother. Then her dad was deported last year. They decided to move to San Diego because that way they can visit their dad every weekend in Tijuana. They don't have a car, so they wouldn't be able to see him if they stayed in LA. Here, they can take the trolley all the way down to the border. They are working on getting him back to the states.

M also is frequently absent. She has to take care of her brothers and sisters if her mom needs help. Recently, her mom had to have surgery so M was out for quite a while.

Despite all of this, M still likes school. She also still likes reading. She has an incredible positive attitude as well. I constantly worry about her and her family. This is the reality that these kids face. They are invisible. Most of us never really know what they go through. Hopefully this has given you a glimpse, and a bit more understanding of the situation, and the ridiculousness of Common Core and high stakes testing.

HOMELESS TWO-PARENT FAMILIES

About 55% of the cities surveyed by the 2014 US Conference of Mayors reported that families may have to break up in order to be sheltered. Because no beds were available, emergency shelters in 73 percent of the survey cities had to turn away homeless families with children (The United States Conference of Mayors, 2014). San Diego did not respond to the survey. Just when families need their only support system, we shouldn't split them apart for emergency shelter.

Emergency shelter for families

Women with children who need immediate shelter, don't have much of a choice in San Diego. Currently the Rescue Mission, a faith-based provider, is the only emergency shelter in downtown San Diego that takes children. Following a lawsuit in 2014, the Rescue Mission purportedly implemented some improvements. The following interview describes conditions prior to these changes. As of May 2016, an average ____ women and ____ children bed down at the rescue Mission each night.

Keeping the family intact

Service providers will attest to the benefits of keeping the household unit intact, particularly households with two parents. But the reality is that once a family loses their housing, access to emergency and temporary housing works against them. The story below illustrates an all-too-common scenario

where husbands and wives must separate and the male must choose to sleep outside so the children and their mother can get access to shelter.

Amikas Welcomes Spring with a “Housing First” New Baby! April 2014

It was one of those unusual days for San Diego with a sudden torrential rain storm, when Amikas got a call from a woman who said she was 8½ months pregnant, had two small children and no place to live. She said she wasn’t a veteran, but I knew we had to get this woman and her children housed before she gave birth.

I ran into a brick wall trying to find shelter for this family. Although Rachel’s had a bed for a pregnant woman where she could remain after giving birth for six months (if she could manage the 35 steps leading up to the sleeping quarters over the Post Office) they could not take her other two children. When I called the mom back, I reassured her that there was no way I was going to let her and her kids stay on the street. If necessary, I was prepared to put them in the living room of Amikas House until we had an opening and we figured out how to get the \$400 per month she’d need for rent.

I happened to mention that it was too bad she wasn’t a veteran because we could get her temporary financial assistance through the VA Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program. That’s when she told me that her husband is a veteran. “Husband?” I asked, “Where is he?”

She explained that when the family lost their housing, they had been unsuccessful finding anyplace that would take a family. (The lack of emergency shelter for families is a serious problem in San Diego.) They managed to get a hotel voucher for one week but they were frantic that there would be no place to take the baby after it was born. So that day, standing in the cold wind and rain, waiting for a trolley to take them to the motel, they made the painful decision to split up so mom and the kids could get into emergency housing and dad would fend for himself.

The Amikas Board approved opening an additional AD-UP (Amikas Double-Up Program) home for this family if I could get commitments for the money. The response to my email was just enough to go ahead. We referred the dad to Able-Disabled Advocacy for employment and VA benefit assistance and to Veteran Community Services for rental assistance. We negotiated for rental of a recently renovated cottage in Encanto with a property owner who was renting other AD-UP housing to Amikas. Over the next few days, with the help of veteran volunteers from the emergency shelter we picked up donated furnishings and household items and set up the house.

With the help of many people who donated money, household goods and their hard work, Amikas housed this family. It was exhilarating to see what could

WHO ARE THE HIDDEN HOMELESS?

be accomplished with a few days of intensive effort by people working together to make it happen.

And then, just a week later... little Junior was born. He is a beautiful baby! He and his Mom came home from the hospital to live with his sister and brother and Dad in a home that's safe and full of love. When we went to visit the family, Junior's dad exclaimed, "I don't know where we'd be right now if Amikas hadn't stepped in!" Thanks to the combined efforts of the agencies and individuals who care about our less fortunate neighbors, this family is back on track.

HOMELESS SINGLE PARENT FAMILIES

Nearly 20% of households in San Diego County were headed by a single mother in 2013 (Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, 2014).

Almost one in ten households in California (9.3%) are headed by a single mother. Two-thirds of those households (64%) fall below the Real Cost Measure, and more than 3 in 10 (31%) live below the Federal Poverty Level. According to a recent report from Center on Policy Initiatives, 34.9% of single parent families in the City of San Diego are living in poverty (Center on Policy Initiatives, 2015). Indeed, many single mothers face the “perfect storm” of obstacles to economic security.

Having a child in the household, particularly a young child, also is closely associated with living below the Real Cost Measure standard. More than half (51%) of all households with at least one child under six years old is under the Real Cost Measure—and that rate jumps to 76% when the head of household is a single mother. Facing high child care costs and often lacking a second income source or caregiver, single mothers must confront directly choices between working and caring for a sick child, and must do so often with little backup or margin for error.

Most single mothers who head households in California (72%) are employed, and most are doing it alone (64% of those have no other workers in the house), despite the fact that the majority of single-mother households have at least one other adult living at home. In fact, 15% of these households have people from at least three generations in the home (often a grandparent in addition to a mother and children).

Single mothers face a double economic whammy – as women, they generally get paid less than their male counterparts, and they have only that one income supporting the household. Add to that the additional cost of childcare that might not be necessary if two parents are adjusting their work schedules so one can be home for the kids.

Single parents who are paid hourly will lose income when they have to take time off from work to care for a sick child, attend teacher conferences or attend to the myriad of things that need to be done for their children during working hours. This time off can cause single parents to lose employment or fail to advance to higher paying positions.

Additionally, many single mothers have comparatively low educational levels: 44% have a high school education or less. In contrast, only 19% of single mothers have a college degree or greater.

The median single mother household in California lives on under \$41,000 a year (Baum Block, Gascon, Manzo, & Parker, 2015).

These facts are both sobering and unsurprising. Single mothers are at the intersection of a number of factors associated with financial instability. As data shows, female-headed households face more challenges than male-headed households and bring home lower pay, even when comparing households with the same level of education.

HOMELESS CHILDREN

A staggering 2.5 million children are now homeless each year in America. This historic high represents one in every 30 children in the United States. Child homelessness increased in 31 states and the District of Columbia from 2012 to 2013. Children are homeless in every city, county, and state—every part of our country. California ranks 48 (50 being worst) in numbers of children who are homeless

According to U.S. Census Bureau 2014 American Community Survey, which was released Sept. 17, 2015, 57,044 children in the City of San Diego (20.4%) are living in poverty. In 2014 40.8% of students in San Diego County were eligible for free meals and an additional 9.7% qualified for reduced price school meals. Due to the high cost of housing, many of these children are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Closer inspection of data on homeless children reported on kidsdata.org reveals a disconnect between the number of homeless infants (10) and toddlers (38) compared to preschoolers (512) and kindergarteners (2,222) in San Diego County 2014 (Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, 2014). It would appear that very young homeless children are not being counted until they enter the school system. How else would the number of homeless toddlers explode from 38 to 512 by the time they enter pre-school and to 2,222 by the time they enter kindergarten?

Approximately 40% of children ages 3-5 are not enrolled in preschool or kindergarten and we might assume a significant number of them are also

WHO ARE THE HIDDEN HOMELESS?

homeless – and not being counted (Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, 2014).

The percent of public school students who are homeless in San Diego County is slightly less than the state, but growing from 3% in 2011 to 4.5% in 2014.

CHILDREN IN HOMELESS FAMILIES

Children experiencing homelessness are among the most invisible and neglected individuals in our nation. Despite their ever-growing number, homeless children have no voice and no constituency. Without a bed to call their own, they have lost safety, privacy, and the comforts of home, as well as friends, pets, possessions, reassuring routines, and community. These losses combine to create a life-altering experience that inflicts profound and lasting scars (The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2014).

IMPACT OF STRESS AND TRAUMA ON DEVELOPMENT

For children, significant adversity during critical periods can actually alter their developing brain's architecture and make it difficult for the body to manage stress. Research shows that the impact of trauma on overall functioning is greatest when experienced at younger ages or when fewer social supports are available (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2010).

A recent systematic review and meta-analysis based on the literature to date summarized the mental health needs of homeless children. The authors found that 10% to 26% of homeless preschool children had mental health problems requiring clinical evaluation. This increased to 24% to 40% among homeless school age children—two to four times the rate of poor children in a similar age range (Bassuk, MD, Richard, BA, & Tsertsvadze, MD, MSc, 2014).

Clearly the impact of homelessness on children, especially young children, is devastating and may lead to changes in brain architecture that can interfere with learning, emotional self-regulation, cognitive skills, and social relationships. The unrelenting stress experienced by the parents, most of whom are women parenting alone, may contribute to residential instability, unemployment, ineffective parenting, and poor health.

In light of these findings, there is serious cause for concern regarding the repercussions of growing up without housing security.

Considering that the current waiting period for Section 8 housing in San Diego is ten years that means that thousands of our children will be spending critical years without the safety and security of a home and likely suffering the consequences for the rest of their lives. Any programs geared to address

child homelessness must account for the high levels of stress experienced by these children, and their frequent exposure to violence and its mental health consequences.

If compassion doesn't motivate us to act, then the simple fact that we are raising a generation of traumatized citizens should.

CHILD CARE FOR HOMELESS PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

The high cost of child care makes it hard for many families to make ends meet. While many low-income households have the good fortune of relying on family members and close friends for child care, parents without such family supports often face a stark choice between devoting over one-third of their income for quality child care (at an annual average cost in San Diego County of \$13,354 for an infant and \$9,534 for a preschooler, and often unavailable in many communities) (Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, 2014) or placing their child in inappropriate care. The high cost of child care also pushes families to spend less on nutrition, clothes, and other basic needs.

WHO ARE THE HIDDEN HOMELESS?

HOMELESS SINGLE WOMEN

If women with children are low on the list of getting services due to their choice of overnight arrangements, women without children are on the lowest rung. While manifesting similar behaviors to stay hidden, they do not command the urgency of service that we would assume is motivated by households with children.

Women who do not have children with them are more likely to sleep outside than are women with children, who might fear for their children's well-being or worry about the intervention of child protective services (Zugazaga, 2004).

SURVIVAL SEX AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Survival for some homeless women is contingent on trading sex for money, goods (food, shelter, clothes, medicine, drugs), services, transportation, and protection on the street (Wenzel, Leake, & Gelberg, 2001). It is debatable whether sex under these circumstances is ever really a choice; certainly, it is often a requirement last resort strategy for survival. Further, outright sexual violence is a common occurrence for women who engage in sex trade (Wenzel, Koegel, & Gelberg, 2000) found that over the course of a year, homeless women who panhandled or traded sexual favors for drugs or money were three times more likely to experience sexual assault and other forms of violence relative to their homeless peers who did not engage in sex trade.

Indeed, 84% of women who use prostitution as an income strategy report current or past homelessness – which can mean living with abusive pimps or “customers” in the absence of a more stable option (Farley & Barkan, 1998) and homeless prostituted women are at much greater risk for sexual assault than their non-homeless counterparts (El-Bassel, Witte, Wada, Gilbert, & Wallace, 2001). When substance use (often “paid for” by sex) is a factor, the risk of sexual assault increases further, as described in the next section. Because these assaults often occur in the context of an illegal act (prostitution) and among drug users, victims may be seen by perpetrators as attractive targets, as they are less likely to report the crime or to be believed or seen as worthy of services and protection by authorities (Goodman. Ph.D., Fels, & Glenn, M.A., 2011).

HOMELESS VETERAN WOMEN

She's Never Coming Home

by Jeeni Criscenzo, May 2014

*She's gone, perhaps for good,
the woman who proudly walked out that door
thinking she was off to a patriotic war.*

*No one returns,
at least not the same,
once they've tasted the bile of war,
seeing and smelling it
'till it's permeated their every pore.
Doing things not natural to humans
that forever changes them, to their core.*

*She may look the same.
She'll even answer to her name.
But she's not coming home, no more.*

*It's a broken soldier comes back,
but never comes home.
Though they come through the door,
Drop their pack on the floor,
Put their things in their drawers.*

*Something that kept them glued is gone,
Leaving them broken and cracked.
And that person who left
for that stinkinrotten war
Is never coming back.*

*What to do for these broken warriors
with wounds so deep they never can heal?
Wounds kept hidden, yet bound to explode,
like an IED thrown without warning,
destroying their homeward road.*

*Where do they go, these broken warriors
With no place they can ever feel home?
If we can't mend these broken warriors
does that mean we leave them to suffer alone?*

*When yesterday I heard her
cry out for her mama,
while securing the perimeter with boards and stones,
wielding a butter knife, ready to attack
Shouting,
"Fuck you, fuck you,
I've been to Iraq.
And I can't find my way back home.*

WHO ARE THE HIDDEN HOMELESS?

WOMEN VETERANS MORE LIKELY TO END UP HOMELESS

Women make up 15% of active duty and 20% of new military recruits. Yet women veterans are 3 to 4 times more likely to become homeless. While the transition from military to civilian life is challenging for both male and female veterans, the trauma experienced by women veterans during military service often makes the transition more difficult for women and contributes to an increased risk of homelessness. Women veterans are more likely to end up homeless than women who have not served in the military. Over the last decade, the number of homeless women veterans has nearly doubled (Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor).

Starting From Poverty

Some young people who choose to enter the service may be relatively disadvantaged to their own aged peers prior to entering the military. For example, they may have lower educational achievement or otherwise have less labor market competitiveness. They may also have histories of personal disadvantage, such as higher rates of foster care involvement and juvenile justice system involvement as youth, higher rates of residence in economically isolated and poor neighborhoods, and some higher levels of risk behavior (i.e. substance use) associated with such disadvantages - all factors that may make them more vulnerable to homelessness once they leave the military (The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs , 2010).

On the positive side, the risk ratios for veterans in families across all racial and ethnic groups are much lower and generally do not differ among these groups. Being part of a family, even a poor family, appears to be a strong protection for veterans in general against becoming homeless.

Boot camp prepares you for war – But what prepares you for civilian life?

Women veterans face the same problems as male veterans when adjusting to civilian life, with the added layer of problems more common to women – parenting, fewer good-paying employment opportunities and a lack of nurturing social networks.

Women veterans are more likely to be single parents which limits housing options

Difficulty finding housing that accepts children (emergency, transitional, permanent and VA subsidized).

Majority of VA homeless programs do not provide services to spouses and children of veterans. VA Grant per Diem (GPD) Housing doesn't work for veteran women and families

Even when women veterans turn to the VA for housing assistance, the limited veteran housing available for homeless women veterans with children poses additional barriers. Over 60% of GPD programs surveyed with a capacity to serve women reported that they *do not* house children. Of those that do, 70% had restrictions, including the number of children housed per veteran, age restrictions (i.e. they do not house boys over age 12), and restrictions applied to room arrangements such as not allowing children older than 5 of different genders to share a room. These same restrictions limit how Sec. 8 and VASH vouchers can be used, and in a region where there is only a 2% vacancy rate, Voltaire's admonition "not to let the perfect destroy the good," certainly applies – rather than getting a less than ideal roof over their head, these families are out on the street, or worse.

MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA – A PRECURSOR TO HOMELESSNESS

Challenges to adjusting to civilian life are more pronounced for those women veterans who have experienced physical and sexual assault prior to or during their military service.

Violence History of Women Veterans who are Homeless

Violence History	Percent
Lifetime history of physical assault	77%
Physical assault in prior 12 months	20%
Lifetime history of rape	80%
Rape in prior 12 months	13%

(Washington, MD, MPH, 2010)

What happens if you report a rape while serving in the military?

The military recorded 3,374 sexual assault reports in 2012, up from 3,192 in 2011, suggesting that many victims continue not to report the crimes for fear of retribution or a lack of justice under the department's system for prosecution. The Pentagon study, was released two days after the officer in charge of sexual assault prevention programs for the Air Force was arrested and charged with sexual battery for grabbing a woman's breasts and buttocks in an Arlington, Va., parking lot.

Under Article 60 of the **Uniform Code of Military Justice**, a commanding officer reviewing a legal case has "absolute power" to disapprove the findings

WHO ARE THE HIDDEN HOMELESS?

of a military judicial proceeding. Often the person being accused of the crime is in the chain of command, or a friend of a person in the chain of command. Kristen Gillibrand (D-NY), chairwoman of the Armed Services personnel subcommittee, is working on provisions that would strip commanders of their authority to prosecute cases of sexual assault. Instead, seasoned military lawyers would be responsible. The approach is the only one that would guarantee safety to our military rank and file members. It is long overdue and an approach every member of Congress should support. (The Post-Star Editorial, 2013)

OTH Discharge—punishing the victim

Many women who experienced sexual assault while serving in the military end up with an Other Than Honorable (OTH) discharge status, either because they reported the assault, and were discharged in retaliation, or they did not report the rape and their behavior reflected that fear and resentment or the prospect of getting “booted out” seemed preferable to remaining in the situation. Until recently, victims were wrongly diagnosed with a personality disorder.

July 24, 2013, the House passed two amendments offered by Congresswoman Jackie Speier (D-San Francisco/San Mateo) in the Department of Defense Appropriations Act (HR 2397), both related to the handling of sexual assault cases. The amendments address the pervasive misuse of ‘personality and adjustment disorder’ as a diagnosis of victims of sexual assault and provide additional funding to train investigators of sexual assault crimes. For the first time, the Department of Defense will identify and correct cases where a service member reported a case of sexual abuse only to be wrongly diagnosed with a personality disorder and discharged.

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FEMALE VETERANS DON’T GO TO THE VA

While one might assume that veteran women have the advantage of accessing VA benefits, this is often not the case. Many women veterans will not go to the VA for assistance for the following reasons:

1. Many women veterans do not identify themselves as veterans. The stereotype of a veterans is they are male.
2. Women who have experienced sexual assault while serving in the military won't "go back to the yard with the dog that bit them".
3. There is a shortage of programs in the VA tailored to meet the needs of female veterans

Women don't self-identify as veterans

Veteran women often do not self-identify as veterans, often believing the designation is for those who served in combat. And those who experienced sexual assault while in active duty do not want to "return to the yard with the dog that bit them." According to the GAO report on Homeless Women Veterans (Homeless Women Veterans: Actions Needed to Ensure Safe and Appropriate Housing, 2011), homeless women veterans are often further in crisis than their male counterparts by the time they seek VA help. In the GAO report, one VA Medical Center homeless coordinator said homeless women veterans "have often used all of their available resources from family, friends, and community before they come to us, causing them to need immediate help, which is often hard to find." Without referrals to appropriate and safe housing while waiting for HUD-VASH or Grant Per Diem (GPD) housing, homeless women veterans may be at risk of physical harm and further trauma (Goodman, Ph.D., Fels, & Glenn, M.A., 2011).

Limited services for females in VA

Over 40% of the GPD programs surveyed cited "lack of access for women with children" as one of the top barriers faced by homeless women veterans. Additionally, over 25% reported insufficient housing or services for homeless women veterans with dependent children. Safety concerns with GPD housing, including incidents of men accessing women-only spaces, and male staff and residents watching them and making inappropriate comments and physical advances, are often cited by veteran women.

HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program HUD-VASH vouchers are targeted to the chronically homeless; however, homeless women veterans who are not chronically homeless, including those with children, are also eligible for HUD-VASH, according to the program handbook. But according to VA data, only about 3% were given to homeless women veterans with children during the time period studied (GAO Report to Congressional Requesters, 2010).

HOMELESS SENIOR WOMEN

Only 3% of the income of senior heads of household below the Federal Poverty Level comes from employment. Social Security is a vitally important source of income for seniors. Among senior heads of household below the Federal

WHO ARE THE HIDDEN HOMELESS?

Poverty Level, This is true despite the fact that seniors living below the FPL take home substantially less in Social Security (\$4,979 to \$13,672) than seniors above the Elder Index.

The cost of living in most major metropolitan areas is on the rise, while wages are down. In states like California, ongoing budget cuts to services like the Supplemental Security Income, In-Home Supportive Services and adult day healthcare centers are making it harder for elderly people to pay for housing. According to the latest numbers from Hearth, an organization working to end elder homelessness, the country had 40,750 homeless people 62 or older in 2012. As the nation's population ages, that number is expected to more than double by 2050.

But whatever the figure, there's no doubt that life is miserable for older people without a home. Lugging suitcases or bags for dozens of blocks to and fro, from a shelter to a reservation center to the place that serves free lunches, can be incredibly taxing if you're young and able. Doing so with the disabilities and ailments common to those in their 50s or older, from chronic back pain and arthritis to swollen ankles and gout, is that much harder. And then imagine those women's lives, when feeling safe meant another night spent contorted into a hard plastic chair. Then there's the physical toll the streets take. "Most homeless women in their 40s or 50s look like they are 70 or 80 because homelessness takes such a toll," said O'Connor. "I no longer know if a homeless person is 50 or 80." (Aguilar, 2013)

GRANDMOTHERS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN

3.7% of children in San Diego County are being raised by grandparents (US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2014)

HOMELESS FEMALE EX-OFFENDERS

For some, the answer to the question "Where will I sleep tonight?" is a homeless shelter or the street. Many are finding that the difficulties in securing affordable and appropriate housing complicate the reentry process, further reducing already limited chances for successful community reintegration (Aguilar, 2013).

