



The Shifting Gears Initiative 2004-2007

Summary of Evaluation Results and Case Studies of Three Initiative Participants

The Shifting Gears Initiative Sponsored by:
The National Alliance to End Homelessness and
The Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation

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The Shifting Gears Initiative (June 2004-June 2007)

Overview

In June 2004, the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation launched the *Shifting Gears Initiative: Fast Track to Housing for Bay Area Families*.¹ Shifting Gears was a multi-year initiative that worked toward a better future in which periods of family homelessness in the Bay Area are shortened, formerly homeless families are more successful at retaining housing, and fewer at-risk families become homeless. The initiative convened a learning community for a cohort of nine outstanding Bay Area homeless family service providers. After a six-month planning period (during which agencies receive a \$5,000 planning grant), the initiative awarded two one-year grants (\$75,000 per year) to each participating agency. The learning community and the grants supported the cohort in shifting away from “managing” homelessness toward programs and strategies aimed at ending homelessness. These **housing-based strategies** included:

Participating Agencies	
County	Agency
Alameda	➤ Building Futures with Women and Children
	➤ Tri-City Homeless Coalition
Contra Costa	➤ Shelter, Inc.
Marin	➤ Homeward Bound of Marin
San Francisco	➤ Hamilton Family Center
	➤ Raphael House
San Mateo	➤ Shelter Network
Santa Clara	➤ EHC LifeBuilders
	➤ InnVision

- Rapidly placing families in permanent housing (rapid re-housing);
- Providing financial assistance for move-in costs and/or rent until families can become more self-sufficient;
- Providing home-based case management to families and connecting them to other services in the community;
- Preventing at-risk families from losing their homes; and
- Increasing the supply of supportive and affordable housing through advocacy and/or housing development.

How the Initiative Supported the Shift in Service Delivery

Funding for new projects alone is not sufficient to bring about an evolution in service delivery; supporting agencies shift their perspective and philosophy is a necessary component as well. Several design elements of the initiative provided this support:

- Building in an initial planning period;
- Encouraging risk-taking and innovation in project design;
- Convening the participants regularly to provide a range of learning opportunities; and
- Providing trainings for front-line staff at the grantee agencies.

¹ At the time that the Initiative was launched, the Schwab Foundation had grantmaking programs in homelessness, poverty, and substance abuse. The Foundation ended these programs in 2005 and transferred project management and second year grant funds to the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

Initial Planning Period

The initiative included a six-month planning period so that participants could learn about new service delivery models and listen to others in the field before designing their projects. Participants found this planning period very useful; however, participants and organizers learned that an additional ramp-up period *after* grantees received their project funding would have provided the time necessary to do the “foundational work” that is sometimes necessary before making an operational change.

Foundational work is time-consuming and including a wide range of stakeholders: staff, board members, clients, and funders is important. Activities that help these stakeholders make a “cultural shift” include: staff and/or board retreats, staff training, and planning meetings. Changes in operational mechanisms may require new job descriptions, new protocols, and new staff to ensure the right personnel are in place. In addition, cultural shifts often lead to turnover as those who do not agree with the new model may choose to leave the organization.

Innovative Project Design

Funding sources for homeless service agencies are often fairly restrictive, with highly specific grant requirements. This type of funding tends to discourage innovation in service delivery. Shifting Gears grants were meant to be a partial antidote, and essentially became an “incubator” for new solutions to family homelessness. Participation was by invitation only rather than selection through an RFP process. Grants were non-competitive and guaranteed. Recognizing that “failures” often offer the best learning opportunities, the initiative organizers encouraged grantees to take risks in their project design. If an aspect of their projects was not successful, the grantees could change course without penalty.

Participants were extremely appreciative of this aspect of the initiative. Some found that they could consider changes they had never considered before and others found they had the freedom to try out ideas they had not previously had the funding to pursue. For several agencies, this resulted in taking new directions that they had not thought possible at the beginning of the initiative. For example, one grantee strongly believed that long shelter stays fostered family success. Their traditional service delivery model linked services to shelter and transitional housing, encouraging families to stay in order to take advantage of these services. This grantee’s project evolved over the course of the initiative, leading to a much greater focus on a rich array of home-based services. By linking services to permanent housing, this provider changed the incentive structure for families: families no longer had to stay in shelter to access needed services. Instead, they could stay connected with the program after moving out by accessing services that helped them maintain – and thrive in – permanent housing.

Learning Community

Participants were convened as a learning community every two to four months. To reinforce this function of the group, each participating organization identified two members of senior management (usually the executive director and a program director) who were to attend every meeting. This commitment provided the continuity necessary for the group to function effectively as a learning community.