Incarceration raises the risk of becoming homeless for vulnerable people. Prior to a court hearing, an accused may be held without bail on remand. In this case it is not possible to continue working, and it may be difficult to maintain the required income to make rent or mortgage payments on existing accommodation. An accused may be held for an undetermined length of time without knowledge of when he or she will be released. Many of these people

exit prisons without a secure place to live, whether or not they have been convicted of a criminal offence.

A prison sentence jeopardizes any housing arrangements offenders may have had. Offenders serving lengthy sentences are especially likely to become isolated from family and community, and lose social connections that may be beneficial in terms of securing employment or housing (Roebuck, 2007).

BAD DATA IN – BAD FUNDING OUT

NOT VISIBLE - NOT COUNTED

HUD mandates that a homeless count is conducted throughout the country in late January. The purpose of the Point in Time Count (**PITC**), recently renamed **WeALLCount**, is to identify the number of sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals throughout the nation.

The 2016 WeALLCount PICT was performed on January 29, 2016. The county-wide campaign involved 73 deployment and interview sites and 1,676 volunteers. In addition to physically counting the number of unsheltered homeless persons, volunteers interviewed approximately 24% of the unsheltered homeless population in the week following the street count. They collected demographic data, such as gender and family and veteran status.

Agencies providing emergency shelter and transitional housing added their numbers to the count of sheltered homeless people.

This annual count is an impressive feat of organization and cooperation. Volunteers participated in online training prior to the day of the count on where to look, how to determine if a vehicle is occupied, how to mark their maps and tally sheets and most important – how to stay safe. Safety concerns precluded teams from going into the canyons and areas that could pose a threat.

But, despite this gargantuan effort, with so many volunteers going out at 4:00AM on the morning of the count, and conducting interviews in the following week, perhaps as many as thousands of homeless persons, mostly women and families, are never seen by the volunteers and their numbers never make it into the HUD data.

While the information gleaned from this campaign is valuable, the failure to count thousands of homeless persons, mostly from a particularly vulnerable population, results in a highly skewed picture of the situation. And since HUD and the VA use this data to allocate funds for homeless programs, communities are left scrambling with insufficient funds overall and practically nothing allocated to serve what I will show is the largest and most vulnerable homeless population.

	2014	2015	CHANGE
Total Homeless	8,506	8,742	+2.8%
Unsheltered	3,985	4,156	+4.3%
Sheltered	4,521	4,586	+1.4%

Figure 1 San Diego County Homeless Numbers per 2015 Point in Time Count

The people with their hands on the purse-strings – the planners and legislatures and community leaders who decide where to put resources, depend on the numbers provided from the PITC. Those who are involved in serving homeless people boots-on-the-ground, know that reality is very different from those numbers.

For example, **according to data provided by the VA, based on the 2014 Point-in-Time count, in San Diego County there were only 4 unsheltered veteran households with children** out of a total of 517 unsheltered veteran households (HUD recognizes one or more persons living together and sharing rent and expenses as a household). Those of us who field calls from homeless women veterans with children every day, know that this number is ludicrous.

So it should come as no surprise that, according to the PITC, since 2011, the numbers for every homeless population have decreased except for families (see Figure 2 Comparison of Homeless Populations in San Diego County 2011 to 2015).

BAD DATA IN – BAD DATA OUT

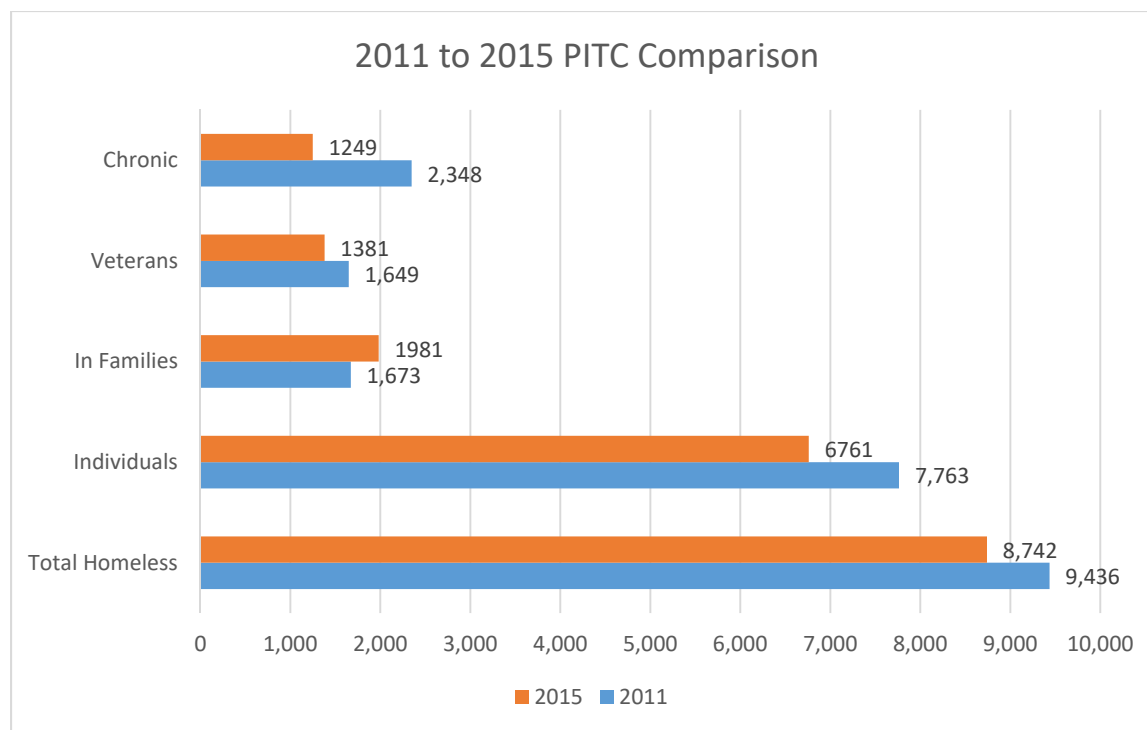


Figure 2 Comparison of Homeless Populations in San Diego County 2011 to 2015

WHY DON'T HOMELESS WOMEN AND CHILDREN GET COUNTED?

For reasons of their own and their children's safety, women will not sleep anywhere that they are visible, unless they have no other option. I have seen women sleeping on the sidewalk downtown in the middle of the day. My first thought was that they are drunk or drugged, but I came to learn that women will sometimes stay awake all night because they are afraid to be completely vulnerable while asleep at night. If they sleep in public while people are walking around them on the sidewalk, they are less likely to be assaulted.

Women with children do not want to be identified by Child Protective Services (CPS) for fear their children will be taken away from them. They will stay with a friend or family member, couch surfing until they have worn out their welcome, or determined the situation is too dangerous. Sadly, they often return to abusive partners (the devil they know) or trade sex for a place to sleep.

When all of those volunteers are out counting homeless people in alleys and parks, there will be thousands of women staying in 'hidden', informal and marginalized homeless accommodation situations who will never get counted.

Also, since most emergency shelters do not take children, or the conditions do not feel safe, or women cannot get their children from school and walk back

to the shelter before the cut-off time, they are not getting counted in the “sheltered” count either.

As a result, homeless women and families are usually invisible, not only to volunteers during the PITC, but also to the general public who are more motivated to remove the highly visible sidewalk squatters whom they perceive as a nuisance and threat, and having a negative impact on their property values.

HOW CAN WE GET A MORE ACCURATE COUNT OF THE HIDDEN HOMELESS?

All schools are required to report the number of students enrolled who are homeless to the U.S. Census. Fortunately this count includes families who are couch surfing or living in hotels/motels (California Department of Education, 2015). The McKinney-Vento Act defines homeless children and youths as individuals who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. The definition also includes:

- Children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason
- Children and youths who may be living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, shelters, or awaiting foster care placement
- Children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings
- Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings, or
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are children who are living in similar circumstances listed above

These numbers reveal a far different picture of the number of homeless households in San Diego County and City than HUD’s PITC.

In 2014 San Diego County schools reported a total of 22,189 homeless students - up from 15,685 in 2011 (Figure 3 Total Homeless Students in San Diego County Schools 2011 - 2015 (Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, 2014).

Homeless Public School Students			
2011	2012	2013	2014
15,685	18,642	22,109	22,189

Figure 3 Total Homeless Students in San Diego County Schools 2011 - 2015

BAD DATA IN – BAD DATA OUT

Figure 4 shows that 80% of homeless students were Doubled Up with Friends or Relatives; 3.5% were in Hotels/Motels; 13.5% were in Temporary Shelters; and 3.1% were Unsheltered.

Homeless Public School Students, by Nighttime Residence				
Nighttime Residence	2011	2012	2013	2014
Doubled Up with Friends or Relatives	72.8%	83.9%	82.1%	80.0%
Hotel/Motel	3.7%	3.7%	3.6%	3.5%
Temporary Shelter	14.0%	9.1%	9.9%	13.5%
Unsheltered	9.5%	3.3%	4.5%	3.1%

Figure 4 San Diego County Homeless Students in 2014 by Nighttime Residence (count and percentage)

If we assume that the students in Temporary Shelter and Unsheltered were counted in the PITC, we can use only the numbers of students who are doubled up or staying in motels to determine those who are not in the PITC data. According to the Census, the average number of children for a Single Female Head of Household with Children under 18 is 1.86 (U.S. Census).

Figure 5 Calculation of Homeless Families in San Diego County, shows how we can use this data to calculate that there were 9,961 homeless households with children in San Diego County in the 2014 – 15 school year who were not included in the PITC numbers.

—

**This is in ADDITION to the 8,742 individuals
counted in the 2015 PITC**

** Average number of children per Single Female Head of Household Family with children under 18 - U.S. Census

Figure 5 Calculation of Homeless Families in San Diego County

Compare this calculation to the 1,981 homeless families the PITC would have us believe were in the County of San Diego in January 2015 as illustrated in Figure 1 San Diego County Homeless Numbers per 2015 Point in Time Count.

But for fluidity to account for such a large discrepancy between the 1,981 homeless families reported by the PICT and the 9,961 calculated by the school numbers, we would have to be doing an amazing job of cycling families out of homelessness within 73 days PLUS accounting for an additional 2,007 families falling into homelessness every 73 days. Considering that there is

BAD DATA IN – BAD DATA OUT

almost no funding available to accomplish such an amazing feat, the evidence seems to prove the obvious, that the PITC is missing thousands of homeless women and families.

Figure 6 San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) Homeless Students in 2014 Figure 7 Calculation of Homeless Families in City of San Diego show how we can apply this same calculation to determine the number of homeless households in the City of San Diego who are not included in the PITC.

Homeless Public School Students, by Nighttime Residence				
Nighttime Residence	2011	2012	2013	2014
Doubled Up with Friends or Relatives	48.6%	72.1%	69.8%	69.5%
Hotel/Motel	3.5%	4.4%	4.1%	2.8%
Temporary Shelter	27.3%	16.0%	16.4%	24.8%
Unsheltered	20.6%	7.4%	9.6%	2.9%

Figure 6 San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) Homeless Students in 2014

Using School Data to Count Homeless Families in City of San Diego

Homeless students – 2014	7,340
% Doubled-up and in Motels*	72.3%
Homeless Students not counted in PITC	5,307
Avg. number of children in single parent household**	÷ 1.86
Homeless Households not counted in PITC***	2,853
Avg. individuals in a household	X 3
Homeless Individuals not counted in PITC	8,559

**This is in ADDITION to the 5,538 individuals
counted in the 2015 PITC**

* Assuming the others were somehow included in the PITC,

** Average number of children per Single Female Head of Household Family with children under 18 - U.S. Census

*** This number doesn't include the families with preschool children and no children enrolled in school, or families who do not enroll their children in school because they are too transitory or fear that CPS will take their children

Figure 7 Calculation of Homeless Families in City of San Diego

Of the 8,506 homeless persons counted in the 2014 Point in Time Count, only 89 have been identified as being both chronically homeless and in families. Using PITC data to allocate funds for homeless programs, combined with the HUD priority to end chronic homelessness, ends up earmarking only 1% of funds for families even though, by the PITC, (which we have proven is missing nearly 10,000 families) 23.6% of homeless persons are in families and only 14.6% of all homeless persons are chronically homeless.

NOT FUNDED – NOT SERVED

HUD HOMELESS DEFINITION EXCLUDES MOST HOMELESS WOMEN AND FAMILIES

Beyond the fact that homeless women and families are not counted because they make safer choices for nighttime residence, these choices, while lacking housing security, do not even qualify them as homeless in the eyes of HUD policymakers. Meanwhile, their sidewalk counterparts, who often choose alcohol and drugs over safety, are on top of the HUD list for assistance.

In their efforts to weed out those statistically insignificant few who might be bilking the system, as well as it being politically beneficial to make visible progress with the “homeless problem,” in their definition of homeless, HUD has specifically **excluded** those who make nighttime shelter choices preferred by most women and families.

Under the Hearth Act, in order to use HUD funding for programs to assist homeless persons, the individual must fall under certain categories:

1. Lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence; or their primary nighttime residence must be a public or private place not designed for regular sleeping accommodations. Such as a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport or camping ground;
2. Have a court order for an eviction or must leave their residence within 14 days and lack any resources to obtain other housing;
3. Are an unaccompanied youth or family with children, defined as homeless under other Federal statutes, with no lease in the previous 60 days AND persistent housing instability AND expect to remain in the immediate future due to special needs of barriers to employment; or
4. Fleeing domestic violence

These stipulations exclude families who are couch surfing or doubling up, paying for a motel for part of the month until their money runs out, or recently discharged from the military.

Families and unaccompanied youth staying with other people out of necessity are only eligible for HUD homeless assistance if:

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- They can prove that they can stay there only for 14 days or less, and have no subsequent permanent place to go, and no support networks needed to obtain other housing. To prove this, HUD regulations require that unaccompanied youth and families obtain a statement from the owner or renter of the place where they are staying that they can only be there for less than 14 days (HUD's category two) ((Id. §§ 583.5, "Homeless" (2) & 583.301(b)(3)(C)); or
- They can prove that they moved twice in 60 days, AND they did not have permanent housing for those 60 days, AND that they have a specified physical or mental condition that would keep them without permanent housing for a long time. Each of these conditions requires extensive documentation. (HUD's category three) (Id. §§ 583.5, "Homeless" (3) & 583.301(b)(4))

These requirements are outlandishly burdensome for families staying with others out of necessity. Often they are breaking lease agreements by exceeding occupancy so owners/renters of the housing are unlikely to be willing to provide a statement that anyone is living there. These families are at the mercy of the people with whom they are staying and can be asked to leave at a moment's notice and never know how long they can stay.

Under these requirements, children and youth staying with others are vulnerable to predators, including traffickers since these criminals are unlikely to make a written or verbal statement about how long a child or youth can stay.

Families and unaccompanied youth who pay to stay in motels have unstable and meager sources of income; they never know how long they will be able to stay there. HUD will not consider them eligible for homeless assistance, but will assist a family in the same motel merely because that family is not paying for their own room. Motels cannot be considered housing for families with young children. They can be violent places and are not equipped to meet the physical and other developmental needs of children and youth.

HUD PRIORITIZES PREDOMINANTLY MALE HOMELESS POPULATIONS

In addition to a definition of homelessness that excludes most women and families, HUD has specifically prioritized efforts to end chronic and veteran homelessness – both groups being highly visible, politically practicable and predominantly male.

And to assist service providers in correctly identifying the narrow population they must serve with HUD funds, HUD recently came out with a 55-page document titled *Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to*

Housing: Defining “Chronically Homeless” (Housing and Urban Development Department, 2015). This final rule establishes the definition of “chronically homeless” that will be used in HUD's Continuum of Care Program, and in the Consolidated Submissions for Community Planning and Development Programs. Anyone falling outside this definition cannot be served with HUD funds.

One can only imagine the thousands of dollars that were spent to clarify that:

...agencies receiving HUD funds to serve chronically homeless people cannot use those funds for persons or households if any of the periods separating the requisite “4 separate occasions in the past 3 years” where they were homeless (according to the HUD definition of homeless) were less than 7 nights.

If that sounds convoluted to you, imagine being an underpaid intake staff person at an underfunded homeless service agency, interviewing a homeless client to determine if they can accept him or her into the program without jeopardizing their HUD funding.

Worse yet, imagine being that desperate homeless person. As if people who find themselves with no place to go have the option of deciding when and how long they are going to have a roof over their heads! And really, do any of them bother to keep a calendar? “So let’s see, January 15 to January 19, 2012, I was able to stay with my Aunt Sally for 5 days, until she caught me smoking a joint and put me out on the street. Damn, if I’d known that wouldn’t count as a legit “period separating occasions,” maybe I would have pleaded with her to let me stay two more days!”

I’m tempted to set up a table on the street to advise homeless people how long they have to be on the street and how long they have to shack up with a friend in order to qualify for help.

Unfortunately HUD’s complexity of definitions of what is “homeless” and “chronically homeless” is leaving a lot of our most vulnerable people quite literally out in the cold. Using PITC data to allocate funds for homeless programs, combined with the HUD priority to end chronic homelessness, ends up earmarking only 1% of funds for families even though 23.6% of homeless persons are in families and only 14.6% of all homeless persons are chronically homeless.

HUD REGULATIONS DISCOURAGE PRIORITIZING HOMELESS FAMILIES

Currently, communities and nonprofits seeking to prioritize services for homeless children and families have been less competitive when applying for HUD funding. Current law prohibits a Continuum of Care from using more

BAD DATA IN – BAD DATA OUT

than 10% of its funds to serve families and youth in Category 3 of their narrow definition of homeless (Unaccompanied youth or family with children, defined as homeless under other Federal statutes, with no lease in the previous 60 days AND persistent housing instability AND expect to remain in the immediate future due to special needs of barriers to employment).

This means even families and youth who can meet that definition are highly unlikely to get help. HUD has created strong incentives for prioritizing projects that serve single adults who are chronically homeless (living on the streets or in shelters only), such that communities have little to no incentive to prioritize programs serving families and unaccompanied youth and in fact risk continued funding if they do so. (Facts About the Homeless Children and Youth Act (H.R. 576/S. 256))

In support of the Homeless Children and Youth Act introduced to the US Senate in January 2015, Senator Dianne Feinstein of California stated, “Only one in 10 homeless children in this country is eligible for federal housing assistance, and that’s shameful. Under the narrow HUD definition, even children living with traffickers because they have nowhere else to go would be ineligible for help. The harmful effects of homelessness on children’s educational and emotional development is clear, and ensuring children have a permanent roof over their heads will have a long-term benefit on their lives and our nation’s future.”

“HUD denies help to nearly a million homeless children and youth who live every day with hunger, trauma, exploitation and violence,” said Ed Walz, First Focus Campaign for Children. (Portman, 2015)

RUSH TO TRANSITION OUT HURTS HOMELESS FAMILIES

Now, the complexity of who can and cannot be served with HUD funding has just gotten much worse. The bureaucrats in D.C. seem to have an “all or nothing approach” to addressing the highly complex problem of homelessness. In selected studies, it has been found that the “Housing First” model has more successful outcomes. So now HUD is pulling funds from all transitional housing programs, and agencies are scrambling to redesign their programs to match HUD’s latest housing wet dream.

Lisa Halverstadt, of VOSD reported that San Diego’s Regional Continuum of Care Council, the countywide group that decides on local programs which will compete for federal funds, turned in an application last month that nixed seven current projects and proposed reduced funding for another.

Unfortunately, these transitional programs, while not long term solutions, and often provided substandard conditions, were often one of the few options available for women with children. Most of the Housing First units coming on

line are for individuals, primarily chronically homeless persons with mental illness requiring permanent supportive housing (PSH).

CONSEQUENCES OF NOT COUNTING HOMELESS WOMEN AND FAMILIES

The lack of available beds for homeless women and families is disturbing. Neither the San Diego Winter Shelter, which had become a year-round emergency shelter nor the Veterans Tent took children. The Veteran's tent only began taking veteran women in 2013. Now the point is moot, since San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer and Councilmember Todd Gloria came up with a plan to close both the Emergency Shelter (250 beds) and the Veterans Emergency Shelter (150 beds), resulting in a loss of 127,750 beds per year for homeless individuals:

$$350 \text{ beds} \times 365 \text{ day/year} = \text{Net Loss } 127,750 \text{ Beds}$$

Instead of the Emergency Shelter beds, Mayor Faulconer and the City Council moved money over to Saint Vincent de Paul's Mirabile Center to change the center's transitional housing for 270 men and 80 women where residents could stay for up to one year, to interim housing where residents can only stay for 90 days while being assisted with getting into permanent housing. Of course, that housing doesn't exist at this time, so the Mirabile is basically a replacement for the Emergency Shelters and nothing is replacing the 350 transitional beds. The net loss of beds during what may prove to be an unusually cold and rainy winter, is putting further strain on the availability of shelter for families.

UPDATE Sept 2015: Currently, emergency shelter for a family mostly consists of San Diego's parks or if the family is lucky, their car, while awaiting an opening in the very few family shelters available or the basement of the Rescue Mission where mattresses are spread out on the floor and everyone is sleeping wall to wall with everyone else's kids, crying, sick, dirty diapers and all. (Rescue Mission is in the process of a major re-model of their family emergency shelter. They have been able to pursue this because they have opted out of HUD funding.

FEMALE HOMELESSNESS MUST BE ADDRESSED DIFFERENTLY

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As in almost everything else, gender influences how homelessness is experienced. The greater actual and perceived vulnerability of women who don't have a safe place to live, and the psychological impact of being homeless, even for a short period of time, can have lifelong ramifications. Because of this, we must put greater effort and emphasis on homeless prevention and rapid rehousing for women, particularly women with children. Our allocation of funding and community resources must increase the availability of services that specifically address the physical and emotional needs of homeless women (Goodman, Ph.D., Fels, & Glenn, M.A., 2011).

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA IN HOMELESS WOMEN AND FAMILIES

Ten years ago, I had what may be the shortest ever experience of homelessness. It didn't even last the entire night. But that brief experience gave me an insight into what women undergo when they have no safe place to spend the night.

That Friday afternoon I had closed the sale of the RV I had been living in fulltime as a "free-range" journalist for a little over a year. I'd emptied my few belongings into two giant black trash bags and taken the bus to the bank in Oceanside, CA. where I had literally squeezed out my last dollar in cash for the certified check required for the security deposit and first month's rent on a small cottage I was planning to move into that afternoon.

Certain that I had planned everything perfectly, I'd used the check I'd received as payment for the RV to open a new checking account, not realizing until I'd made the deposit that it wouldn't clear for two business days. As I walked to the cottage, I worried about how I would buy food while I waited for that check to clear.

It was only when I got to the cottage that I found out there were unexpected problems with refurbishing the unit and I wouldn't be able to move in for a few more days. Suddenly buying food wasn't my biggest problem.

I'll never forget the way I felt when I realized I was cornered with nowhere to go. I didn't even have a car at that point, because the RV had been both home and transportation. My one credit card was maxed out, so going to a motel wasn't an option.

I was fairly new to the area and could only think of one friend to impose on in San Diego, but she wasn't answering her phone. Using the change I'd scrounged up from the bottom of my purse to buy dinner in a nearby taco

shop, I dawdled over every grain of Spanish rice so I didn't have to go out on the street that evening. I had no Plan B.

Finally my friend called back! She and her husband were out of town, but she told me where the extra key was hidden at their house and said I could make myself at home. With an overwhelming sense of relief, I caught the last bus to Ocean Beach and walked the 10 blocks uphill to her house, happily dragging those heavy-duty trash bags behind me.

I remember every detail of that night because it was so terrifying to think that I might have to spend the entire night, or even the next few nights, out on the street. I had fearlessly travelled the country for a year in my RV, alone, never once feeling afraid because I knew I had someplace safe to go where I could lock the door and go to sleep – even if it was just an old RV.

I blamed myself for not thinking through every possible way things could go wrong. The man who bought my RV needed to close the deal that day because he wanted to take his family on a trip that weekend. I had signed the lease on the cottage and handed over the certified check for the key, fully expecting to move right in. Neither the landlord nor I had anticipated that the plumber wouldn't finish the job on time.

We think it could never happen to us, but that convergence of having no money and no place to live can and does happen, and often results in cascading catastrophes.

There are few things more terrifying, especially for a woman, than realizing that one must eventually fall asleep and that while asleep we are completely, utterly vulnerable unless we have some place to lock the door and let our defenses down. The impact of that trauma can have life-long consequences that can affect a homeless woman's ability to get back to a normal life.

TRAUMA OF BEING HOMELESS

The experience of becoming homeless, of losing one's home, neighbors, routines, accustomed social roles, and possibly even one's children, can cause psychological trauma in anyone. Even if a woman is not traumatized by the initial experience of finding herself homeless, the ongoing condition of homelessness, living with such attendant stressors as the loss of safety, predictability and control, often undermines and erodes coping capabilities and precipitates symptoms of psychological trauma. Worse yet, for people who have previously experienced victimization, homelessness can exacerbate symptoms of psychological trauma and result in formidable barriers to recovery (Goodman, Saxe, & Harvey, 1991).

The very public officials who are tasked with serving our residents have been intensifying the traumatic impact of experiencing homelessness by

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implementing weekly and even daily "sweeps" of homeless encampments. For populations already dealing with the traumatic triggers of being homeless, these sweeps compound the problem, decreasing the likelihood that a person can summon up the internal fortitude to move beyond their situation.

TRAUMA OF FEELING VULNERABLE

Stress becomes traumatic when the level is so intense that it overwhelms the individual's ability to manage. In addition to an actual experience so overwhelming that it impacts our relationships and belief systems, a sense of vulnerability or a loss of control, a feeling of helplessness and/or fearfulness, or actual or perceived threats to one's physical well-being, can result in trauma (Konnath, LICSW & Gabowitz, Ph.D., 2008). Due to the intense feelings of vulnerability experienced by homeless families, the prevalence of traumatic stress is extraordinarily high.

Most of the women we interviewed for Amikas described these feelings of extreme vulnerability, compounding the physical trauma they frequently experienced on the streets, such as physical and sexual abuse, partner abuse, and community violence.

Research proves these profoundly high rates of trauma in families who are homeless. The 2010 Service and Housing Interventions for Families in Transition (SHIFT) study, conducted by the National Center on Family Homelessness on families in homeless shelters and housing programs, enumerated significant traumatic experiences that impacted their residential stability:

- 93% of mothers had a history of trauma, and 81% had experienced multiple traumas. The most common trauma experienced was interpersonal violence (e.g., physical and/or sexual abuse).
- Approximately half of the mothers met the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- Factors related to their ability to earn income predicted residential instability at 15 months, but the only predictors at 30 months were the severity of maternal trauma symptoms and lower self-esteem (Hayes, Ph.D., Zonneville, & Bassuk, M.D., 2010).

The SHIFT study confirmed the high prevalence of trauma and interpersonal violence in the lives of homeless families, complicating efforts to help them achieve housing stability. The severity of their PTSD symptoms affected their residential stability over the long term. Residential instability remained high for all participants over 30 months. **The study concluded that housing and shelter programs, including rapid rehousing for families, need to be enhanced by a focus on trauma informed care and services that**

address maternal mental health, specifically maternal depression and PTSD.

MANIFESTATION OF PTSD IN WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS

Without a context for understanding trauma-based reactions, the behavior of homeless women can be frustrating for those aiming to help them achieve stable housing. To develop an understanding about how to provide trauma sensitive services, we need to first clearly understand that the impact of traumatic stress can be devastating and long lasting, interfering with a person's sense of self and safety, leading to feelings of helplessness, terror, and disempowerment manifested as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Complex Trauma (Hopper, Bassuk, & Olivet, 2010).

PTSD refers to a group of symptoms that some individuals experience after overwhelming, frightening, or horrifying life experiences that exceed their capacity to cope. PTSD includes intrusive symptoms such as triggered memories or nightmares, avoidance symptoms such as social withdrawal, constriction, and emotional numbing, and symptoms of hyperarousal such as concentration problems, irritability, and constant alertness for danger (Hopper, Bassuk, & Olivet, 2010).

Some symptoms of PTSD that can manifest in women who have experienced homelessness include:

- Feelings of intense distress
- Intrusive, upsetting memories
- Loss of interest in activities and life in general
- Feeling detached from others and emotionally numb
- Sense of limited future (you don't expect to live a normal life, inability to plan ahead)
- Sleep problems
- Irritability and outbursts of anger
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hypervigilance
- Depression and hopelessness
- Suicidal thoughts
- Feeling alienated and alone
- Paranoia - Feelings of mistrust and betrayal
- Feelings of guilt, shame or worthlessness (HelpGuide.org, 2015)
- PTSD symptoms do not always manifest immediately after the traumatic experience. Sometimes, as seen in veterans, the symptoms can be suppressed for years until something triggers a memory of the

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trauma and the person re-experiences the trauma as if it is actually happening.

TRAUMA IN VETERAN WOMEN

In addition to homelessness induced trauma, veterans who have experienced Military Sexual Trauma (MST) while in the service, have an additional, independent risk factor for homelessness. MST increases the odds of homelessness by 4.4 times (Washington, et al., 2010).

In a study of homeless vs housed veteran women, homeless veteran women were shown to be more likely than their housed counterparts to have experienced MST. For most women in the study, sexual trauma during military service, subsequent trauma and eventual homelessness went “hand-in-hand” and homelessness was most often cyclical, with an average of 4 cycles

“It’s like, you start with the rape. Then you go into the drugs. And drugs leads to homelessness. You regroup. You go back to the rape. You go back to the drugs. Go back to the homelessness... You go to stay with people and they rape you. It’s a vicious cycle until something stops.” (Hamilton, Poza, & Washington, 2011)

Back to Homeless and Hopeless

A week ago, I was sitting in the Denny’s across the street from Howard Johnsons in Chula Vista, waiting for Tracy (name changed), an Army veteran Amikas had been assisting for almost a year. The good news was that Amikas was going to cover the next five days at the hotel for Tracy and her three children. But I wasn’t looking forward to this conversation – where this family would go after those five days was anybody’s guess.

This situation was all the more frustrating because Amikas had helped Tracy to get into permanent supportive housing six months earlier. The system had worked. Through a collaboration between 25 Cities Campaign to End Homelessness and the San Diego Housing Commission (SDHC), Amikas had placed this family in a two-bedroom apartment in Paradise Hills. SDHC would partially subsidize her rent so Tracy only had to pay 1/3 of her income for the next 18 months. Amikas would provide volunteer case management and Tracy was expected to do her part to be ready to take on the full rental payments by the end of 18 months.

And Tracy had been on track to do just that! She was going to be the poster-child of success for the program. She was attending school for medical office administration at Concorde Career College and was looking forward to getting a decent job when she completed the course in August. Talking to Tracy on the

day before she was going to move into her apartment, I could see she was feeling something she hadn't felt since I'd first met her – hopeful.

Amikas had originally placed Tracy and her three children in one of our shared houses in Crowne Point. After a few weeks of trying to get along with a housemate who turned out to be just plain mean, Tracy packed her kids up in her SUV and left. Looking at her case history, this seemed to be the way Tracy dealt with stressful situations – she would just leave. That's a common behavior for women dealing with PTSD. Just prior to coming to Amikas, Tracy walked away from an apartment with a mold problem after her requests to have it fixed were ignored. Her youngest has asthma and the mold was making her sick.

The key to understanding what happened to Tracy and to so many other homeless women we try to house, is that trauma is not recognized and accommodated for by services working with this population. For people who had previously experienced victimization, such as Military Sexual Trauma (MST), homelessness can exacerbate symptoms of psychological trauma and result in formidable barriers to recovery. Like many of the homeless female veterans Amikas has worked with, who are being treated for anxiety and depression, Tracy is trying to survive in a world that's not trauma informed.

When the opportunity came up for Tracy to go in the SDHC apartment, I had a talk with her about the necessity of dealing with problems and not walking away from them. But she seems to be damned if you do and damned if you don't. Shortly after moving into the furnished apartment, she noticed bug bites on herself and her children. She looked it up on the internet and found out what to look for as evidence of bed bugs. Sure enough, her apartment was infested and she has photos of the bug droppings on the bedding as well as the welts on her children's arms and legs.

Finding bed bugs would make me hysterical and I don't have trauma and anxiety issues. In fact, studies show that bed bug infestations can cause long term psychological damage. People experiencing a bed bug infestation have been shown to display sleeplessness, increased nervousness and anxiety. Some have even exhibited symptoms of PTSD. In a study of over 400 individuals who lived in bed bug infested homes it was found that: 29% suffered from sleeplessness; 22% suffered with emotional distress; 20% had anxiety; 40% were in a constant state of stress (Knapp, 2015).

But Tracy really wanted this apartment to work. It was close to the schools her kids had been attending and she had made friends with another veteran woman living in the complex. So this time she didn't pack up and leave. She went to the property manager and notified them there were bed bugs in her unit.

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Now I wasn't there. I don't know if Tracy was particularly diplomatic in her request. I doubt I would be very calm with a bed bug complaint. But in any case, she wasn't successful in getting action on her request and apparently didn't endear herself with management. Unfortunately she didn't tell me or her volunteer Amikas case manager about the problem. We had been told by SDHC to stop intervening on behalf of our clients.

The fact that the bed bugs problem wasn't immediately addressed was a huge mistake on the part of property management. I attended a 4-hour workshop on bed bugs last year. I went in thinking, good grief, what are they going to talk about for four hours? I left thanking my lucky stars Amikas hadn't had an infestation in any of our homes because it's hell to get rid of them.

The point they emphasized at that workshop, was to encourage tenants to notify you at the first sign of bed bugs. In fact, a good property manager should provide tenants with photos of what to look for. Why? Because they spread like wildfire from one unit to another and if you don't exterminate them ASAP you are going to have every unit infested. Assigning fault is pointless – they are everywhere and have nothing to do with personal hygiene or housekeeping.

But months went by and no effort was being made to deal with Tracy's bed bugs. In fact, they accused her of bringing them into the property and suggested that she might have to pay for the extermination! Mind you, Tracy's unit came furnished, and everything was used, including the bedding! There were no bed-bug liners on the mattresses and box springs – something I insisted on in Amikas homes after I attended that workshop.

I have a letter from Tracy describing the incident on July 15th that would result in her and her children being expelled from her apartment. She said she was leaving to pick up her daughter from school when she saw the property manager and asked her what was going to be done for the bed bugs? Another person, who would later claim to be a witness, walked up from behind Tracy and started giving her opinion. Tracy, who suffers from trauma, wasn't comfortable being sandwiched between the two women and claims that she told the second person to back up while pointed her finger at her. The manager told her to put her finger down if she knew what was good for her. Tracy turned to her and said, "What the hell!" and turned to get back into her truck.

Whatever actually happened that day probably depends on whose eyeballs you were looking through. While Tracy has trauma issues, I've never seen her lose her temper. But it wouldn't surprise me if she was angry and speaking a lot louder than normal. And maybe, in a perfect world where people are not dealing with PTSD and anxiety and feeling powerless, it would be reasonable to expect someone to maintain their composure at all times.

Maybe, in a perfect world where a person could just go find another apartment they could afford; where an eviction wasn't a condemnation to homelessness for you and your three kids... maybe it wouldn't be a perversion of justice to kick a family out of their home on the say-so of the property manager and her friend, who had every motive in the world to lie to get rid of a tenant who was asking them to just do their job and get rid of the damn bugs!

Maybe in a perfect world where we didn't send our service men and women to boot camp to be programmed to respond to threats with violence, but we don't reprogram them when they return to civilian life to respond civilly... maybe it would be reasonable to have a zero tolerance rule about acting in a threatening manner toward the property manager.

But Tracy doesn't live in a perfect world. She lives in a trauma world. When she told us she was given 30 days to get out, I suggested that, no matter whether or not the property manager was lying about her making threats and racial slurs, she needed to do whatever she could to stay in the apartment and if she would agree to attend an anger management class I would intercede on her behalf. (Tracy is African-American, the property manager is white).

Tracy agreed and sent a letter pleading for mercy and offering to attend anger management classes. She is currently being treated by the VA for anxiety and depression. Amikas begged our contact at SDHC to at least give Tracy a chance to tell her version of the story. I sent several emails to my contacts at 25 Cities to intercede. Christina suggested a meeting with SDHC. I requested that Tracy be given the opportunity to tell them her side of the story.

But after a week, we were informed that the decision was final, there would be no meeting and Tracy had to be out of the apartment by Aug. 19th or she would have an eviction on her record. Tracy was never given the opportunity to talk to anyone at SDHC. SDHC decided to just take what their property manager said as the truth.

This is a story about real people. Tracy was honorably discharged from the Army in 2007. She has a 12-year-old daughter, a 7-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter. I have been working with her for almost a year now. I liked her the first time I met her and I still like her. Despite getting a raw deal in life, this is a woman who has really made an effort to do better and to care for her children. She has no reliable support systems. She entered the military to try to earn a living and do better. She was getting an income from the GI bill but has just completed school, so that income stops. But with that certification, she was anticipating getting a job. She also makes some money doing braiding and you can see the amazing styling she does on herself and her daughters.

Getting into the SDHC unit in February was the break Tracy finally needed to get her life together. She used the opportunity to focus on school and giving

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her kids some stability. She was lining up job interviews when this whole thing blew up on her.

On the day Tracy had to move out, I stopped by with Christina to help her pack. The little one was holding the dustpan for me while I was sweeping into it and she was just so happy to be part of helping despite the upheaval going on around her. When I was leaving, she didn't want me to go, and I reassured her I would be visiting her in her new place, to which she replied, "But THIS is our new place!"

These kids finally had a roof over their head, and some continuity in their lives and it all got swept up in that dustbin! Why? Because of office politics at SDHC? Because of an inability to understand that housing homeless people requires some flexibility in rules to accommodate the mental illness they bring to the table? The fact that service providers are so understaffed and burnt out that their clients become statistics?

While I was boxing up the few kitchen items in the cabinets, Tracy turned to me and said, "I'm not OK." Uncertain what she meant, I repeated what I thought she said, as a question, "You're not OK?" She put her arms out to me and I held her. She was shaking, but not crying. I kept reassuring her, "You are strong. You will get through this. We will help." I felt this beautiful, intelligent woman shaking in my arms and thought about how completely unnecessary this whole awful situation was.

Tracy and her kids are back to being homeless. The kids started school this week as one of the thousands of San Diego kids who have no housing security. Given the current shortage of affordable housing, Tracy's search for an apartment she can afford is turning up more scams than possibilities. She can't focus on getting a job when she doesn't have a place for her kids to live because she is in fear of having them taken away. It's a Catch-22. Every day that goes by, there is a little less hope that things will ever get better.

An email from SDHC stated that their Real Estate Department is "purely a landlord" and they are "increasing the screening level to ensure folks who get placed into one of these units are a good fit for their properties." Sounds like they will only be housing homeless people without issues. They are oblivious to the damage they have done to this family and the injustice of not giving this mother and veteran the opportunity to dispute the accusations made against her.

25 Cities will continue to have meetings where they will review the numbers of chronically homeless and veterans they have placed in housing, and reset goals to meet their mission of ending homelessness. For all of their good intentions, no one had the courage to express their outrage for the way Tracy and her children were tossed out of their home. Or, maybe I'm the only one who finds this outrageous.

IMPACT OF INSOMNIA AND SLEEP DEPRIVATION IN HOMELESS WOMEN

Due to concerns for their safety at shelters, homeless women often prefer to sleep outside rather than in a mixed gender shelter (Tsai, 2012). But without a place to sleep where they can feel safe, homeless women will often have difficulty falling asleep or having sufficient sound sleep.

When I first began working with homeless women, on occasion I would notice a particular elderly woman lying asleep in the middle of the sidewalk in front of the city offices on C Street. My first assumption was that she had passed out from alcohol or drugs. People would be walking around her nonchalantly, as if she was nothing more than a bunch of rags dumped on the sidewalk.

I happened to mention to someone who works with homeless people, how disturbing it was to me to see that this old woman had been reduced to being nothing more than an object to walk around. He knew the woman I was talking about and explained to me that she wasn't drunk or drugged, but rather she chose to stay awake all night long, because she didn't have anywhere to sleep where she felt safe. It was only in broad daylight, in the middle of everything, that she could finally feel certain she would not be molested, and could allow herself to fall asleep. He explained that it is not uncommon for homeless women to sleep during the day, for reasons of safety.

Worry, trauma, anxiety and depression all impact an individual's ability to fall asleep and stay asleep long enough to be fully rested. In addition, the actual physical features of a location where a homeless woman can feel safe enough to sleep are seldom comfortable. Even with a sleeping bag or cardboard mat, a cement surface is unforgiving to the bones, making it impossible to stay in any position long enough to fall asleep.

If a woman is in a car, perhaps with her children, there is no room to stretch out, turn or get comfortable. The weather is always a problem: too hot, too cold, rain, mold, etc. The noise of traffic, especially garbage trucks that seem to start picking up trash just when someone finally falls asleep, is relentless. Bedding is often soiled, infested with parasites, bugs and rodents. Only two or three public restrooms are available at night in the downtown vicinity, and because relieving oneself at night is far more complex and unsafe for a woman than it is for a man, women will tend to "hold it" until morning, which makes going back to sleep unlikely. This is a bigger problem for older women, who need to urinate more frequently.

All of this leads to serious sleep deprivation for homeless women, which further reduces their ability to problem solve their way out of their situation.

HOMELESS WOMEN ARE MORE VULNERABLE TO VICTIMIZATION

The fear of assault that homeless women experience is not unfounded. Without the protection of four walls and a door to lock, women on the streets do not have the security and safety of their housed counterparts (Geissler, Bormann, Kwiatkowski, Braucht, & Reichardt, 1995). Studies on homeless women consistently document the extraordinarily high levels of abuse and victimization that homeless women endure before, during, and after episodes of homelessness. In fact, although rates of victimization in this country have decreased overall, rates of victimization among homeless women remain relatively unchanged (Lee & Schreck, 2005).

Homeless women are particularly vulnerable to multiple forms of interpersonal victimization, including sexual and physical assault at the hands of strangers, acquaintances, pimps, sex traffickers, and intimate partners on the street, in shelters, or in precarious housing situations (Goodman, Ph.D., Fels, & Glenn, M.A., 2011).

VULNERABILITY TO SEXUAL ASSAULT AND RAPE

Being homeless dramatically increases a woman's risk of being sexually assaulted. One study found that 9% of homeless women reported at least one experience of sexual victimization in the prior month (Wenzel, Koegel, & Gelberg, 2000). At a forum on Homelessness at USD in 2014, Lt. Debra Farrar, of the SDPD Homeless Outreach Team, stated that **there is a high probability that any woman living on the streets will be raped within the first 48 hours of being homeless.**

The victimization of homeless women is unique within the homeless population as a whole. Compared to their low-income housed counterparts, the sexual assault experiences of homeless women are more likely to be violent and to include multiple sexual acts. Statistics prove that homeless women are among the most defenseless in our society:

- One-third of homeless women reported experiencing major violence while homeless (Wenzel, Leake, & Gelberg, 2001).
- Some men interpret a woman's homelessness to be a license for sexual abuse (Novac, Ph.D., Brown, M.S.W., M.E.S., & Bourbonnais, B.A., 1996).
- Homeless women are more likely to have been sexually abused, raped, and physically assaulted than the general population (Novac, Ph.D., Brown, M.S.W., M.E.S., & Bourbonnais, B.A., 1996).
- Homeless women experience higher rates of both physical and sexual abuse than homeless men (both levels are higher than the general population) (Novac, Hermer, Paradis, & Kellen, 2006).