At convenings, guest speakers presented on a variety of topics, including the Housing First model, housing advocacy, harm reduction, and property management. (A complete list of the convening topics is included in an appendix to this brief.) The initiative conveners chose the first few topics presented. For subsequent topics, they asked the participants about what they needed to learn to make shifts at their organizations and then found the best speakers and experts to present to the learning community. Topics presented to the participants challenged the cohort of agencies to consider moving in new directions and gave them access to new ideas, tools, and resources. For one convening, grantees were encouraged to invite board members to an informal presentation and group discussion about rapid re-housing (this special session was designed to help create board buy-in to new service delivery models).

Convenings also allowed for collegial networking. Participants from every agency were enthusiastic about the opportunity the initiative afforded them to get to know their counterparts from other homeless organizations in the region. They appreciated knowing that they were not alone in facing the daily challenges they encountered and valued the ability to contact colleagues for additional resources such as sharing service delivery approaches.

Trainings for Front-Line Staff

Changes to new service delivery models require staff training, but such trainings are expensive for an individual agency. The initiative thus provided trainings for the front-line staff of participating agencies: Housing First, harm reduction, and home-based case management. These trainings not only provided new knowledge about approaches and specific practices, but also gave staff the opportunity to reflect on and grapple with a new philosophy. These opportunities were important to the foundational work needed for organizations to make the transition to housing readiness practices.

Initiative Results

When comparing results from the final year of the Shifting Gears initiative with the year prior, we see dramatic results for participating organizations and the families they serve. Aggregate results for all nine participating organizations are presented below. In addition, included at the end of this document are case studies of three grantees that provide the stories of the shifts that these organizations made as a result of initiative participation.

Participating homeless service providers experienced a major philosophical shift.

Across the cohort, providers increasingly based their service delivery on rapid re-housing principles, and moved away from practices based on housing readiness principles.

- Five providers developed **new mission statements** during the initiative, and four of them reflected an additional commitment to housing-based solutions. These new mission statements emphasize homelessness prevention, supportive housing, rapid re-housing, and voluntary services.
- Seven organizations added **new staff positions** that focused solely on getting families housed.
- Five organizations **revised their case manager job descriptions** so that a focus of the work with client families is to help find housing as soon as possible.
- Two organizations established **homelessness prevention programs**; three expanded these programs.
- Four organizations established the use of **shallow rental subsidies to rapidly re-house families**, and four organizations expanded the use of these subsidies.

Families moved into permanent housing more quickly.

Families had shorter stays in shelter, and even in transitional housing. Not only did this benefit families who returned to permanent housing sooner, but greater turnover expanded the capacity of providers to shelter families.

- All families, whether going to transitional or permanent housing, moved out of shelter sooner: on average, they spent **25 fewer days in shelter** (a 25% decline, from an average of 106 days to 81 days).
- Families moving from **shelter to permanent housing moved 27 days sooner** (a 29% decline, from an average of 89 days to 62 days).
- Families moving from **transitional to permanent housing moved 33 days sooner** (a 9% decline, from an average of 357 days to 324 days).
- Shorter stays in shelter translated into **greater capacity of providers to shelter families that face a housing crisis**, without increasing the number of shelter beds (on average across the cohort, 31% more families per year).

More families received rental subsidies.

Research shows that subsidies are the single most important factor in housing stability, and due to the expansion of subsidy programs in cohort organizations, many more families could take advantage of this benefit.

- **The number of families receiving rental assistance doubled:** during the year prior to the initiative 231 families received rental subsidies; during the last year of the initiative 466 families received them.

More families avoided homelessness.

Adding or expanding homelessness prevention programs also meant that there were families that avoided entering the homeless service system altogether. Agencies provided emergency rental assistance to families that could not make their next rental payment, or provided other financial support (such as grants to pay for utilities). One agency worked with landlords on behalf of tenants to help prevent eviction.

- Participation in the initiative led to **more homelessness prevention programs:** the number of providers in the cohort with homelessness prevention programs rose from three to six.
- **The number of families that avoided homelessness doubled:** in the year prior to the initiative, providers prevented homelessness for 572 families; in the last year of the initiative, providers prevented homelessness for 964 families.

Providers incorporated harm reduction approaches into their programs.

Harm reduction is defined as a set of practical strategies that reduce the negative consequences associated with drug and alcohol use, and non-punitive abstinence. With these strategies staff actively engage with residents, meet drug and alcohol users where they are at, and address the conditions and motivations of drug use along with the use itself. This approach fosters an environment where individuals can openly discuss substance use without fear of judgment or reprisal, and does not condone or condemn drug use.

Harm reduction became a major focus of the philosophical shift among the providers in the Shifting Gears cohort. The initiative hosted harm reduction trainings for executive management as well as front-line staff – trainings which all agencies attended. Providers began to move away from drug testing and zero tolerance. Instead they actively *worked* with those families with drug or alcohol issues, rather than evicting them or screening them out of program participation.