- Sexual assaults against homeless women are reported as being more violent and often perpetrated by strangers in public places (Stermac & Paradis, 2001).

Just to survive, many homeless women resort to activities that place them at further risk for sexual assault, such as panhandling or prostitution (Kushel, M.D., Evans, M.S., Perry, Ph.D., Robertson, Ph.D., & Moss, Ph.D., 2003). These victims must contend with the psychological and physical difficulties of sexual assault within the context of being homeless, with:

- poor access to legal, mental health and medical resources;
- social alienation and isolation;
- unsafe living environments;
- constant exposure to reminders of the experience;
- lack of transportation, and little information about available services (Goodman, Saxe, & Harvey, 1991).

These additional burdens are compounded for homeless women of color, lesbians and bisexuals, and women with physical, emotional, and developmental disabilities (Goodman, Ph.D., Fels, & Glenn, M.A., 2011).

Mental illness and/or substance abuse further increases vulnerability to sexual assault

Homeless women with serious mental illnesses such as major depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder, are even more vulnerable to victimization. In one study, 97% of the participants, all of whom were homeless and had a mental illness, reported experiences of violent victimization at some point in their lives, with 28% reporting at least one physical or sexual assault in the month preceding the interview (Goodman, Ph.D., Dutton, Ph.D., & Harris, Ph.D., 1995) (Goodman, Johnson, Dutton, Harris, & Landis, 1997).

Although substance use and abuse among homeless women may represent their best method of coping with the chaos, unpredictability, and isolation of homelessness, as well as previous victimizations, it is also strongly associated with a greater risk for sexual assault. One study found that homeless women who had experienced either physical or sexual victimization in the past month were three times more likely to report both drug and alcohol abuse or dependence than homeless women who were not victimized (24.3% vs. 7.9%) (Wenzel, Koegel, & Gelberg, 2000).

VULNERABILITY TO HATE CRIMES

Homeless people are also highly vulnerable to hate crimes by members of the general public simply for being homeless. Women and homeless minorities

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are disproportionately the victims of hateful speech. It is common for offensive comments and insults to be directed at homeless persons, particularly at homeless women, who are often verbally assaulted with degrading sexual comments and offensive sexual gestures. Such cases often happen within the context of panhandling.

Occasionally harassment of this nature escalates to something much more serious, including physical assault, objects being thrown at them from cars and being hit or punched. Sadly, people prone to being judgmental of others who are less fortunate, have been incited to acts of violence toward homeless people by the very vocal remarks of some politicians who calculate that it would be beneficial to their campaigns to scapegoat the poor for the problems low income and uneducated voters are experiencing. These political strategies are not only exacerbating the resistance of tax payers to fund programs to assist homeless people, they are also encouraging psychotics to abuse our most vulnerable residents.

In April 2016, a man in a pickup truck drove up to a Rite Aid store in the Oak Park neighborhood of San Diego, summoned a homeless woman to his truck. Sensing danger, she refused. He then called to her male companion and proceeded to douse him with a flammable liquid and set him afire (hernandez, 2016).

Contrary to popular opinion, more mature women are no safer from assault than their younger, more sexually attractive sisters. A simple Google search brings up dozens of accounts of older homeless women being beaten by younger males:

- In March 2016, a reputed gang member knocked a 65-year-old homeless woman unconscious who had called the police after witnessing him beat his girlfriend.
- In October 2015, an Atlantic City man was arrested after posting a video on Facebook of a 45-year-old homeless woman being knocked unconscious in Browns Park.
- In 2014, four men savagely beat and raped a 54-year-old homeless woman in Camden, New Jersey, nearly severing her ears.

The perpetrators of these brutal attacks on homeless people must be swiftly prosecuted and punished in order to send a strong message that there is no tolerance for violence against any person, no matter their housing status. And public figures who encourage this kind of criminal behavior should be arrested for inciting to violence, no matter what political office they are campaigning for.

Reluctance to seek help and report crimes

With the exception of intimate partner violence, when a housed woman is the victim of a crime, she will think nothing of calling the police. Homeless women, on the other hand, may not see the police as being there for their protection and safety. Because their only contact with the police is often when they are being kicked off park benches and forced to sleep under bushes that are far from the public eye and therefore more dangerous, they have no reason to trust them.

Women may be afraid to report a rape or assault because they are involved in illegal activities (e.g. drug related, prostitution) or have outstanding warrants from these or other illegal activities. For these women, harassment and abuse by police is commonplace. If a woman has a prior criminal record, or an outstanding warrant, she will most likely avoid reporting assault and victimization so she doesn't attract attention from the police.

Homeless women of color, immigrants, refugees, and victims of sex trafficking may be even more skeptical about law enforcement and less likely to turn to them for help or protection. In addition, homeless women and youth with very low self-esteem may fear that people in authority will not believe them (Novac, Hermer, Paradis, & Kellen, 2006).

The recent proliferation of videos posted on social media depicting law enforcement personnel abusing and even killing minorities, male and female, has fomented a deep mistrust of the people who are supposed to protect residents from criminals. It is clear they are not immune from biased attitudes about stigmatized groups such as people (women in particular) who are homeless, mentally ill, prostituting, or abusing drugs or alcohol, resulting in excessive force and discriminatory behavior. (Novac, Hermer, Paradis, & Kellen, 2006).

The highly publicized arrest and trial of San Diego Police Officer Anthony Arevalos and others for multiple counts of sexual assault while on duty further fuels the high level of distrust that homeless women have for the police, making it less likely that they will report victimization.

Regular sweeps of homeless encampments where up to a dozen officers are assigned to support sanitation workers who, under the pretention of cleaning up an area, are seizing the few precious possessions of homeless people along with tarps, tents, sleeping bags and blankets, further erodes any trust in law enforcement.

The problem is compounded by the “code of the street” – an unspoken loyalty to protect fellow homeless people and not to tell on others who live on the street. The very public nature of life on the streets means that few women

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have a place to hide if an abuser or rapist learns she has “ratted” on him (Brassard & Cousineau, 2000).

In addition, because homeless women are highly transient, they generally make poor witnesses in victimization cases, resulting in feelings of helplessness between even the most sympathetic criminal justice personnel and homeless women (Goodman, Ph.D., Fels, & Glenn, M.A., 2011).

LOSS OF SELF-ESTEEM FOR HOMELESS WOMEN

It's no secret that we live in a society that judges people based on their economic success. Many housed residents, even some of those who offer food and assistance to homeless people, think that people who can't pay for housing are somehow responsible for their situation – that they have failed to play by the rules, and are suffering the consequences. This attitude of self-blame is often held even by the persons experiencing homelessness.

For women, these feelings of low self-worth are compounded by social expectations for women to look attractive. Deprived of access to hygiene and grooming, lack of sleep, poor health, loss of teeth, soiled and unkempt clothing, are not conducive to looking good or feeling good about yourself. Many of the homeless women I interview at Amikas have a habit of holding their hands in front of their mouths. This presents a problem for me because I'm hearing impaired and depend on lip-reading to understand our often soft-spoken clients. I quickly realized that these women were hiding their missing teeth. In a society where we judge women by their appearance, losing a tooth because they cannot afford dental work, condemns a woman to being second class citizen. Every time they see their reflection, they are reminded that they are “less than”.

For women with children, the shame of failing to provide for their family further exacerbates their loss of self-respect. And the less worthwhile one feels, the more likely they will make poor choices regarding friends and partners. Without self-respect, it is difficult to postpone gratification, leading to substance abuse, gambling, illegal activities and an inability to make an effort for a better in the future. The social and personal condemnation for being personally responsible for their failure to secure housing becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

LOSS OF PRIVACY – EVERYTHING YOU DO IS IN PUBLIC

Many everyday activities that housed people do in the privacy of their homes, are embarrassing, humiliating and even illegal to do in public. Basic, essential, human functions, such as going to the bathroom, require forethought – a search for privacy in a world where you are denied it. Simply sitting down on a bus bench, or falling asleep in public, can result in arrest for loitering or illegal lodging, or being subjected to public harassment.

But while daily human functions are the most obvious and urgent frustrations for someone without housing, there are a myriad of other permissible activities that housed person take for granted that homeless people are denied. For example, any housed person can go home, and behind the privacy of their closed door, pour themselves a drink and savor the feeling of relaxation that each sip brings. Drinking alcoholic beverages is perfectly legal for adults. Even becoming intoxicated, in a private place, is perfectly legal. If a person can afford to pay the price of a drink (or several), purchased at a bar or in a restaurant, they are not breaking any laws unless they become disruptive or attempt to drive a car.

But drinking in the public places where a person without housing or money might go, such as a doorway, sidewalk, park bench or the beach, could land you in jail. Homeless persons who are observed drinking are judged, harassed and belittled for spending their money on booze. The truth is, most of us, finding ourselves in the horrible situation of being homeless, would probably resort to dulling our emotional pain with some sort of cheap and available self-medication. If a wealthy business person pours themselves a scotch after getting bad news, that's considered perfectly acceptable behavior, even if they resort to that escape on a regular basis. But if a homeless person takes a swig of cheap wine from a bottle nested inside a brown paper bag, they are advised to get themselves sober before they can qualify for assistance, or they might even be arrested.

Perhaps the greater injustice has to do with what adults can do in the privacy of their homes because the Fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibits unreasonable searches and seizures and requires any warrant to be judicially sanctioned and supported by probable cause. This is why the police can't enter your property without a warrant signed by a judge or they are arresting you. The government can't search or seize your property without due process of law. So if you partake of substances that are illegal in the privacy of your home, unless there is probable cause to believe you are doing something illegal, you won't be arrested. So while housed people can avoid the legal consequences of illegal drug use, people who don't have a door to lock will end up in prison.

Perhaps this doesn't seem to be such an important issue when you put it in perspective with the issues of assault and trauma previously discussed. But for the mom who has her children taken from her and goes to prison for smoking marijuana, that drug record will be yet another barrier to ever getting housed. While society in general is moving toward accepting the use of marijuana both medicinally and recreationally, and a majority of adults have at least tried it, without consequences, a homeless person will be disproportionately punished for something that is only a few elections away from being decriminalized.

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Sex is another basic activity that homeless adults are denied. While I doubt this has ever been discussed in meetings addressing the plight of homeless people, without privacy, engaging in mutually consenting sexual activity can get you arrested. One might argue that homeless people should be thinking about other more important things, but when homelessness continues for long periods of time, this denial of intimacy is yet another frustration of homelessness, particularly for couples. When considering reasons that couples and young adults might refuse emergency shelter, this factor must be considered.

INACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC TOILETS

A few years back, a well-respected man in San Diego, had been out knocking on doors campaigning for City Council, when he urgently needed to urinate – a common problem for men of his age. He rushed to his car and thinking it was private, relieved himself into a cup. Unfortunately, he was observed by two women passing by, who called the police and reported that he was masturbating in public. Not only was the man publicly humiliated, he was arrested on suspicion of indecent exposure. The real crime is that San Diego has very few public restrooms, and that can be a serious problem when you don't have a place to “go”.

Anyone who has had to urinate while confined to a hospital bed will acknowledge that a woman's physiology puts her at a disadvantage. Lacking the convenience of a male penis, women can't just relieve themselves behind the bushes. Modesty and safety require access to a restroom. When that is not available, women are reduced to the humiliation of wetting themselves or resorting to primitive behavior.

I recall waiting for a trolley at the 12th Street transit station one day when a disheveled woman squatted between the trolley tracks and "watered" the spot. From what she was muttering, it seemed she no longer gave a damn what anyone thought – she had to go and there was no place to do it.

I wondered how many times she had been denied access to a restaurant bathroom, perhaps finally not being able to hold it and wetting herself in public. Was it this daily degradation that eventually pushed her to this point where she lost all shame and self-respect? This act of public urination seemed to be her way of expressing her desperation. Had she been mentally ill prior to becoming homeless? It's possible. But one has to wonder, how many times would it take to be denied access to a restroom and accidentally wetting your pants, before any woman would be reduced to this?

Menstruation

The lack of access to a restroom is compounded when homeless women need to take care of their monthly feminine hygiene needs. The expense of

tampons and pads adds to the problem. Since periods are something only females need to deal with, women's hygiene needs are sometimes overlooked by organizations that are not focused on serving females.

Most women have had the experience of sensing that their period might have started and when they were unprepared. Or they have felt that tell-tale moisture alerting them that their pad or tampon is leaking. Most women know what it's like to have to back out of a room, hoping to dash to the restroom without anyone seeing the red stain they suspect is on the back of their pants or skirt, hoping it's a false alarm. If their worst fear is correct, they make some emergency "repairs" in the ladies' room or get home where they can change their clothes.

The fact that for many people, particularly in some cultures, menstruation is still a taboo topic. Period accidents can be so humiliating that women shudder remembering them. Dealing with a monthly period when you don't have access to a restroom, and you might not even be able to afford tampons and pads, adds to the stress and anxiety for homeless women – something that males don't need to think about. It is an issue that those who work with homeless women must consider, not only in making provisions for women, but also understanding how stress about hygiene and sanitary supplies can add to trauma.

Tampons and sanitary pads usually top the list of needs at shelters, since they're pricey and supporters don't often donate them. I always suggest that when people bring toiletries to homeless people, they should include plenty of feminine hygiene products for the women and in different sizes so women can choose what works for them. Remember that menstruation is different for every woman, some have only a few days with a light flow, and others, particularly those with endometriosis, could have periods lasting 10 or more days with a heavy flow. It has been suggested that menstrual cups are more hygienic and easier to take care of than tampons and pads, for some women. In addition, they remove the worry and expense of purchasing feminine products every month.

In addition to restrooms, menstruating women need access to showers for personal cleanliness and to prevent infections,

Urinary Tract Infections

While urinary tract infections (UTIs) are not unique to females, this painful and sometimes dangerous condition is more than twice as common with women and can be exacerbated when women hold their urine because of the unavailability of a restroom or by filthy sanitary conditions. UTIs are more than painful, they can cause incontinence and the need to urinate frequently, which for a homeless woman just adds to the nightmare of the unavailability

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of public restrooms. Left untreated, the infection can spread to the kidneys and lead to serious health problems, even death.

Children need restrooms too

Then there's the kids. What do you do when you are living on the street with children and they need to go to the bathroom? School age kids have access to restrooms at school during the day, but what do they do at night? How do you potty-train a toddler when you are living in a tent or car? How do you keep your children safe from predators and disease when the only bathroom available is filthy and frequented for drug deals and prostitution?

Inaccessibility to restrooms for women and children should top the list of reasons why we should absolutely be doing everything possible to make certain families never spend a night on the street. Sadly, it is a reason why women will settle for housing situations that are unsafe for them and their children that also disqualify them from homeless services.

THE SAD SAGA OF THE PORTLAND LOO

Think Dignity (Formerly Girls Think Tank) is a San Diego group that has been helping homeless people for years. Among other projects, they set about to address the severe shortage of public restrooms in downtown San Diego. In 2010, after considerable research, GTT urged the San Diego City Council to fund four "Portland Loos" for downtown.

These pre-fabricated, stand-alone public restrooms have real toilets and running water and are better ventilated than port-a-potties. They are connected directly to the sewer so there is no need for them to be emptied.

The city council voted unanimously to set aside \$700,000 of Centre City Development Corporation's ("CCDC") budget for 24/7 bathroom facilities in the form of solar-powered "Portland Loos." The subsequent dissolution of redevelopment agencies put the program on hold. In January 2012, after extensive advocacy by GTT, the San Diego City Council again confirmed the loos as an important infrastructure addition for the people of downtown San Diego.

It took five years for San Diego to finally agree to purchase and install two of the permanent 24/7 public restrooms in East Village at the NW corner of Imperial Ave. & 14th Street and one at the NW corner of Market St. & Park Blvd.). Despite years of squabbling over where to locate the loos, one was installed in an area where residents claimed it was a magnet for crime, and after only 13 months, unit at Market Street and Park Blvd. was removed and put in storage, where it remains.

Officials claimed that maintenance and repairs for the Portland Loos far exceeded original plans. To fill the void, St. Vincent de Paul homeless shelter made their 10 public restrooms available 24/7 with a full-time security attendant. (Garrick, 2016)

In its 2014/15 report, the San Diego County Grand Jury recommended that the City Council and the Mayor develop and implement in a timely manner a plan to provide additional clean, safe accessible public restroom facilities throughout downtown San Diego, including the East Village. They also suggested that the City Council work closely with the County, the Port District, the Downtown Partnership, businesses and other stakeholder groups to establish a way-finding system to help in locating the nearest facility. (The Ongoing need for downtown public restrooms, 2015)

Considering the impact that inaccessibility of safe public restrooms has on homeless women and families, it's time we stopped playing games with this essential public service, not just for homeless persons, but for members of the public who are out and about in our city, including tourists, cyclists, taxi cab drivers, pedestrians, shoppers and public employees. Public restrooms, if done right, are a win-win for businesses and residents alike, and would help alleviate the burden local businesses currently bear to provide facilities for the public. Public bathrooms are an integral component of urban planning and creating a healthy, walkable city for tourists and residents. Finally, public restrooms are a matter of basic dignity for those who have nowhere to go, particularly women and children.

These long-term threats to the future of children who are entirely not responsible for their homeless circumstances, makes the number of homeless children in San Diego all the more disturbing. As explained in the following section, San Diego County schools reported over 22,000 homeless students in the 2014 school year. This appalling statistic doesn't include an untold number of pre-school children, in their most critical formative years, who are experiencing housing insecurity of one form or another.

Based on the research, these thousands of homeless children are experiencing physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive issues due to exposure to the trauma and high levels of stress that comes with housing insecurity (Rog & Buckner, 2007). Homeless children have more acute and chronic medical problems, four times the rate of developmental delays, three times the rate of anxiety, depression and behavioral difficulties, and twice the rate of learning disabilities.

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Fifty percent of homeless children perform below grade level and thirty-three percent under the age of five demonstrate more than one developmental delay (The National Center on Family Homelessness;, 2009).

Considering that over 70% of the families in homeless shelters are single parent families (HUD's 2013 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations, 2013) and most (77% in 2013) single parents are single mothers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013), the urgency of prioritizing housing security for women and families should be obvious and compelling.

HOW DO WOMEN AND FAMILIES BECOME HOMELESS?

HOW DO WOMEN AND FAMILIES BECOME HOMELESS?

According to the 2015 Conference of mayors report, when asked to identify the three main causes of homelessness among families with children, 85 percent (17) cited lack of affordable housing, 55 percent (11) cited poverty, and 35 percent (7) cited unemployment and, and 35 percent also cited low-paying jobs. Next came family dispute, eviction, and domestic violence, each cited by 20 percent (four) of the cities; mental illness and substance abuse and lack of needed services for both were each cited by 10 percent (2) of the cities, and poor social networks was cited by 5 percent or one city. (22 City Survey, 2015)

Traumatic life experiences, such as sexual abuse, neglect and abandonment, reproductive health issues and violence, regularly feature in the causes of women's homelessness.

In the 2014 Conference of Mayors Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness, city officials identified lack of affordable housing as the leading cause of homelessness among families with children. This was followed by unemployment, poverty and low-paying jobs.

Victimization figures prominently in the lives of homeless women. One study estimates that roughly 20% of the adult homeless population are female (Tolomiczenko & Goering, 2001). When women report the process of becoming homeless, they usually describe a combination of interconnecting events and factors, such as domestic violence, divorce, other family disruptions, poverty, and low income housing shortages (D'Erole & Struening, 1990).

THE RENT'S TOO HIGH

Despite the delightful and glamorous photos the tourist industry touts, San Diego has more than its share of poverty. The poverty rate for the city remained at 15.7% of the population in 2014, effectively unchanged from the previous year's 15.8%. According to U.S. Census data, more than 3,000 additional city residents fell below the federal poverty level in 2014, bringing the total to 212,098.

But the situation is actually much worse because the federal poverty level is so low compared to the cost of living – and primarily the cost of housing. 54.7% of San Diego renters pay at least 30% of their income in rent. Homelessness is essentially caused by the inability of households to pay for housing.

For low-income families, budgets are even tighter than they used to be. The basic necessities of life are eating up a bigger share of poor families' spending compared to 30 years ago, leaving little money left over for anything else.

And the biggest culprit is the cost of housing. Low-income Americans are now spending 41 percent of their budget on housing, up from 35 percent in 1984. (Nelson, 2016)

LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

“When people say, ‘Why are all these people on the sidewalk?’ there’s a simple mathematical equation: They’re on the sidewalks because we have eliminated their housing.” – Fr. Alice Callaghan

I had just returned from a 3-hour forum on options for housing homeless people. The Amikas phone was ringing and I rushed to answer it while flinging the handouts and brochures from the event onto my desk. The hopeful but timid voice on the other end of the call sounded all too familiar. It didn’t matter that I couldn’t make out her name, I already knew her story and why she was calling Amikas.

Although our agency closed the last of our residential programs last month, there are still listings for us throughout the county and I’m still getting calls like this one. This woman found our card tacked on the bulletin board at the LGBT Community Center and thought we would be the answer to her prayers. She is seven months pregnant and has two kids, 6 and 7 years old. She’s been homeless for six months.

She explained that she and her kids had been sleeping in abandoned cars when they can find one, but mostly camping in Balboa Park or wherever she can avoid getting picked up by the police. You would think, after listening to nine speakers describe the different kinds of housing available to homeless families (transitional; recovery; permanent supportive; subsidized; etc. etc.) and all of the categorizations of homeless people: transitory; episodic; chronic; veterans; etc. etc.) and all of the campaigns and goals and blah blah blah blah... you would think I could have suggested something for this woman.