- **All six providers** with **permanent supportive housing** units adopted a harm reduction approach for these units.
- **Seven** out of nine providers adopted harm reduction practices for **family shelters**.
- **Seven** of eight providers **with transitional housing** adopted a harm reduction approach for these programs.

Investments in permanent supportive housing expanded.

Most homeless families are not chronically homeless, but there is a small group that cycles in and out of the homeless services system. They often struggle with a variety of stressors: extreme poverty; substance use; very poor health; or mental illness. This group of families may benefit from permanent supportive housing (PSH): long-term, affordable housing with voluntary supportive services for parents and children. Building PSH ends chronic homelessness for the families living there, and frees up the homeless system to more effectively support families that are experiencing a housing crisis for economic reasons (e.g. temporary unemployment, high medical bills, the loss of a paycheck that comes with divorce, etc).

Over the course of the initiative, providers developed more PSH units, and additional providers began to invest in PSH.

- By the end of the initiative, there were **142 new PSH units**. At the start of the initiative, across the cohort there were 61 units of PSH developed; at the end of the initiative, the number of developed units had risen to 203 and there were an additional 42 in the pipeline.
- **Three providers** that had not developed permanent supportive housing at the start of the initiative, **had developed units (or had units in the pipeline) by the end of the initiative**.
- **Two providers** who had PSH units in the beginning **developed more units over the course of the initiative**.

Providers that participated in the Shifting Gears initiative are well-positioned to apply for funding that will support rapid re-housing for families.

One sign of success is the sustainability of programs for which the Schwab Foundation supplied initial funding. At the end of the initiative, six providers reported that they had been successful in accessing additional dollars for rapid re-housing programs. For example, the cities of San Francisco and San Jose added funding for rapidly re-housing homeless families, and two initiative participants with operations in those cities succeeded in securing this funding. In addition, the department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has released its first RFP for programs using the rapid re-housing model of service delivery for families. Only providers who have experience with this model are eligible for this grant, so by virtue of having participated in the initiative, Shifting Gears providers are qualified for this major source of funding.

The Shifting Gears Learning Community Events

Convening Topic	Presenters	Attendee Types
Launch: Introduction to the Initiative and Presentation “Making the Case for the Shift: The National Perspective”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Nan Roman, <i>Executive Director of NAEH</i> 	Direct Participants in the Initiative: Executive Directors, Program Directors, other Executive Management Staff
Experiences of other Service Providers Implementing Housing-Based Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Britt Shawver, <i>Executive Co-Director of Housing Opportunities for Women in Chicago, IL</i> ➤ Barb Poppe, <i>Executive Director of Community Shelter Board in Columbus, OH</i> 	Direct Participants in the Initiative
Housing Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Geeta Rao, <i>Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California</i> ➤ Julie Snyder, <i>Housing California</i> 	Direct Participants in the Initiative
National Alliance to End Homelessness’ National Conference on Family Homelessness (Various workshops on Housing First, Section 8, Permanent Supportive Housing, Housing Policy, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ All-conference presentation given by Dennis Culhane, <i>Professor of Social Policy and Practice at the University of Pennsylvania</i>, showing the efficacy of housing subsidies in getting and keeping families housed ➤ Presentation at private dinner for initiative participants by a representative of the <i>One Family Campaign, Boston</i> 	Direct Participants and Other Executive Management Staff
Families in Housing: Harm Reduction and Voluntary Service Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Jeannie Little, <i>LCSW, Executive Director of Harm Reduction Therapy Center in SF, CA</i> ➤ Jo’Vel Jones, <i>Support Services Coordinator (Cecil Williams Community House in SF, CA)</i> 	Direct Participants in the Initiative
Institute on Housing First for Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Neil Donovan, <i>Capacity Building Director, NAEH</i> ➤ Brooke Spellman, <i>National Expert on Housing First for Families</i> ➤ Marianne Hughes, <i>Interaction Institute for Social Change</i> 	Direct Participants and Other Executive Management Staff
Housing First for Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Neil Donovan ➤ Brooke Spellman 	Direct Participants and Board Members
Housing First: Overview of program model, and breakout sessions with Beyond Shelter staff on housing search and home-based case management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Tanya Tull, <i>Founder, Beyond Shelter</i> 	Direct Services Staff
Harm Reduction: Implementing harm reduction with families in housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Jeannie Little ➤ Jo’Vel Jones 	Direct Services Staff
Experiences of grantees in implementing projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Grantees (no guest speaker) 	Direct Participants in the Initiative
Issues around Converting Transitional to Permanent Supportive Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Katharine Gale, <i>Supportive Housing Consultant</i> 	Direct Participants and Other Executive Management Staff