I flipped through my notes scribbled alongside the PowerPoint handouts, business cards and tri-fold brochures I’d just dumped onto my desk as I listened to this woman’s explanation of her situation. I let out a long sigh that I hoped would convey my genuine feelings of sadness for what I was about to say.

“I can give you some names and numbers, but I know that they all have very long waiting lists. But I urge you to go ahead and put your name on all of their lists anyway. Go to St. Vincent’s and make an appointment to fill out a VI-SPDAT (a survey that is supposed to determine a homeless person’s level of vulnerability but doesn’t account for families or pregnancy).”

HOW DO WOMEN AND FAMILIES BECOME HOMELESS?

I didn't tell her that I asked the panelist who said the waiting list for Section 8 housing is 10 years, if a person's income changed during that 10 years would they need to reapply each time because in 10 years a poor person could be employed and unemployed a bazillion times. The answer was no, only their income at the time they come to the top of the list matters. I suspect that some people might not be around by then.

I cautioned her about Single Room Occupancy hotels (SROs) – that most of them are too dangerous for children, they are mostly in terrible disrepair and have no bars on the windows that you must open because there is no air conditioning. But some of them don't require a deposit and sometimes you can rent week to week. The decent ones cost upwards of \$750 per month – she said that was more than her benefits.

The housing that was offered at the forum was for very specific populations – Sunburst Youth has one unit for a disabled youth between 18 and 24; St Paul's PACE has housing for seniors who meet a slew of qualifications, including a downtown address; TACHS has 1 unit available for an individual with severe chronic mental illness, PATH and Veteran Community Services can offer case management and temporary financial aid for veterans – but they don't actually have the housing. St. Vincent de Paul has a 2 to 3 week wait for single women and a 3 to 5 month wait for families! Alpha Project has subsidies and case management, but no actual housing at this moment.

So what's a mom like my caller to do? All of this talk about Housing First and a coordinated intake system isn't doing her a bit of good. No doubt the terror that she faces every night as a homeless mother has left a lifelong mark on her psyche as PTSD. She'd have to be super human not to be traumatized. And now she is coming to term with another baby. I've been 7 months pregnant – twice –and I can't even begin to imagine what it would be like to be living on the streets in that condition. On the one hand, to survive, she has to be fully focused on the present. On the other, she has a due date looming where she has to be wondering, how am I going to care for a newborn in this situation?

The federal standard of housing affordability is that housing is considered affordable if a household pays no more than 30% of its income to housing expenses (housing expenses include monthly rent or mortgage plus utilities, less any portion that may be covered by government subsidies).

In their "2010 Regional Comprehensive Plan," the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) that represents San Diego's 18 cities, identified economic indicators that contribute to poverty and homelessness in the region, including the fact that 48% of San Diegans spend more than 30% on housing and San Diego is ranked 6th highest in the nation for the cost of housing (in 2000 it was 40th).

The income needed in the San Diego region to afford a two-bedroom unit in 2009 was \$56,720 annually, or \$27 per hour. At the current minimum wage in California of \$8 per hour, a household must maintain three minimum wage jobs at 40 hours per week year-round to afford the rent (SANDAG, 2013).

As of 2008, San Diego County had a deficit of 90,500 housing units at the very low and low-income brackets (County of San Diego, 2010).

>> insert here about San Diego City Council declaring Housing Emergency for 12th year in a row. (Burke, Cavanaugh, & Pico, 2015)

From interview: Average monthly rent for 1 bedroom apartment in San Diego County is \$1,582, nearly 50% higher than the national average. Murtaza Baxamusa explained that we do not build enough low and moderate rent housing so the rents keep going up 5 – 10% every year but wages are only going up 2.8% per year. 225,000 households cannot afford the average home. AB1385, introduced by Toni Atkins would generate \$2 – 3 billion for affordable housing.

According to the San Diego Housing Commission, 60,700 San Diegans are currently on the waiting list for Section 8 housing. The wait time is 10 to 12 years.

From website: Murtaza Baxamusa, director of planning and development for the San Diego Building Trades Family Housing Corporation, said little has changed since the city first declared a housing emergency in 2002.

"It's been 12 years since then and it appears like we are stuck where we were or a little bit behind," Baxamusa told KPBS Midday Edition on Wednesday. "In terms of the region as a whole, we're not doing enough to address the housing emergency."

Baxamusa said in 2002, experts estimated that San Diego would need to produce 40,000 more units to address the crisis. That number is unchanged.

"If you don't have minimum requirements for developers to build affordable housing then we will not see the stock we need," Baxamusa said.

In June 2015, Murtaza Baxamusa testified in support of Assembly Bill 504, authored by Assembly member Lorena Gonzalez regarding the review process for downtown development projects. He explained that the approval process used by the developer-preferred non-profit, Civic San Diego, significantly curtails meaningful public input, and that there should be an appeals process for large projects to the city's elected body. San Diego is the only city in the state that has delegated its land-use authority in this manner, without accountability on a project-specific basis (Smith, 2015).

HOW DO WOMEN AND FAMILIES BECOME HOMELESS?

Gentrification, loss of SRO's and displacement of poor

Gentrification is defined as “The buying and renovation of houses in deteriorating urban neighborhoods by upper or middle-income families or individuals, thus improving property values but often-displacing low-income families and small businesses.”

POVERTY / INSUFFICIENT INCOME

Struggling to Get By constructs a bare-bones Real Cost Budget that reflects constrained yet reasonable choices. For example, a “basket” of basic needs goods for a two-adult, two child household would include a two-bedroom apartment at the “fair market” rent set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s lowest cost food budget, a minimum health care cost (pre-Affordable Care Act), and appropriate licensed child care at a family-based facility. The Real Cost Budget does not allow for savings or “luxuries” such as eating out. Though the budget includes transportation expenses, it does not include the cost of buying the car. We find 31% of California households do not earn enough to meet the Real Cost Measure. Among these struggling households, the average adjusted household income is only 53% of what is needed to make ends meet (Baum Block, Gascon, Manzo, & Parker, 2015).

Table 1 Real Cost Measure in San Diego, per Struggling to Get By

Household	2012 Real Cost Budget	2014 Self-Sufficiency Standard*	% of Federal Poverty Level (2012)
2 Adults, 1 Infant, 1 School Age Child who Rent Housing	\$57,759	\$71,383 (up from \$59,450 in 2008)	248%
* California Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Standard . (2014).			

In 2012, 50.7% of San Diego households were living below the Self-Sufficiency Standard (Pearce, 2014).

San Diego’s poverty rate remained at 15.7% of the population in 2014, effectively unchanged from the previous year’s 15.8%, despite significant job growth in the region. More than 3,000 additional San Diegans fell into poverty, bringing the total of city residents living below the federal poverty level to 212,098. (Center on Policy Initiatives, 2015)

Living in Poverty		2014
8 Poverty in San Diego from CPI Report: Making Ends Meet		
	Children	20.1%
	Seniors (65+)	11.4%
	Men	14.6%
	Women	16.8%
	Families with children	17.3%
	Single parent families	34.9%

In the City of San Diego, 41.5% of adults living in poverty had jobs in 2014.

Altogether, 67,115 people were working and still lived below the federal poverty level, including 12,684 people working full-time all year. The poverty rate among all part-time workers in the city was 20.1%, which is higher than the overall poverty rate. Earnings remained at low levels in some of the city's largest industries such as accommodation and food services.

In 2014, the federal poverty level was \$12,316 for a single person and \$24,008 for a family of two adults and two children. Because it is so low, the Census

Bureau also reports the numbers of people living at 200% of that level as a more realistic measure of hardship. For example, the economic hardship measure in 2014 is \$48,016 for a family of four. In San Diego, nearly one-third of the population - 438,277 people - lived below that near-poverty level of economic hardship in 2014. That includes more than 40% of children. Many of these families had incomes well below the actual cost of living, but were not counted in the official poverty rate.

Most households in San Diego still have lower purchasing power than before the recession began in 2007, despite significant regional economic growth during five years of recovery. In 2014, the median household income in San Diego was \$67,799, combining all earnings and other payments such as Social Security. Adjusted for inflation, that is \$2,834 lower than the median in 2007. Almost half (44.6%) of all households in the City of San Diego paid at least 30% of their income for housing in 2014. That's the level defined as unaffordable by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. For San Diego renters, housing was even less affordable, with 54.7% paying that much of their income in rent.

Among San Diego residents over age 16 living below the federal poverty line, 41.5% - or 67,115 individuals - had jobs. About 12,684 of them worked full-time year-round, and the rest had part-time or part-year jobs. For part-time workers, the poverty rate was 20.1%. For all workers, 9% lived below the official poverty line. Among full-time, year-round employees in San Diego, 85,273 people earned less than \$25,000 in 2014. This means roughly 1 in 5 full-time employees earn less than the amount needed for a single person to live self-sufficiently in this region. (Source: www.onlinecpi.org/making_ends_meet) The gender wage gap grew by more

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than \$800 between 2013 and 2014 to \$6,694 annually. For full-time, year round work, median earnings were \$53,742 for men and \$47,048 for women in San Diego. (Center on Policy Initiatives, 2015)

Even single mothers who are employed are often not making enough to pay for housing in San Diego. Among working-age San Diego county residents living below the federal poverty line, 38% were employed but not earning enough to meet the region's basic living expenses of \$34,741 a year (Self-Sufficiency Standard, n.d.), a level defined as unaffordable by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Currently, three in 10 working-age San Diego County households do not earn enough to make ends meet (Center on Policy Initiatives, 2010).

The Center on Policy Initiatives sets a self-sufficiency household wage (essential expenses only) in 2010 dollars of \$64,957 for a family of two adults and two young children. That compares to the 2009 Federal Poverty level of \$21,756. Families in poverty often live doubled up or in other inadequate environments, and are without health insurance

IT COSTS MORE TO BE POOR

“Anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor.” —JAMES A. BALDWIN “Fifth Avenue, Uptown: A Letter from Harlem” July 1960

In America, the poor are continually being punished for their poverty in ways that ensure their continued impoverishment. In addition to cutting funding for social safety net programs, recent laws and policies have codified this war on the poor. In April 2015, Kansas made it illegal for welfare recipients to withdraw more than \$25 from an ATM machine at one time. If a person in Montana and Iowa misses a student loan payment, they can have their driver's license revoked which will very likely compound their money problems. In Tennessee, a nurse who fails to make student loan payments will their nursing license – which deprives them of the ability to earn the money needed to pay their debt doing the job they went into debt to learn to perform. In Arkansas, you can be arrested for missing your rent payment and have a record as a convicted criminal. Try to get a job or rent another apartment with a criminal record!

Many communities target the poor for expensive fines. On the cull de sac where I live in a lower middle class neighborhood in San Diego, we had worked out a solution to all of the cars that had to park on our street because so many families are doubled up or have housemates – we all park perpendicular to the curb at the end of the street. One day everyone on the street got a \$69 parking ticket! If we didn't pay it, it would have cost in the hundreds of dollars in fines and penalties and even jail for parking the way

everyone else was parking, and had been parking for years. That \$69 represented the food budget for many of the people who live on my street.

The ACLU has concluded that poor defendants are being jailed at increasingly alarming rates for failing to pay legal debts they can never hope to legally afford, despite the Supreme Court ruling that it's unconstitutional. When this happens to young people for petty crimes, their families are, in essence, required to pay ransom to get their kids back. (Masciotra, 2015)

INSUFFICIENT WAGES

One significant reason so many working Californians are below the Real Cost Measure is that they are working hard for low pay. The median wage (imputed) for full-time workers below the Real Cost Measure is \$10.49 per hour (the current minimum wage in California is \$9.00/ hour), while those above the Real Cost Measure are paid an average of \$26.97 per hour.

Employment is no guarantee of economic security for people with children. Having children in the home, particularly young ones, correlates with greater economic insecurity. Approximately 34% of households led by an employed person with children are below the Real Cost Measure, but only 14% of employed heads of household without children are below the Real Cost Measure. For single mothers, the task is especially daunting. Approximately 65% of households headed by an employed single mother are below the Real Cost Measure, with a majority of those mothers living on less than \$36,000 a year (Baum Block, Gascon, Manzo, & Parker, 2015).

UNEMPLOYMENT – LOSS OF INCOME

Workers in a household provide the vital means to economic security: wages. When a non-senior head of a household is working, 76% of households exceed the Real Cost Measure, and that figure drops to 43% when he or she is not working (Baum Block, Gascon, Manzo, & Parker, 2015).

MEDICAL OR OTHER UNEXPECTED EXPENSE

Many households without health coverage risk not only their health but their financial wellbeing as well. The latest three-year population estimates from the American Community Survey indicate that there are over 6.6 million Californians without health coverage. For many families, one cancer diagnosis, car accident or other medical disaster could easily prevent a family from making ends meet for many years even though the Federal Affordable Care Act (ACA) and California's expansion of Medi-Cal have made health coverage more affordable and accessible, particularly to lower-income households. However, we will not be able to fully assess the economic impact

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of the ACA for several years given its relative infancy. (Baum Block, Gascon, Manzo, & Parker, 2015).

SENIOR POVERTY

In states like California, ongoing budget cuts to services like the Supplemental Security Income, In-Home Supportive Services and adult day healthcare centers are making it harder for elderly people to pay for housing. According to the latest numbers from Hearth, an organization working to end elder homelessness, the country had 40,750 homeless people 62 or older in 2012. As the nation's population ages, that number is expected to more than double by 2050. (Aguilar, 2013)

MENTAL ILLNESS

The Plight of Homeless Women and Families

By Jeffery B. Gordon, MD, MPH, retired family doctor and Bioethics Consultant at Sharp Memorial Hospital.

My recent experiences working as a general physician in a clinic for the homeless has reinforced the importance of all the facts and stories compiled in this book. Homelessness is but one measure of our failure as a society. The existence of homeless women, children and families all across our country is a reflection of how cruel we can be. The general attitude of society has been one of neglecting the problem altogether, sponsoring underfunded and inadequate social programs, or a scoffing: give them a bath and a new set of clothes and they should be able to get on their feet and take care of themselves like everyone else. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In my personal experience very few homeless people are just down on their luck or suffering from temporary adversity. The majority suffer from mental illness, either schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, and are not stable or resourceful enough to consistently care for themselves, never mind become an employee. Many have endured a chaotic, and often abusive, childhood (for example, having addicted, alcoholic, or mentally ill parents and/or being in foster care) and may not have had the benefit of role models, nor the education to have self-esteem or mature coping mechanisms, even if they do not qualify to be diagnosed with PTSD. Others have a substance abuse problem, either street drugs or alcohol, which can often be understood as a coping mechanism or self-medication. Many have sought refuge or been placed in an institution, such as the military or prison, where they can get by, but once dropped back in the world, they cannot cope. In our clinic, we see that many of these patients are also suffering from difficult to manage chronic medical illnesses, often from a young age.

All of these adversities are magnified for women, who are less able to physically protect themselves, and their children who are, of course, very vulnerable and are scarred for life, becoming the next generation of disabled citizens. A homeless woman with a child is experiencing a perfect storm of adversity. She is faced not only with her own challenges, but also with the embarrassment and guilt of not being able to shelter and protect her child.

After World War II, the United States chose as a matter of public policy to phase out mental hospitals as somewhat effective medications were discovered and because the hospitals were becoming very expensive. However, no dependable alternative system was ever developed to care for mental illness. These days the severely mentally ill are largely homeless or imprisoned.

Even in a time of limited resources, society should provide a home for all residents and there should be universal medical care. The goals of rehabilitation and reintegration into society in most cases are illusionary and our policies are better guided by kindness and compassion. I am very proud of our small clinic which does a good job medically and does have mental health resources, but it is merely a band aid on a festering sore.

Homeless women with serious mental illnesses such as major depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder are highly vulnerable to victimization. Indeed, in one in-depth study 97% of the participants, all of whom were homeless and had a mental illness, reported experiences of violent victimization at some point in their lives (Goodman, Ph.D., Dutton, Ph.D., & Harris, Ph.D., 1995) (Goodman, Johnson, Dutton, Harris, & Landis, 1997) with an astonishing 28% reporting at least one physical or sexual assault in the month preceding the interview.

Another large-scale study of 1,839 ethnically diverse, homeless women and men with mental illnesses from 15 cities across the US found that 15.3% of the women participants reported being raped in the past 2 months (Lam & Rosenheck, 1998), compared to 1.3% of the men. For homeless women with mental illnesses, rape appears to be a shockingly normative experience. This is deeply troubling, as no one should ever become “used” to being raped or assaulted. To the contrary, there is evidence that the cumulative effects of multiple victimizations may be far deeper than single rape events (Goodman & Dutton, The relationship between victimization and cognitive schemata among episodically homeless, seriously mentally ill women, 1996). Moreover, these women's ability to get help are greatly compromised by social attitudes that people with mental illnesses do not experience violation as searingly as others; that their accounts of the abuse and assault are “made up” (Goodman & Dutton, The relationship between victimization and cognitive schemata among episodically homeless, seriously mentally ill women, 1996) (Goodman,

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et al., 1999); or that women with mental illnesses cannot clearly communicate a lack of consent. Homeless women with mental illnesses who are also victims of sexual violence shoulder the burden of three forms of social stigma against poor or homeless people, people with mental illnesses, and victims of rape (Goodman, Ph.D., Fels, & Glenn, M.A., 2011).

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Nanette's eyes tear up when she recounts the day she was chased down the block by a group of kids throwing rocks at her and calling her names. "That was the lowest I got. I was nothing. These kids were screaming at me to get out of here. They were only about ten years old, boys and girls, who were telling me I was so worthless that I couldn't just sit in the park on J Street."

Looking back now, Nanette can understand why even kids might have found her repulsive. Even the drug lord at the house where she would sometimes hang out would tell her, "You stink!" She confesses that one night, just to get out of the pouring rain, she and her boyfriend sought refuge in a full porta potty. But even that wasn't enough to get her clean and sober. It's not that she didn't want to be sober, she just didn't want to stop drinking.

It's not that she didn't want to be sober, she just didn't want to stop drinking.

You'd never know it, sitting in her office at a San Diego non-profit where she works as director, that Nanette had been one of the thousands of people in San Diego who had no place to live. And for years, she was the cliché that is often used as an excuse for not offering humanitarian assistance to those who are experiencing homelessness – she was an alcoholic. And she'll be honest about it, her drinking was the reason she ended up without housing, and her drinking was the reason family and friends gave up on her.

It's easier to refrain from judgement knowing that the woman sitting there telling her story is no longer that pathetic, smelly loser huddled under a tarp in J Street Park. How she transformed herself is nothing short of a miracle, but what it proves is that no life is beyond hope. Alcoholism is a wretched disease that drags its victims into its wretchedness, but recovery is possible.

Many people facing poverty and despair will turn to alcohol or drugs to dull the overwhelming emotional pain of failure and fear. As the Housing First approach demonstrates, with some assistance getting housing and income, many people can stop self-medicating and get on with their lives. But there is a percentage who won't be able to make the best of that opportunity. These are the ones too often held up as representative of the entire homeless population being drunks and drug addicts.

Housed or not, alcoholism is a lifelong affliction. It can often result in homelessness, although many alcoholics manage to stay housed. An alcoholic

must come to terms with the fact that they cannot drink successfully. For these people, total abstinence is the only solution. These people often benefit from a 12-step program such as AA. Like Nanette, they might need to do it over and over again, perhaps for the rest of their lives.

Nanette started drinking at fourteen years old, two years after her mother had died of cancer. Despite being indulged by her father, who she thinks had actually enabled her addiction, she went from booze to cocaine by the time she was sixteen, so she could “keep the party going longer”. She was good at hiding it, or so she thought. For a while after high school she was working as a temp doing clerical and customer service jobs.

Then her father died of cancer. Nanette became clinically depressed and was offered disability benefits if she could prove she was working on her sobriety. Under the program, she paid only \$100 per month for an apartment. She thought she had it down, as far as getting herself together just prior to her doctor visit every 90 days, and then resuming her drinking.

Eventually she couldn’t hold it together any longer. Nanette and her boyfriend Brian were evicted from their North Park apartment. She remembers that first night, sleeping on the porch with all of their stuff piled on the lawn. The next day a friend helped to put most of her stuff into a storage and she credits him with paying that storage fee throughout her entire homeless saga. A former neighbor took in one of her cats, but the other was “taken.” She still grieves that loss.

Nanette recalls walking past houses in the evening, seeing the people inside with their families and feeling outside of the rest of the world.

The first six months without housing, Nanette and her boyfriend camped in the alleys and shadows of the area near where they had formerly lived. They would walk the two miles to get lunch at Fr. Joe’s, although, because of her drinking, she seldom ate much. Her boyfriend made money collecting recyclables. Every day was about survival, which included getting the alcohol she needed. She would hang out at bars at night and bum drinks from men, although she never actually resorted to prostitution.

Eventually Nanette and Brian gravitated to the Ocean Beach and Mission Beach area. Nanette recalls walking past houses in the evening, seeing the people inside with their families and feeling outside of the rest of the world. She never thought about the future because she saw no way out of her situation.

When it got cold, Brian suggested going into the winter homeless tent. But she had become very dependent on Brian and they would have to be separated in the tent. She would also have to be sober, and that wasn’t on her To Do list. So they braved the cold.

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Nanette was on summary probation which required her to attend a weekly class for anger management. Since she didn't have the \$25 for each class, she stopped going. That made her even more wary of the police who she only saw as a threat.

This would be the first of many times that she would go through the horrible process of detox entirely on her own.

One day they were approached by an elderly woman who invited them to the Baptist Church across the street from a drug house they frequented. She told them God wanted them to be baptized. The entire congregation was clapping and welcoming them. Nanette remembers how, for the first time in a long time, she felt valued.

The experience changed Brian. He had an outstanding parole violation and decided to turn himself in. Together they went to the police station. Watching him being led away in handcuffs, she decided to take up the offer of a friend in La Mesa who said she could stay with her if she got clean. This would be the first of many times that she would go through the horrible process of detox entirely on her own.

She kept sober for almost three months, going to meetings every day and even getting some temp jobs. But then there was that one drink that she thought she could have. But, she explained to me, her brain becomes a different brain when she has a drink. "Once that alcohol was in me, there was no stopping me. I was back to drinking again. And back out on the street."

She ended up in jail again and was told by the judge this was her last chance. With the help of a friend who was letting her live with him with the stipulation of no drinking, Nanette tried sobriety again, starting with self-detoxing.

The day Brian got out of prison, Nanette met him in front of her Anger Management class. But it wasn't the happy ending one would hope for. Brian got into trouble again, and Nanette relapsed.

She remembers the exact day she had her last drink – March 16, 2003. Brian was in jail and she was in a sober living facility. A friend found her a place to rent and bought her a bed. She got a job at a supermarket. She had one more 1-night relapse, but that was it.

Finally sober, Nanette slowly began to rebuild her life. Brian got out of jail but she decided to stay focused on her sobriety. And she did. This story has a happy ending. Nanette and Brian were married and are no longer homeless. A recent photo on Facebook shows them together at a friend's wedding. They look like the happiest couple in the world.

Homeless women are more likely to have substance abuse problems and to engage in substance use than low-income housed women (Wenzel, Tucker, Elliot, Marshall, & Williamson, 2004). Although substance use and abuse among homeless women may represent their best method of coping with the chaos, unpredictability, and isolation of homelessness, as well as previous victimizations, it is also strongly associated with risk for further sexual assaults. One study found that homeless women who had experienced either physical or sexual victimization in the past month were three times more likely to report both drug and alcohol abuse or dependence than homeless women who were not victimized (24.3% vs. 7.9%) (Wenzel, Leake, & Gelberg, Health of homeless women with recent experience of rape., 2000).

As with so many aspects of homeless women's lives, the causal relationships between substance abuse and victimization are far less clear than the correlation itself. Nevertheless, substance abuse and dependence may put women at risk for victimization in a number of ways, such as by altering women's perceptions of what is dangerous; leading them to engage in risky survival strategies; causing disorientation that may make it difficult to ward off an attacker; making them a target for assault because authorities will be less likely to believe them; or putting them in an environment that involves interactions with criminals. Indeed, offenders often rely on drugs and alcohol to incapacitate their victims (Lisak & Miller, 2002). Furthermore, drug and alcohol services and rape crisis services largely remain fragmented, which can make it difficult for individuals to receive the services they need to recover (Goodman, Ph.D., Fels, & Glenn, M.A., 2011).

INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

The Devil They Know, by Jeeni Criscenzo – San Diego Free Press

All kinds of explanations are suggested for why women stay in violent relationships: because of the stigma our society associates with being a victim, admitting you are in a domestic violence situation is shameful; people will avoid you, because they don't want to put themselves and their family in danger; employers think that you are too much of a risk – that you'll bring too much drama into the workplace, miss work for court dates, be too emotionally distracted to do your job; and too many men (and women) still assume that victims of domestic violence probably deserved everything they got. Just read the comments below any recent article on this topic.

As the executive director for Amikas, I get calls from women in all kinds of desperate situations, including many who are ready to leave a violent abuser or have already left and are dealing with the consequences – homelessness, loss of children, lack of legal and emotional support and retreating to substance abuse.

While there are many reasons why a woman won't leave a situation where she is being subjected to physical and mental assault from a partner, the one I see most often is that she has no place to go. Too often, the consequence of leaving is that mothers will lose their children and live in destitute poverty. Tragically, women who somehow summoned the courage to leave, will return to their abuser because it's better to be with the devil they know than the devil they don't. And until we, as a society, start asking why we she

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has to be the one to leave, at the very least we need to be giving her someplace to leave to.

They didn't have safe houses back in 1980 when I had to hide from an abusive husband, but we are enlightened enough to have them now. The problem is that there simply isn't enough and that's because we haven't made it a priority for funding. When Amikas gets a call from a DV victim, we often can't find of a single safe house in San Diego that has an opening. When Amikas House was open, it was always full, with a long waiting list.

One weekend we were going to put a woman who was 37 weeks pregnant, with two little children, on the sofa in the computer room at Amikas House, because her husband threw her out. How is that OK? -that a man, a Marine, can throw a woman about to give birth and her two kids out on the street, on a Friday night when all agencies are closed? And when one of the largest agencies serving the homeless in San Diego County has to call on Amikas, an agency that gets NO funding, because they have no place to put this family, something is wrong with the whole system.

I met with a young woman in a park in East County who had been living there for 3 months. When she tried to get a restraining order on her husband, he turned around and put one on her - so now her youngest children are in foster care and her eldest is living with the grandmother. The woman can't stay with her own mother, because her daughter is living there. She has had no legal counsel. She's been fighting this fight all alone, after serving our country in the Navy for four years. I brought her to Veteran Community Services to connect her with VA benefits so she can get some income, so I can get her housed - because you can't get your life together, or get your children back, if you are living in the park. I doubt her husband is homeless.

Meanwhile, I had no choice but to bring this woman back to the park, because there are no beds available for her. The lack of resources and funding for agencies serving this vulnerable population is not only disgraceful, it's also the answer overlooked to the question, "Why doesn't she leave?"

It's time we stopped asking why doesn't she leave and start demanding that she shouldn't be the one who has to leave. It's time we trained our law enforcement to give women the benefit of the doubt in a domestic violence situation. If it's her fault, the courts will determine that, but in the meantime, approach every DV case like it's your own daughter, or sister or mother begging for help.

It's time we started asking ourselves why we haven't made it safe for her to leave. Why haven't we made this vulnerable population a priority when allocating funds? We should be committing funds to safe houses, transitional to transition-in-place housing, case workers and resources for women and children.

Domestic violence is a primary cause of homelessness for women and children. A staggering 92 percent of women who are homeless report having experienced severe physical and/or sexual assault at some point in their lives. Approximately 50 percent of all women who are homeless report that

domestic violence was the immediate cause of their homelessness (Bassuk, M.D., et al., 1996).

An expansion of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), the centerpiece of the federal government's commitment to combating domestic violence and other violent crimes against women, was signed into law in March 2013. VAWA has saved thousands of lives and brought safety to countless homes. Survivors of domestic violence and their families could benefit from effective implementation of the expanded housing protections, as well as the stronger focus on connections to permanent housing resources included in the law.

Not surprisingly, a number of studies point to abuse--including rape--at the hands of a current or former partner, as a risk factor for homelessness among women (Toro, et al., 1995). This is particularly evident for women who experience partner violence at the more severe end of the continuum, and who have been isolated by their abusers from family and friends who might have offered to help them (Baker, Cook, & Norris, 2003). Indeed, it is estimated that half of all homeless women and children have become homeless while trying to escape abusive situations (Browne Ph.D & Bassuk B.A., 1997). Experiences of partner violence have also been shown to predict risk of repeat homelessness and shelter use (Goodman. Ph.D., Fels, & Glenn, M.A., 2011).

Research suggests that women's housing status is more vulnerable than that of men. In particular, intimate partner violence is a common risk factor for homelessness because women can lose their source of income and their housing when they flee abusive partners (Novac, Ph.D., Brown, M.S.W., M.E.S., & Bourbonnais, B.A., 1996), explored pregnancy as a risk factor for homelessness in low income single mothers. They found that stresses related to pregnancy and childbirth can further aggravate a delicate relationship with an abusive partner and young mothers may be forced to leave with no source of income or support. Further results reveal that substance abuse complicates the situation for this group and that when the response to pregnant substance abusers is criminalization, women can be discouraged from seeking help with addictions (Roebuck, 2007).

Those fleeing domestic violence are more likely to become homeless or have a problem finding housing because of their unique and often urgent circumstances. They may have:

- Difficulty finding apartments due to poor credit, rental, and employment histories as a result of their abuse
- Few tangible social supports.
- Limited ability to collect and/or enforce child support and alimony payments.

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Compounding the challenges faced by low-income women in violent relationships are rules that govern public housing. Through a “one strike” policy, women may be evicted for a violent activity regardless of the cause or the circumstances. Although the eviction of women in domestic violence situations might violate federal and state housing acts, few states provide mandatory protection for these women and children (The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011).

Lack of affordable housing for women fleeing family violence may contribute to their decisions to return to abusive spouses (Novac, Hermer, Paradis, & Kellen, 2006).

ABUSE IN CHILDHOOD

Abuse in childhood, particularly when this has not come to the attention of others, can directly lead to homelessness.

Almost one out of every three homeless women, 32%, in three Western countries have experienced childhood sexual abuse. We assessed sexual trauma histories among 29 women from three community sites: one residential safe house and two safe parking areas. Over half of the women, 54%, reported that they had been forced to have sex against their will, or had experienced the threat of forced sex. The percentage was over twice as high at the safe home (86%) as at the homeless parking sites (42%). All four of the women who had served in the military (100%) reported having experienced military sexual trauma. The high percentages of sexual trauma found in both civilian and military women highlights the need for effective interventions for sexual trauma. [Assessing Sexual Trauma Histories in Homeless Civilian and Veteran Women: A Feasibility Study]

DIVORCE OR DEATH OF SPOUSE

Women’s role within the family (homemaker, child care) and related financial dependence can increase the likelihood of homelessness following the breakup of a relationship.

VETERANS – DISCHARGED TO HOMELESSNESS

Women veterans identified as homeless by the VA increased more than 140 percent from 2006 to 2010 and despite increasing dollars being pumped into the VA’s Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program, here in San Diego the number of homeless veterans, including women veterans, continues to grow.

Unfortunately, specific statistics on homeless women veterans, particularly women with children, is lacking. HUD collects data on homeless women and on homeless veterans, but does not collect detailed data specific to homeless women veterans. As a result, the number of homeless women veterans is unknown at the national, state and local levels.

LOSS OF TRADITIONAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Insert here

INSUFFICIENT EDUCATION

A family headed by an adult with less than a high school degree is five times more likely to be in poverty than one headed by a college graduate. At every level of education, women are paid less than men. Moreover, those differences are most dramatic for college graduates who live above the Real Cost Measure, while they are also true for those with less education. Women with some college are paid less, on average, than men with just a high school diploma. While only 10% of college-educated white men are below the Real Cost Measure, 84% of African American women without a high school diploma are below the Real Cost Measure. Moreover, in every racial group, at every education level, female-headed households are more likely to be below the Real Cost Measure than similar households headed by men. All of these data powerfully underscore the importance of education toward economic stability, but also make clear that education alone is not a panacea: the racial and gender disparities that exist in our society simply will not be erased by a degree alone (Baum Block, Gascon, Manzo, & Parker, 2015).

PART II

WHAT CAN WE DO?

The issues of justice and equality are your calling; you may not conceptualize it that way, but in my view you live it that way. You answer to the moral calling and you do it insisting that justice and equality are not empty promises, but something real and tangible for real people.

- Nan Roman, President and CEO, National Alliance to End Homelessness

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

At the 2015 National Conference on Ending Homelessness, Nan Roman reported that Los Angeles County re-vamped its entire family homelessness system, creating regional crisis-intake centers linked to TANF and other mainstream systems. Within the first year they used rapid re-housing to reduce the time families spent in crisis beds; and within the first six months they had re-housed more families than they typically re-housed in a year. Virginia re-tooled its family homelessness system to a rapid re-housing approach, and reduced family homelessness by 25 percent. (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2015)

But, if we don't address the causes of homelessness, the best we can ever hope to happen is to continue to allocate more and more funds to stemming the tide. Back in 2010, we included the following cartoon in a presentation to the San Diego City Council as part of a proposal to convert the Midway Post Office distribution center into a community for homeless veterans. Since then, the faucet continues to pour out more and more homeless families, despite news reports that we are recovering from the recession.

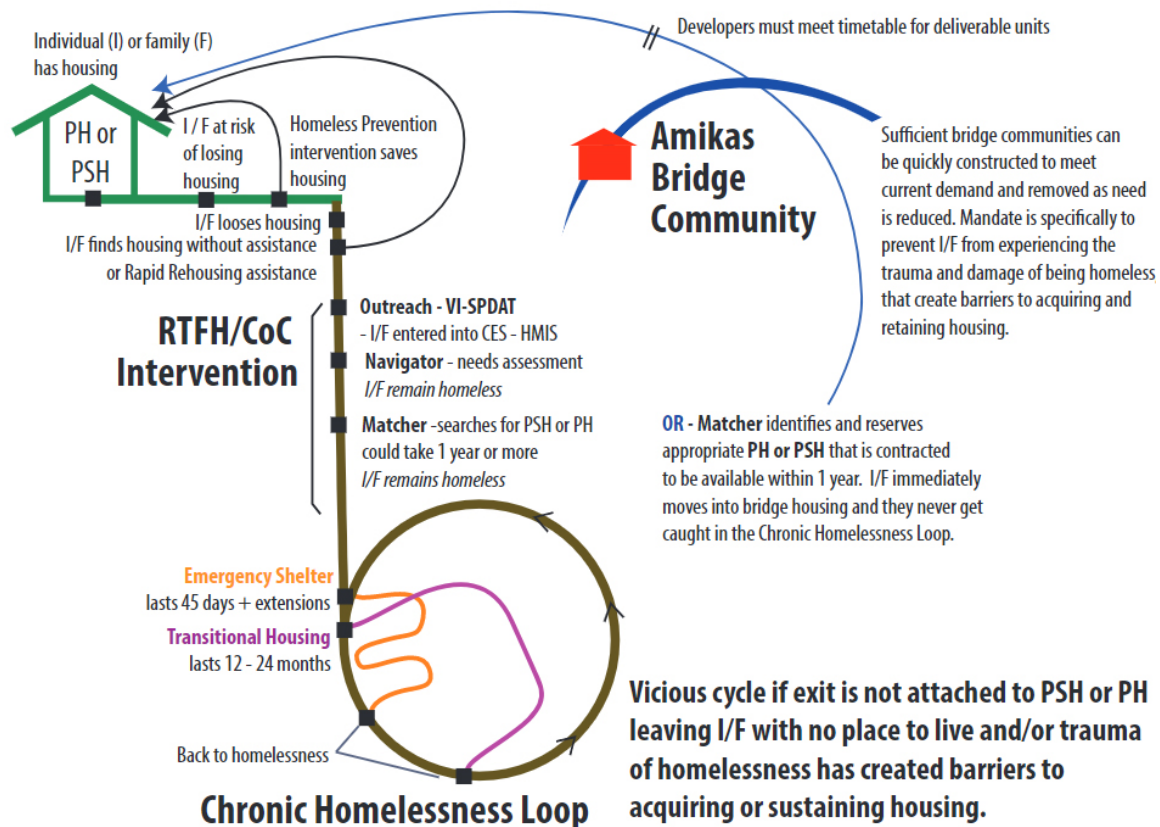


PRIORITIZE PREVENTION AND RAPID RE-HOUSING

PRIORITIZE HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND RAPID REHOUSING

Because the risk of PTSD – a life-long mental illness – is so high for women who experience homelessness for even a brief time, we should be making homeless prevention a priority for women and families.

Amikas Bridge Communities bypass the feedback loop that results in chronic homelessness



HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

By focusing on families living in poverty with the highest levels of vulnerability, efforts can potentially stem the growing crisis. The most vulnerable categories of families identified through the Keys to Housing planning process include:

- Families with young children enrolled in Women, Infants, Children (WIC) nutrition programs
- Families identified by Child Welfare Services as at-risk of separation due to lack of stable housing Prevention
- Families with children enrolled in school free and reduced-cost meal programs
- Families already homeless seeking shelter and transitional housing

- Victims of domestic violence and their children (San Diego Grantmakers Homeless Working Group, 2010)

RAPID REHOUSING

NAE President and CEO, Nan Roman, explained at the 2015 National Conference on Ending Homelessness that, given rising rents and stagnant incomes, it is her belief that we are going to see increasingly more housing instability among poor individuals and families, which means many will experience short term homelessness. We do not have a housing voucher for every poor household that has housing instability; we cannot afford to put every household that has housing instability into a transitional facility at a cost of \$32,000; and we do not want to let people languish in shelter while they are trying to save enough to move back into an apartment. We have one other option: rapid re-housing. It is not perfect. It does not end poverty, provide permanent housing affordability, ensure long term stability; and there are many other things it also does not do. Importantly, however, neither do the other interventions we have on offer. Rapid re-housing does one important thing for the vast majority of people it serves: it ends their homelessness. Ending their homelessness is our job. (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2015)

EVICTION AND FORECLOSURE INTERVENTION

Insert here

HOUSING VOUCHERS

The Family Options Study, launched by HUD in 2008 (and still under way), is a rigorously designed experimental study intended to provide the strongest evidence possible about the effectiveness and relative costs of four main interventions available to homeless families—permanent housing subsidy, project-based transitional housing, community-based rapid re-housing, or usual care.

The most recent report, documenting outcomes at 18 months, presents *striking evidence of the power of offering a permanent subsidy to a homeless family*. Families who were offered a housing voucher experienced significant reductions in subsequent homelessness, mobility, child separations, adult psychological distress, experiences of intimate partner violence, school mobility among children, and food insecurity at 18 months. Moreover, the benefits of the voucher intervention were achieved at a comparable cost to rapid re-housing and emergency shelter and at a lower cost than transitional housing. (HUD Office of Policy Development and Research, 2015)

PRIORITIZE PREVENTION AND RAPID RE-HOUSING

TRAUMA-INFORMED INTERVENTION AT EVERY STAGE

Homeless programs are divided into neat little components that don't accommodate the specific needs of women to be rapidly housed as well as provided at least short-term supportive services specifically addressing the impact of trauma on their ability to sustain housing. Each point of intervention should include trauma informed care.



In response to the high rates of traumatic stress among families who are homeless, the homelessness service system is moving towards a new way of providing care. Trauma survivors have unique service needs requiring providers to tailor their approaches. Becoming "trauma-informed" involves using knowledge of trauma and recovery to design and deliver services.

Trauma-informed care is defined as:

A strengths-based framework that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment. (Hopper, Bassuk, & Olivet, 2010)

Collaboration between homeless providers and rape crisis advocates is critical to meet the needs of homeless victims of sexual violence. Homeless service providers must be given training and support in trauma and its consequences

and staff must be given the authority to respond flexibly and appropriately to sexual assault survivors who come to them.

Indeed, all homeless women would benefit from a trauma-informed approach since, as illustrated throughout this article, homelessness is itself a form of trauma and a significant risk factor for assault; and survivors of child sexual abuse, regardless of economic status, may not remember or label their experience as such, but continue to suffer its damaging effects. However, being trauma-informed goes far beyond staff training. Organizations must examine and reframe their practices and protocols based on an understanding that most homeless women are survivors of trauma, and are likely to be re-victimized if not given emotional support, the ability to have some control over their daily lives, and a safe and calm place to stay 24 hours a day (Goodman, Ph.D., Fels, & Glenn, M.A., 2011).

Treatment for PTSD relieves symptoms by helping the woman deal with the trauma she experienced. Treatment will encourage her to process the emotions and sensations she felt when she was homeless. Treatment for PTSD will also help restore her sense of control and reduce the powerful hold the memory of the trauma has on her life.

Providing trauma-informed care requires an organizational commitment to building the knowledge, awareness, and skills needed to create service environments that support recovery and healing. Often this means adapting the practices, policies, and culture of an entire organization. Trauma-informed care is driven by a set of core principles integrated into all aspects of an organization, including physical and emotional safety and offering families choice, control, and autonomy over the circumstances in their lives. Given the high rates of trauma among families who are homeless, a trauma-informed approach is an essential component of quality care (AIR - The National Center on Family Homelessness, 2015).

KEEP FAMILIES INTACT

EMERGENCY SHELTER FOR COUPLES AND FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Currently there is only one emergency shelter in the City of San Diego for homeless women and children – the Rescue Mission. And there is NO where for homeless men with children to go.

Homeless families benefit from returning to housing as quickly as possible. Once in a home, they can maintain employment, get their children to school, and approach their problems from a solid footing; goals that are much harder to achieve from shelter or other temporary housing.

Most shelters separate couples and many do not take children. Just when a family is going through the most traumatic experience they can imagine, our system separates them, destroying their critical support system when they need it most. An example is a woman veteran with a 16-year old son who was looking for shelter for herself and her son TOGETHER. Boys between the ages of 15 and 18 are the most difficult to house in our current system. All that this mother wanted to do was keep her family together while she works through her financial crisis. Our shelter system denies the most basic need of human beings for love, family and companionship. Many couples do not go into shelters because they do not want to be separated. Section 8 vouchers restrict bringing a non-related person into your household – so an unmarried adult can't cohabitate with an adult they are romantically involved with. We need to rethink this system so people can retain their precious support systems while getting through homelessness with their loved ones.

NO CHILD should be without shelter. Families with children, including fathers with children, MUST be given priority for shelter. Right now we have moms with newborns being told there is a 3-month waiting list to get into Father Joe's. The PATH Connections Housing doesn't take children. The San Diego Unified School District reports 15,000 students are homeless!

*Any program to address homelessness STARTS HERE –
with our children.*

MAKE SEC. 8 RULES FAMILY-FRIENDLY

Assuming there are affordable housing units available, recent studies show that it is cost effective to give families housing vouchers.

There was one negative aspect to giving families vouchers—household members became less likely to have a job. That's because, with housing covered, there's less need to work, and voucher programs require families pay

one-third of their income towards rent, which means the net wage they keep is relatively small. (Semuels, 2015)

One needs to consider if our emphasis on getting a job, particularly for single parents, is worth it. If they cannot earn enough to make working worthwhile - their part of the rent increases with an increase in income, but added costs for child care are not considered, the anxiety and stress to both parent and children with time away from them etc. If we weigh the cost to keep these families housed, even if they don't get a job and continue with subsidized housing for an extended period of time, with the cost of not housing them when they fail to get sufficient income by the end of the time limit (i.e. 18 months), maybe we need to change the emphasis on securing employment, any employment, to getting the family emotionally stabilized, engaged in the community, feeling secure, learning life skills etc. before telling them they need to get a job - ANY job - even if that won't make their lives better.

ALLOW RENTERS TO DOUBLE UP

Insert here

MORE FLEXIBILITY IN ROOMS PER CHILD AND FAMILY MIX

Insert here

SUBSIDIZED HOUSING FOR SELF-FORMED FAMILY UNITS

Insert here

EMERGENCY SHELTER WITH A DOOR THAT LOCKS

Anyone who has graciously offered a couch to a friend or family member who is down on their luck, knows how, even in the best of circumstances, this is a strain on everyone's patience. Tragically, in too many situations, couch surfing turns out to be unsafe for moms and their kids. And because it is always temporary, the experience is traumatic, particularly for the children and studies have shown it can be detrimental to their physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development.

By any measure, these families should be considered homeless and as a humane civilization we should be dedicating resources to helping them get out of this situation. But not only are they not counted by the PITC because they are not visible, they are not even considered homeless by HUD because of their choice of nighttime accommodations, which means there is no funding available to help them. So they go from imposing on family, to wearing out their welcome with friends, to whatever horrendous situation will shelter them for the night (use your imagination – it's happening).

Changing HUD's definition of "homeless" is a legislative process that should begin now, but will not change things soon enough for the 10,000 families needing real housing tonight in our county. But there is a way to provide emergency shelter for these families that is safe while still qualifying them as "homeless" so they can be served by agencies using HUD funds. They could be safely sheltered and still qualify for rental assistance for real housing, which we also need to be building but isn't going to appear overnight.

We need a "meantime" solution – emergency shelter that is safe – meaning it not only protects from the elements, but also protects women and children from assault, robbery and rape. There has been a flurry of interest recently in tiny homes as a solution for homelessness and a counter argument that these are not really homes. Last week I wrote about the wooden shelter that Lisa Kohan built for a homeless man, which was impounded by SDPD. It seems to me that there is a convergence of ideas here that could actually solve the problem of counting our most vulnerable homeless population, women and children, while getting them the services they need through HUD funding.



Figure 9 - Tiny Shelters in Seattle

And that's by classifying these small wooden shelters as emergency shelter, at least in the beginning, they could be specifically for women and children and elderly homeless persons. As emergency shelters, property that has been classified for emergency housing would be exempt from requirements to get a conditional use permit. And since they are not in legally living in emergency shelter, the women and children sheltered in these structures would be classified as homeless.

By clustering these shelters near public transportation, we could do this in an organized way so that these families would get into the social services system and get the assistance they need to get into permanent housing. We could provide common facilities for toilets, showers, laundry, dining and even job training or self-employment. People in the housed community who want to help could provide bedding and basic furnishings, meals, etc.

And most important, these families, women and children, who are dealing with trauma, would have a place of their own, privacy where they can lock the door at night and lock their few precious belongings up in the day, so they can get their kids to school and go to work.

REAL LOW-INCOME HOUSING FOR WOMEN AND FAMILIES

Subsidizing developers to allocate a small percentage of their projects to affordable housing is not a productive solution to the shortage of affordable housing. They are NOT providing housing at rates that are actually affordable in this economy. They are not creating sufficient units to keep up with the demand. Waiting lists for these units are often years. If we are going to solve the homeless crisis, we need real, immediately available, affordable housing that people earning minimum wage or living on Social Security or Disability can afford:

- **Rehab for Shared Housing:** The recently passed Abandoned Properties Ordinance and the Property Value Protection Ordinance will give the City a database of abandoned properties in San Diego. We should be evaluating every one of these properties for potential re-habitation for group or shared housing, put the unemployed to work on the rehab and get banks and corporations to fund the program – they need the positive publicity.
- **More Affordable Units:** Let's put the HOME/CHDO program into high gear with incentives to make a much higher percentage of units affordable.
- **Save affordable housing from gentrification:** Fix up the SROs. Use every zoning variance to make sure that every existing unit that is converted to upscale activity is replaced with real, affordable housing appropriate for families.
- **Families First:** Give families who are trying to get back on track first place on the list. Rents should be affordable because they will be sharing the space (see below). We could charge slightly more than Sec. 8 to be self-sustaining and people won't have to wait the 10 years for a voucher.
- **Double Up:** If we put two families in every affordable single-family home we could instantly double the available affordable housing.

Families are already doubling-up, people are couch surfing, young couples are moving back with their parents, and families are renting out rooms in their home to keep up their mortgage payments during difficult times. We should facilitate the process:

Examine current regulations concerning house-sharing and make adjustments so families can rent rooms legally.

Facilitate home-sharing with a website that would be the housemate version of eHarmony – where people with a room to rent and people looking for a room to rent can find the perfect match. Provide downloadable rental

agreements, recommended questions to ask, owner and tenant rights & liabilities, legal requirements, suggestions for success, etc.

Right now the laws are very supportive of tenants' rights – and that's fine when people are renting an apartment. But current laws leave an owner or primary tenant who rents a room to someone in their home, extremely vulnerable. In order to make house-sharing a viable solution, we need to make changes that allow the owner or primary tenant to immediately remove a tenant from their home if they are threatening or destructive. No one should be required to allow someone to remain in their home after a situation has become unsafe to persons or property.

FAMILY FRIENDLY AND TRAUMA INFORMED HOUSING

- Emphasis on safety
- Family-friendly rules
- Case-based timelines
- Common areas that encourage community
- On-site child care
- Child-friendly playgrounds and programs
- On-site employment and entrepreneurial opportunities
- On-site educational programs
- Service providers come to the site

INCENTIVES FOR LANDLORDS TO RENT TO HOMELESS WOMEN AND FAMILIES

RENTER TRAINING CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Many homeless people develop behaviors that may be adaptive to the homeless experience but problematic in housing. They often need training to maintain housing, programs should prepare people to succeed.

Suddenly they will be expected to pay rent on time every month, and even if their portion of the rent is proportional to their income, they will now have to budget to have that money when the rent is due.

Residents may be expected to live more independently and may have to develop or re-learn ADL skills

Way too many families are one or two paychecks away from homelessness. An unexpected interruption of income due to job loss, illness or any of the unexpected curves life throws our way can start a cascade of events that compound the problem and thwart recovery. Once a person has an eviction or foreclosure on their record, they will be hard-pressed to find a landlord to rent to them, or if they do, they usually must come up with 2 or 3 months' rent for a security deposit. If we are going to solve the homeless crisis, we

INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR WOMEN AND FAMILIES

need to help people experiencing temporary financial problems to stay in their homes:

EVICTION INTERVENTION

We need to fund and enhance housing counseling programs where people facing eviction can get advice on how to prevent that process, be directed to resources and even intercede with the landlord for a payout agreement to catch up on back rent without penalties, with the counselor monitoring that process. We did this successfully for one of our Amikas did this successfully with one client, prior to her moving into Amikas House last year, and she was able to pay back the money and successfully rent an apartment again after six months. SDHC's Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) was supposed to provide this service, but funds have been exhausted and too many families that could have been kept housed are not getting the help to do it.

FUND FOR DOUBLE SECURITY DEPOSITS AND DAMAGES

AGENCY INTERMEDIARY

Insert here

SHARED OR CO-HOUSING

Co-housing is the coordinated renting of one unit to two or more unrelated tenants. The Amikas Double-Up Program (AD-UP) facilitated this process by acting as the primary tenant (we sign the lease with the landlord and were billed for utilities). Amikas screened potential client tenants and sublet a home to multiple tenants (usually two women). Their rent bill included their half of utilities.

Each sub-tenant (participant) had their own separate lease agreement and could leave the rental without disruption to the other tenant(s). The units were furnished by Amikas, including kitchen/household items. Participants could only bring personal items into their bedroom and could not remove anything from the common areas of the home.

Through trial and error, we established policies and rules designed to support each participant's rental experience and described them in a handbook that we reviewed with each participant. They were required to sign that they understood the rules and agreed to the terms. In retrospect, we were trying to achieve harmony and stability with rules that could have been better achieved with trauma-informed case management.

Ideally, when bringing a new subtenant into the home, a personality profile and pre-meeting with prospective housemates could assure a compatible co-existence. In reality, we had to deal with two factors that made the process difficult. First, is the pressure to get a woman and her children housed when there are no other options available, caused us to overlook red-flags that could make shared housing inappropriate for a particular client, such as OCD or serious mental illness. The second challenge is what I called the “Alpha-Tenant Syndrome” where there was a participant who finds herself having a whole unit to herself after her housemate leaves. She experiences having that greater privacy for half of the rent it would normally cost for that unit. Now we give her the power to be choosy about her housemate and she quickly realizes that the longer she rejects potential housemates, the longer she gets the unit to herself.

Even if a new participant moves in, the original housemate often takes a dominant role rather than being welcoming and cooperative. It was a quagmire for Amikas because we depended on the two rentals for us to pay the rent and going through frequent turn-over as the Alpha tenant made life miserable for the new housemate was making life miserable for everyone. Threats of eviction often resulted in the participant refusing to pay rent and the expensive and non-productive eviction process. Without a solution to this problem, managed shared housing cannot sustain after the first match splits up.

A possible solution is to simply remove the service provider as primary tenant and to simply help to facilitate housing matches. An online shared housing and roommate matcher program (similar to eHarmony) could help women find and select their own housemates. Landlords willing to rent to two tenants could also list their rentals on the site.

But this brings us to the barriers that the Amikas AD-UP program was originally designed to overcome: women with poor credit history who cannot get a rental; landlords unwilling to provide separate leases for two or more tenants; difficulties splitting utility costs; leaving one tenant stuck if the other fails to pay rent or utilities; and the question of what furnishings, etc. belong to whom when one participant moves out.

Shared housing where one tenant qualifies to rent a unit by herself, but really could use the extra income of a housemate, uses the facilitation of a shared housing program to identify, screen and match a suitable housemate. The tenant has control of the unit and its furnishings and responsibility for the rent and utilities and maintenance. In the event that match doesn't work out, the program could mediate and assist in re-housing the housemate so the eviction process can be avoided. Obviously program staff would need to be astute in screening potential housemates and making compatible matches.

INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR WOMEN AND FAMILIES

There would also need to be optional housing available that is appropriate for housemates who turn out to be unsuitable for shared housing.

What this program doesn't do is solve the housing needs of women and families who are not suited for shared housing. But it could be a way to quickly increase affordable housing for women who have minimal mental issues and to quickly re-house women BEFORE they experience the trauma of being homeless.

FACILITATE ROOM RENTALS

CHANGES TO TENANT AND LODGER LAWS TO ENCOURAGE ROOM RENTALS

California Landlord Tenant laws are disproportionately favorable to the tenant and surprisingly this has made it more difficult to "create" affordable housing opportunities, particularly when the vacancy rate is less than 2%. Owners willing to rent a room to a homeless woman are often reluctant if they have heard horror stories where a homeowner went through hell trying to remove a room renter who was violent or behind in rent.

If homeowners are able to quickly evict a tenant who is dangerous or behind in rent they would be more willing to rent a spare room

WORKSHOPS AND INCENTIVES TO ASSIST HOMEOWNERS IN RENTING A ROOM

Insert here

GROUP HOUSING

We walked in the front door of Amikas House and saw the dining room festooned with Halloween decorations. Lucy was sitting at the dining room table with two of her children (9 and 5), helping them with their homework (names have been changed). In the living room Marsha was chatting with one of the teenagers living at the house. I went into the computer room Yolanda was at the computer, taking advantage of the time while her 2-year-old was napping to work on her resume. She happily showed me a book she had found on our bookshelf about how to get a better job. I told Nancy, who just came home from work, that there were some new curtains in the garage. She and her roommate have been putting a lot of time into decorating the house, hanging curtains, and pictures and arranging furniture. She was delighted to go see what had been donated.

The house was just humming with positive energy! What a difference having a place to live has made in the lives of these women and their children, already!

I wish I could show you some photos, particularly of the smiles on the kids' faces – kids who only a few weeks ago were living in circumstances children should never know. Because we need to protect those children and their moms, you are going to have to just imagine the look on the face of a 5-year-old girl intently coloring as her mom looks on, finally feeling safe and at home.

We are a very long way from housing the thousands of people in San Diego who have no place to call home. The shared-housing concept that we are using at Amikas House is just one of many ways that we need to be working to address the problem of homelessness. If you look at the 6 families we are helping, it seems like it's hardly making a dent in the situation. But for these ladies and their kids, this is life changing.

I keep thinking of that movie, "Field of Dreams" where they said, "If you build it they will come." We built it and they've come – we already have a waiting list! So now, I have to believe the money will come too.

ADAPTING SINGLE FAMILY HOMES FOR GROUP HOUSING

Insert here

CASE MANAGEMENT AND FULL-TIME HOUSE MOTHER

Insert here

PRE-SCREENING AND PREPARATION

Insert here

PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING – NOT TRANSITIONAL – NO TIME LIMITS

Insert here

INNOVATIVE RE-USE OF CITY PROPERTIES

Old Library, Qualcomm Stadium (?) golf course, for affordable cluster communities with mini-homes, common facilities, community gardens and small cottage industry businesses

ASSIGN LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY

ASSIGN LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY TO SOLVE HOMELESSNESS

Insert here

COUNTY IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PROBLEMS WITH A HUMAN FACE

Insert here

HAVE A WRITTEN PLAN

Insert here

ASSIGN A LEAD AGENCY (CITY? COUNTY?)

Insert here

HOUSING FIRST

HOUSING FIRST

Housing First is a great idea. It makes perfect sense to get people housed before you can expect them to address their addictions, look for work and get their lives together. But not every homeless person is prepared to move into their own apartment and maintain themselves and not be a threat to themselves or others.

KEEPING PEOPLE HOUSED

Different types of houses need to be available to house every client appropriately. While there should be no barriers to getting an individual housed, there should be expectations of the client once housed depending on the housing type.

For example...

Case management **MUST** continue beyond the transition into housing. If a client is dependent on drugs or alcohol, that shouldn't prevent them from going into housing, but the housing that is available to them should be designed to guide them to detoxify and overcome or manage their addiction. Certainly we should not be putting meth addicts in the same housing as families.

So, as much as Housing First will produce immediate results, it requires multiple housing options designed to be appropriate for each individual's circumstances. A highly structured, environment with a lot of rules and regulations may seem like the best way to manage difficult populations, but in too many cases, people would rather be homeless than be required to adhere to a host of rules that for reasons of mental illness or addictions they are unable to adhere to.

- Residents will be expected to follow house rules and comply with all lease regulations
- The neighborhood and all its amenities are new and unknown support systems from the street are gone.
- Street friends will try to piggy-back on their housing
- Socialization opportunities may change
- A new code of conduct may be expected
- Choosing between a cigarette and watching your child
- Pets are part of the family

OFFER BETTER INCENTIVES THAN EVICTION

Eviction should not be the redress when a client has problems with following the rules of the housing they have been provided. If the client refuses case

management, there should be a very low level of shelter available to them – maybe akin to the old flop houses. There is no advantage to our communities to put these people back on the street, and we have seen that the threat of jail isn't going to get them sober.

**COLLABORATIVE ASSESSMENT AND HOUSING PLACEMENT
(CAHP)**

VI-SPDAT – BUT WHAT COMES AFTER THAT?

Intake is particularly embarrassing and unpleasant for women and having to do it repeatedly for every housing agency is non-productive

The VI-SPDAT survey is supposed to be a VULNERABILITY INDEX – so we should really be prioritizing the most vulnerable before the most visible: women and families – they can't wait until 2020

CHANGE DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

CHANGE HUD DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS AND FUNDING FORMULA

The process to change HUD policies is arduous. While the problem with HUD's current definition of homelessness is on the radar of some congressional legislators, it is stalled in committee. On January 27, 2015, U.S. Senators Rob Portman (R-Ohio) and Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) introduced the *Homeless Children and Youth Act*, a bill to expand the definition of homelessness used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The change would allow more than 1 million homeless children and families nationwide to access federal housing assistance programs.

The Homeless Children and Youth Act would

- Amend HUD's definition of homelessness to include children and youth who are verified as homeless through HUD's homeless assistance programs and through other federal programs such as Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs, Violence Against Women programs, and public school district homeless liaisons.
- Eliminate complex documentation requirements for "proving" homelessness, such as evidence of multiple moves, or the length of time spent without housing. Under the Homeless Children and Youth Act (HCYA), a HUD homeless service provider could make a simple determination that a family or youth in a motel, or staying temporarily with others, is eligible, or accept a referral from another federal program.
- Prohibit HUD from overriding local communities. Local service providers are the best equipped to evaluate which homeless populations have the greatest unmet needs, and where federal homelessness resources are best targeted.
- Amend federal homeless data collection and reporting requirements to ensure that data currently collected on all homeless children, youth, and families is made available to the public, providing an accurate and honest accounting of homelessness in America.

The bill contains no new mandates, and costs nothing. Whether newly eligible families and youth receive services would depend on communities' assessments of their own needs. (Portman, 2015)

The Homeless Children and Youth Act will help over one million homeless children and youth lead safer, healthier lives and have a better chance for a brighter future. And it will make government work better, by ensuring that the federal government's response to homelessness is based on an honest and accurate understanding of the problem, and by empowering those closest to

the problem to design and implement the best local response. To express your support for this bill, go to <http://helphomelesskidsnow.org/take-action/>

PROGRSSIVELY REDUCE BENEFITS AS HOUSEHOLD INCOME IMPROVES

Works supports such as child care assistance, CalFresh, or Medi-Cal can help households below the Real Cost Measure cover basic needs, yet these benefits drop away too soon, well before households get close to meeting the measure. For example, as noted earlier, CalFresh food assistance drops to zero for a family of 4 (2 adults, 2 children over 6) at gross income over \$47,712, and the EITC benefit tapers to \$0 when gross income exceeds \$49,186; in both cases, well before they reach the Real Cost Measure of \$55,057.

If the intent behind CalFresh, EITC and other taxpayer-funded benefits is to help families reach financial stability, rather than merely avoid destitution, then reviewing and adjusting eligibility limits in light of the Real Cost Measure should be one of the top priorities arising from this report and what it says about the real, high costs of being poor.

Some strategies that may be available to ensure these taxpayer-funded benefits have their intended effect of helping low-income families become financially stable include increasing eligibility limits in light of the Real Cost Measure, or raising the amount of income and assets that is disregarded. Another way to extend the effect of income supports is putting funds into escrow savings accounts; as household income increases and the dollar amount of benefits is reduced, the “savings” in reduced benefit awards could be deposited in savings accounts for households to help them transition off public assistance. One example of this is Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Family Self-Sufficiency program, in which, as a family’s income increases, amounts that they otherwise would pay as an increase in their household share of rent are placed into a savings account. (Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program, 2015) (Baum Block, Gascon, Manzo, & Parker, 2015)

HOUSING FOR FEMALE VETERANS

HOUSING FOR FEMALE VETERANS

ZERO TOLERANCE FOR MILITARY SEXUAL ASSAULT

Insert here.

STOP GIVING OTH DISCHARGE STATUS TO WOMEN WHO REPORT SEXUAL ASSAULT

Insert here.

PROVIDE LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOR VETERAN WOMEN WHO EXPERIENCED MST

Upgrade their discharge status and qualify for benefits

CIVILIAN TRANSITION PROGRAMS SPECIFIC TO WOMEN'S ISSUES

Particularly mothers

PROVIDE FOR HOUSING NEEDS OF FEMALE VETERANS

Including those with children

BUILD VA GPD HOUSING SPECIFICALLY FOR WOMEN AND FAMILIES

Insert here.

ASSURE SAFETY FOR FEMALE VETERANS IN GPD HOUSING

Insert here.

STOP CRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

NO PLACE TO GO

The San Diego Point-In-Time Count released at the end of April 2016, showed less than a one percent decrease from the previous year in the number of homeless people in San Diego County.

A curious decrease in sheltered homeless persons (-18.2%) nearly matched the increase of those who were unsheltered (+18.9%). But anyone with their eyes open didn't need this report to know that there has been a deplorable increase in the number of people living on our streets. The report also confirmed the obvious – a 69% increase in tents and hand-built structures throughout the county.

As in previous years, the tally of 8,692 homeless individuals (sheltered and unsheltered) in the county still doesn't include thousands of women, children and families who, for reasons of vulnerability, are deliberately not visible for counting. We know they exist, because of the 22,000 homeless students reported by county schools last year.

It's when we compare the number of unsheltered persons with the number of shelter beds available, that we can understand why there are so many people living in makeshift shelters on our streets, canyons and alleys.

The HUD mandated Housing Inventory Count that's part of the Point-in-Time count, breaks down available beds in various housing categories: Emergency Shelter (ES), Transitional Housing (TH), Safe Havens (SH), Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), Rapid Re-housing (RRH), and Other Permanent Housing (OPH).

The City of San Diego seems to think they can make homeless persons disappear with recurring sweeps and human deterrent rockscaping. There seems to be an assumption that people are voluntarily choosing to befoul the sidewalks downtown rather than go to a shelter. Some residents will tell you that homeless people are turning down offers for housing. Could it be? Is the aversion to rules and proselytizing so strong that all of these homeless people would prefer to sleep on cold cement and be rousted daily by vigilante residents and "abatement" enforcers?

In order to determine if beds are actually available for those who were counted as unsheltered, I am limiting my analysis of the Housing Inventory Count to ES (90 day limit), TH (max 24 months) and SH (mentally ill) beds.

On the night/morning of Jan 29th, 2,348 homeless people were reported as sheltered in the City of San Diego. The Housing Inventory Count shows 2,359 shelter beds were occupied that night so it's safe to assume that all of the

people counted as sheltered were occupying those beds (I haven't been able to determine why there are 11 more occupied beds than sheltered homeless people, but that doesn't really change the analysis):

Occupied beds

884 (ES)	
1,423 (TH)	
<u>52</u> (SH)	
2,359 beds	Beds occupied on night of 1/29/16

The Housing report also tallies the number of shelter beds that were available that night:

Available beds

1,026 (ES)	
1,710 (TH)	
<u>57</u> (SH)	
2,793 beds	Beds available on night of 1/29/16

For various reasons, 434 beds were not filled. This isn't an indication of inefficiency or beds being turned down.

There are many reasons why 100% of the shelter beds are not filled. A family with only two children could be occupying a Transitional Housing unit with 5 beds; in the case of the rotational shelter provided by Interfaith Shelter Network, they might have three beds open up but the family next in line requires five beds so it will take another night or two to match that opening with a family needing 3 beds; over at Rachel's shelter above the Post Office, they might have a bed open up, but the woman they bring in that night realizes she can't make it up the 35 stairs; or an agency might have beds set aside for only HIV or Domestic Violence victims and that particular night, no one qualifies for that category; or maybe someone just vacated a bed that afternoon and there wasn't time to get it back in the system. But for the sake of our analysis, let's assume that these beds were all actually available on that night.

The PITC reports that there were 2,745 unsheltered individuals in the City of San Diego on the night of 1/29/16. Let's say that we could have put 434 of them into those un-occupied shelter beds, if everything was magically working at 100% efficiency.

That would mean that we would have still had 2,311 individuals who could not be sheltered, even if they were willing to go anywhere there was a bed

STOP CRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

open for them. (And these numbers do not even include the thousands of women and children who are not counted)

That qualifies as “Having no place to go,” no matter how you want to look at it.

The fact that 2,311 human beings had absolutely no place to go, needs to be factored into how San Diego deals with people living on the streets. In February 2011, the terms of a settlement of a lawsuit filed by homeless advocates specified that San Diego police officers can only issue citations for illegal lodging or take someone into custody if a bed is available in a shelter and the homeless person refuses to take it. The city supposedly holds 5 beds open for homeless people in order to claim that a bed is available. The thinking is that, given the choice of taking the shelter bed or being taken into custody, most homeless people will just move on. But word on the street is that even if a person agrees to go to the bed that's offered, they are often not taken there.

Five years later, it still remains to be seen where people can move on to. Whether or not the city can keep five beds open, there are 2,311 city residents needing beds. Unless we have a prophet performing a bed version of the Miracle of the Loaves and the Fishes every night, it is mathematically impossible to house 2,311 people in 5 beds! So what does that do to laws against loitering, trespassing and illegal lodging?

What happens when you give a citation for illegal lodging to a person who can't afford to pay rent? Illegal lodging comes under section 647(e) – a misdemeanor carrying a \$250 bail (fine) plus a Penalty Assessment (PA) for the first offense. That PA adds \$31 to every \$10 of the fine, which would add \$775 to the bill. That's a helluva tab for sleeping on a sidewalk! Knowing they can't pay the fine, and fearing they will be put in jail, many homeless people just don't show up in court and that results in a warrant.

So when you read that the police doing the sweeps are only arresting people with outstanding warrants, you might think they are arresting criminals, but it would be safe to assume that many of those warrants are for unpaid illegal lodging citations. With some guidance from local service providers, a person could be referred to homeless court where, if they can show that they have a plan for not continuing to “illegally lodge” they could be forgiven of their trespasses.

But how does someone assure even the most compassionate judge that they will “sin no more” when there isn't anywhere to go? Which brings us to ask who is actually guilty of breaking the law? The destitute or the city?

Boise, Idaho is a long way from San Diego, but we should be looking at a Statement of Interest filed August 6, 2015, by the U.S. District Court, in the case of *Bell vs City of Boise*. Boise plaintiffs argued that criminalizing public sleeping in a city without adequate shelter space constitutes criminalizing homelessness itself, in violation of the Eighth Amendment. They alleged that Boise's enforcement practices are unconstitutional because:

- There is insufficient shelter space available to accommodate all who are homeless in Boise;
- There are restrictions on certain shelter beds that some homeless individuals are unable to meet, thereby preventing them from obtaining shelter space even when beds may be unoccupied, and
- The BPD continues to enforce the anti-camping and disorderly conduct ordinances when shelters are full and against those who do not qualify for the beds, either because BPD officers are insufficiently trained or they are unaware when shelters are full because of unreliable reporting from the shelters.

Plaintiffs encouraged the court to follow *Jones v. City of Los Angeles*, (9th Cir. 2006), which held that enforcement of anti-camping ordinances may violate the Eighth Amendment on nights where there is inadequate shelter space available for all of a city's homeless individuals.

The United States District Court concluded that:

If the Court finds that it is impossible for homeless individuals to secure shelter space on some nights because no beds are available, no shelter meets their disability needs, or they have exceeded the maximum stay limitations, then the Court should also find that enforcement of the ordinances under those circumstances criminalizes the status of being homeless and violates the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution.

San Diego has eleven municipal codes that criminalize daily activities associated with homelessness, or slightly more than the state average. Among the eleven are four codes that criminalize standing, sitting, and resting in public places; five codes that criminalize sleeping, camping, and lodging in public places, including in vehicles; and two codes that criminalize begging and panhandling. But the “vast majority” of citations issued to homeless people in San Diego have been for illegal lodging under California Penal Code 647(e).¹

We must stop treating our homeless residents as criminals when their only crime is having no place to go. And while it is noble to set goals to get everyone into permanent housing, let's be honest about how quickly that is going to happen no matter how well intentioned our providers may be. And let's be realistic about the suitability of emergency shelters for people with

STOP CRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

good reason to avoid them, from valid fears of assault, to mental challenges, to addictions, to not being able to climb 35 stairs or even hoist up to the top bunk. We need a multiplicity of emergency shelter options to get people off the streets while we create permanent housing that is appropriate for all of the different populations who currently don't have a place to be.

Safe, suitable emergency shelter is not a solution to homelessness. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the path Portland has chosen, letting homeless people sleep on city sidewalks or pitch tents on public rights of way during evening hours, with the understanding they pack up and move out by 7 a.m. isn't a solution either. Getting people off the street should not end our efforts to get them permanently housed. But it's what we must do now, because arresting people like criminals, sweeping them away like trash and building rockscape deterrents as if humans are pigeons, when they have no place else to go, just ain't right.

RIGHT TO REST LAW

We cannot continue to deny that human beings take physical space--they need to BE somewhere. If we are going to solve the homeless crisis, we must codify the most basic of human rights, because apparently we, as a society don't have the decency to assume them.

ORGANIZED AND SAFE FOOD DISTRIBUTION

A recent letter from the Rock Church explained their change in policy regarding feeding homeless people. Part of one sentence was highlighted: refrain from feeding homeless people on the streets, as well as distributing items such as clothing and blankets. The letter evoked passionate responses from many people with opposing, yet reasonable points of view.

I've had mixed feelings on this issue since attending a Downtown Fellowship of Churches and Ministries meeting in 2014 where I learned about their plans for Doing It Better Together (Doing it Better Together, 2015) to coordinate services provided to homeless people on the streets.

Talk about feeding homeless people is very personal for me, as I imagine it is for many people who feel called to help the less fortunate. When I first decided to get involved in helping homeless people, I would bake up batches of my signature, organic-oat scones, tucking each one into a wax paper baggie with a little note taped to the outside saying: I made this for you because you matter.

I had taken the Food Handler's course offered by the County and had my certificate with me, and I took my responsibility to not spread disease very seriously. Sometimes I would make brown bag lunches, including peanut butter and jelly sandwiches with my homemade whole wheat bread and an organic piece of fruit.

It felt good to share healthy food with people who were hungry. I enjoyed the opportunity to have one-to-one conversations with people and hoped that in some small way it made up for the abuse or snubbing that they often experienced. Later, when I volunteer with Julie Darling's Just Call Us Volunteers to prepare meals in her professional kitchen to distribute at Stand Down and holidays at Neil Good Day Center, it seemed that personal contact was missing.

When I brought people along with me downtown for my food distribution runs, they often got hooked on helping homeless people. For many, the experience of feeding poor people on the street seems to be like a gateway drug to a lifetime of community service. So I was astonished to learn at that Downtown Fellowship meeting that there were so many rational reasons not to do it.

Most of the groups who prepare food for street distribution are not professional food preparers. I volunteered at one church that was making baloney and cheese sandwiches and was surprised that basic protocol for safe food handling, such as wearing gloves when handling food, was not being followed. And this was in a church kitchen. Just imagine what conditions could be in an individual's kitchen.

Just because someone has been making dinner and desserts for their family for 40 years, doesn't mean they know how to keep the public safe when it comes to food prep and distribution. We require people working in restaurants and catering facilities to be licensed. But who is checking the qualifications of the well-meaning people bringing food to the people on the streets?

Sure, you say, but when you're hungry... I mean I've watched old women pick through the trash for a half-eaten sandwich. Yes, there is no question that we need to be providing food for the hungry. But what the Downtown Fellowship, the City and others are trying to do is find a way to do this that is safe for everyone. Imagine one sick person preparing food for distribution to this population that has compromised immune systems from the get go. Do you want to be the person that starts an epidemic that wipes out our homeless population?

Come to think of it, when we have sickos that think it's OK to go into bible study meetings to shoot and kill people, what's to stop some nut from deliberately killing off our homeless neighbors with contaminated food?

Another big negative to free-for-all food distribution is that it's not getting to the people who need it most. I've learned that group after group will show up at the most obvious places downtown to give out food. Often people will have just finished eating one group's handouts when another will pull up with

STOP CRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS

something else. Street people don't have a way of storing food and most are not of the mindset to be cleaning up. So all of that well-intended food becomes piles of trash that attracts bugs and rodents and costs taxpayers lots of money to clean up. No wonder downtown businesses want us to stop street feeding!

It's not like there are not places to get food downtown. Fr. Joes serves over 3,000 meals every day. But there are people who won't go to Fr. Joes or God's Extended Hand for food. They have a list of excuses that make sense to them. That's unfortunate, because if they went to these places they might be able to access other services. And maybe if street feeding wasn't so abundant, they might get hungry enough to try one of the organized and safe places to eat.

The sad part is that there are so many families who don't have enough to eat, but they are not living on the sidewalk, so street feeders don't get to them. And many of them are not living close to Fr. Joe's and can't bring their families there for food. San Diego Unified School District provides free breakfast and lunch to low-income children every school day. What are these kids and their parents getting for dinner, or on the weekends, or summer recess? The week before their benefit check comes, many families are lucky to subsist on rice, tortillas and pasta.

Rather than put all of their effort into Fr. Joe's feeding program, that already has a crowd, I would like to see the Rock Church and other well-meaning organizations who want to help our less fortunate neighbors, organize meal centers throughout the county, similar to what Neighborhood House does for seniors. Healthy food could be properly and safely prepared and served in each neighborhood so families could walk there or take the bus.

Sometimes, when I would stop by at Amikas House in the evening, I would watch the moms come home from work, having picked up their kids from the Boys and Girls club or child care. They looked exhausted. And they would have to figure out what to feed their kids with what little they had. What if even one or two evenings a week they could go to a neighborhood meal center where they could pick up a hot and healthy meal for their family? What if we organized this so there were more opportunities on the last and first week of the month? Being able to spend less on food would mean these poor families could pay the rent and not become homeless!

FINDMYFOOD

Amikas created a website called FindMyFood.org that is designed so people can find where food is being distributed and served on any particular day in any area of the county. I am offering it to the community as a tool for organizing food and meal distribution.

I'd hate to see San Diego become like St. Petersburg, Florida where they are arresting people for feeding the poor. We don't need any more reasons to arrest good people or to criminalize being homeless. We just need to be creative about how we can help people, better.

MORE HOMELESS STORAGE SITES

The Think Dignity (formerly called Girl's Think Tank) Transition Storage Facility proved itself and now it is itself without a facility. This is insane! When we have the will to get something done, it gets done. Stop all further downtown development until this facility has a home, an expanded one where more people can store their belongings so as to avoid them being taken during sweeps. Having a place to store their belongings allows people to look for housing, social and health services, and EMPLOYMENT. There are plenty of empty buildings downtown – make this happen.

STOP HOMELESS SWEEPS

LAWS TO PROTECT PROPERTY OF PERSONS WITHOUT HOUSING

SAFE ZONES WITH FACILITIES FOR HOMELESS WOMEN AND FAMILIES

Until we can get people housed, we need to create Safe Zones where people can sleep at night, under some protection from the elements, including a personal tent if necessary, with toilet facilities and showers. Why can't we use the same tents and cots used at Stand Down in various parking lots throughout the city (not just downtown)? We could rotate the locations the way Interfaith Shelter Network rotates churches, so no neighborhood feels like this is being inflicted on them. Tents go up at dusk, and come down at dawn. Service providers can be available. A local faith-based group was working on this idea, but they wanted to require religious indoctrination in the program. Let's do this as a city, throughout the city and bring these church groups in to help – without the indoctrination element. These zones could include an area where people can sleep in their cars, similar to Dreams for Change – which at this time is another great idea that has lost its permanent (they have a temporary one right now location).

DAY CENTERS FOR HOMELESS WOMEN AND FAMILIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY

SAFE RESTROOMS AND SHOWERS

A place to go - Public Restrooms. The City Council approved \$700,000 for public restrooms two years ago. The Girls Think Tank had done all of the research and could have installed 4 or 5 Portland Loos downtown. Funds for maintenance failed to materialize and NIMBYism prevented securing locations. Finally the funds disappeared when Gov. Brown ended Redevelopment Funds. There should be 24/7 restrooms throughout the city – particularly at transit centers and areas where people gather, housed or not. The lack of restrooms also leads to greater personal and public health issues as people end up urinating and defecating in the bushes and sometimes simply on the streets. Women tend to “hold in” their urine or not drink because they don't want to have to deal with finding a place to urinate. This causes medical problems which end up costing more than simply providing clean and safe restrooms in the first place.

FREE FEMININE SANITARY PRODUCTS AND BABY DIAPERS

MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AFFORDABLE

DISCOUNT COMPASS CARD RATE FOR ANYONE ON COUNTY BENEFITS

If women and families had use of public transportation we could locate homeless services (such as shelters, meals, restrooms) throughout the county and reduce the convergence of homeless people on downtown.

Affordable Transportation: We need an MTS Compass Card discount for economic hardship. You can't expect a person to go out looking for work every day if they can't afford the bus and trolley fare. Anyone who is below 30% AMI should qualify for a free monthly Compass Card. People don't take the bus for the thrill of it – they have to get to work, the doctor, the supermarket and services. Everyone bemoans the fact that homeless people gravitate downtown, and the most logical solution is to make it possible for people to get downtown by public transportation for the services they need, and live outside the city where rents are more affordable. In many cases, a free Compass Card would make that feasible.

CHANGE LIMIT FOR NUMBER OF FREE CHILDREN TO 6

Insert here

CHANGE AGE LIMIT FOR FREE CHILDREN FROM 5 TO 12

Insert Here

EDUCATE PUBLIC ABOUT HOMELESSNESS

Too many viable projects that could make a real dent in getting people housed are stopped or seriously delayed because of an outcry from neighboring residents and businesses. We need to dispel the myths that people who have fallen on hard times are always dangerous and threatening and a menace to society. If we are going to solve the homeless crisis, we need to have a PR campaign to inspire the public to support the effort:

HOMELESSNESS AWARENESS PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN

Following the County of San Diego's model of the current media campaign to educate people about mental illness (It's Up to Us) we should begin a concerted effort to educate people about homelessness, so the housed population sees that those who are un-housed are their neighbors who need a hand and not a threat to them. The general public doesn't realize that homeless people are often not to blame for their situation and most are just trying to do the best they can with the cards they've been dealt. When people learn to see themselves in others they replace judgment with gratitude for their own good fortune. Remind people that every faith teaches us to care for the poor and those with less than ourselves. Illustrate that it feels good to help others, and it feels bad to crush people when they are down.

GET BUY-IN BY JOINING THE EFFORT.

By getting people involved in solving the problem, they will be less likely to thwart the program. Projects that invite community collaboration with government and non-profits will convince opinion influencers that a program is worthwhile.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND LIVING WAGE

INCREASE THE MINIMUM WAGE SO WORKING FAMILIES CAN ACTUALLY AFFORD HOUSING

Living Wage Jobs: This is a much bigger issue than can be covered by this paper – but it is the elephant in the room – a majority of the new- homeless are either working at a job that doesn't pay enough to afford housing, or they have been unable to find any employment. It is possible that the shortage of living wage jobs will not improve for a long time, and we must re-think how people earn a living – by supporting small business ventures and other ways that people can use their skills and education to earn an income.

CPI REPORT

Insert here

ENCOURAGE JOB SHARING PROGRAMS

Insert here

USE OF VACANT PUBIC FACILITIES FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL INCUBATORS

Insert Here

CHILD CARE

PROVIDE SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE PROGRAMS FOR WORKING HOMELESS WOMEN AND VERY LOW INCOME FAMILIES

RECOGNIZE CHILD REARING AS VALUABLE WORK

Consider paying unemployed mothers to stay home and raise their children when they are unable to find work that pays more than the cost of child care and transportation.

REQUIRE EMPLOYERS TO ALLOW LEAVE FOR PARENTS TO CARE FOR A SICK CHILD

HEALTH CARE

HEALTH CARE

FULLY FUND MEDI-CAL SO FAMILIES HAVE PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN

SAFE DRINKING WATER

Water to drink and bathe - Drinking Fountains. We need public drinking fountains with clean, sanitary water, throughout the city – San Diego is a desert – all of our citizens require potable drinking water – every day.

PUBLIC RESTROOM FACILITIES

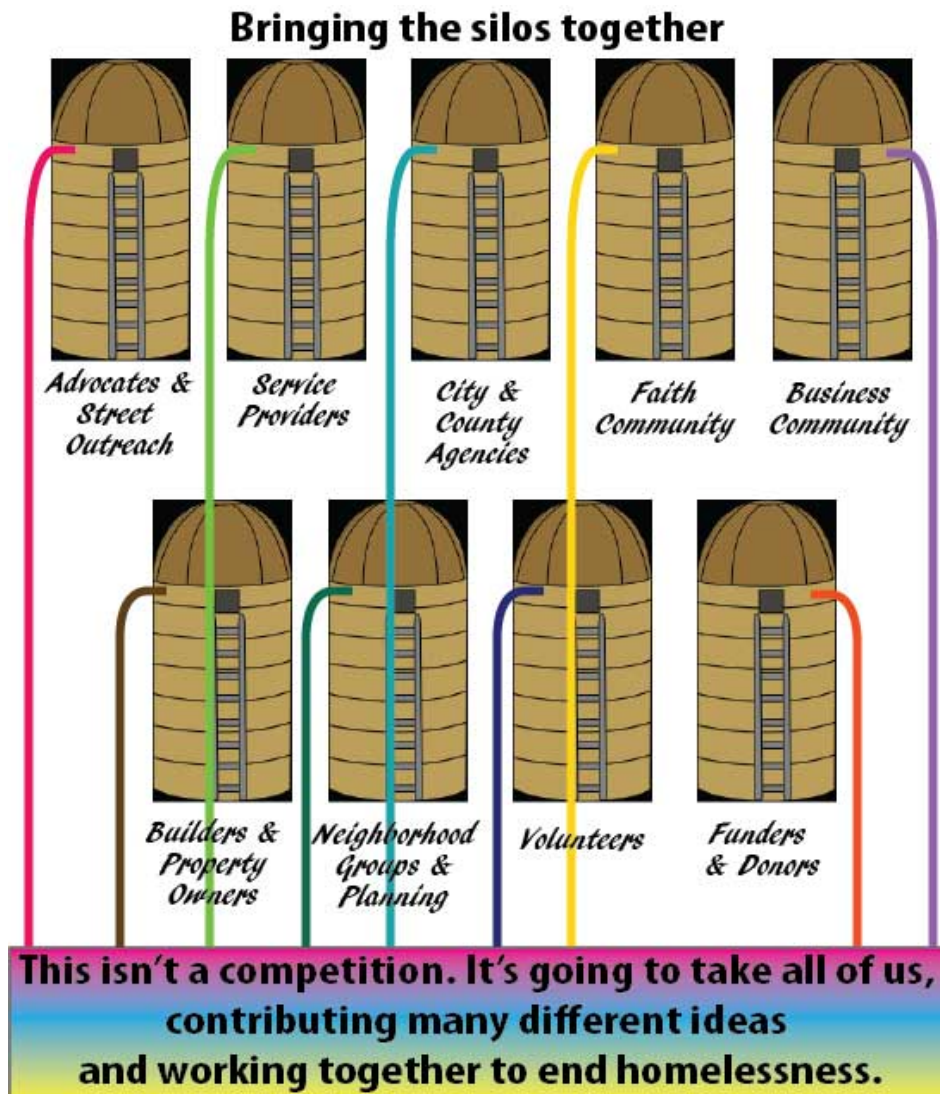
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CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

As long as we persist in a profit/greed based system, we will never actually end homelessness because the system continues to spit out humans like industrial waste, Trying to end homelessness while refusing to address economic inequity is like trying to get more people to vote but refusing to do anything about how our candidates are bought by special interests or trying to get people to use less water while letting fracking continue.

What I have proposed here, are ideas for reducing homelessness among our most vulnerable. These suggestions follow the age-old practice for when a ship is sinking to put women and children on the lifeboats first.



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