Convening Topic	Presenters	Attendee Types
Experiences of grantees in implementing projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Initiative evaluator ➤ Grantees 	Direct Participants in the Initiative
Property Management leadership roundtable addressing the question of whether to partner with property manager, take the function in-house, or use a hybrid model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lauren Hall and Doug Gary 	Direct Participants in the Initiative
Roles of property management and support services team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lauren Hall and Doug Gary 	Direct Services Staff
Best practices providing voluntary, home-based services in scattered site housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Jennifer Ho, <i>Hearth Connection</i> 	Direct Participants in the Initiative
Home-based case management; voluntary services model; family centered services; assertive engagement strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Jennifer Ho, <i>Hearth Connection</i> 	Direct Services Staff
Final summing up of experiences of grantees in implementing projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Initiative evaluator ➤ Grantees 	Direct Participants in the Initiative

The Shifting Gears Initiative: Three Case Studies

Nine service providers participated in the Shifting Gears Initiative, and each had a unique culture, project, and experience. Three agencies are highlighted here in short case studies, each of which exemplifies different themes. At the beginning of the initiative, two agencies had philosophies very different from the housing-focused approach encouraged by the initiative, and one was already moving in that direction. The projects of two agencies focused on making changes to service delivery, and one focused on advocacy and the development of permanent supportive housing. One agency developed an innovative AfterCare program to support children’s well-being – an issue that is sometimes perceived to be at odds with rapid re-housing approaches. Another refocused its services from therapy-centered assistance to more practical supports, such as those for raising incomes and searching for housing. A third agency found that its management of permanent supportive housing units contributed to a shift toward harm reduction in its shelters and transitional housing programs.

Other agencies may be able to recognize something of themselves in the stories of these three organizations, and perhaps can draw lessons from their approaches, challenges, and solutions. Though organizations’ particular context and goals may vary, we hope that sharing these case studies can generate new ideas for pursuing similar strategic and programmatic shifts.

Raphael House

Raphael House, established in 1971, is the first shelter in San Francisco for homeless families. Its program focused on providing a caring residential community for as long as the family needed it. In practice, this meant that despite the fact that Raphael House was an emergency shelter, families stayed on average for six months – and often for over a year.

“This was emergency shelter, but the stays were so long that it felt like transitional housing.”

The goal of the Raphael House project was to shorten the average length of stay by offering move-in grants to families so that they could return to permanent housing. Staff at first resisted this idea, believing that families were being pushed out before they had the opportunity to improve family functioning. They were especially concerned that this new model of service delivery would shortchange the children. But by the time the initiative was over, the average length of stay had been cut in half, the staff believed in the new model, and Raphael House had reconciled its rapid re-housing service delivery with the need to safeguard children’s welfare by greatly expanding its AfterCare services to children.

At first, Raphael House’s Shifting Gears project did not represent a significant departure from its existing approach to working with clients.

When Raphael House joined the initiative, their service delivery model was built around the housing readiness service philosophy. Staff wanted families to stay as long as they needed to, allowing them to take advantage of a wide array of services that promoted healthy family functioning. Another goal was for families to stay long enough to bond with staff, and thus to stay in touch with the program after they moved out. A key validation to their approach came when an outside evaluation conducted during the 1990s found that the longer families stayed at the shelter, the more likely they

“Staff members saw Housing First as a model for simply plopping the families in housing and saying goodbye.”

were to participate in their AfterCare program – the program that Raphael House used to ensure that families thrived after they left the shelter.

The Shifting Gears project design ran counter to the goal of long stays: Raphael House would use the Shifting Gears grant for move-in grants to its families moving out of shelter. These \$1,000-\$3,000 grants would cover all of the costs for a family moving into permanent housing (i.e., first and last month's rent, plus a security deposit). The goal was to move families out as soon as financially possible. However, this goal did not sit well with the Program Director and the case management staff. They worried that if a family stayed for only short time, case managers and families would not have time to bond with each other and families would not participate in AfterCare.

As a result, the project design was customized to complement the housing readiness model: only *certain* families would be eligible for the move-in grants – in other words, just the “housing-ready” families would be “Schwab families.” The program was two-tiered, with the families that were not classified as Schwab families participating in the existing Raphael House model, and a small subset of families labeled as housing-ready and put on the fast track.

The real shift came when a new Program Director was hired, and prioritized the alignment of the Shifting Gears project with Raphael House core values.

Raphael House hired a new Program Director during the first year of the grant, and she made it a primary objective to have *every* family considered a Schwab family, rather than separating families into two tiers, with only one tier seen as ready for housing. But to cultivate staff buy-in for this shift, she needed to reconcile a rapid re-housing approach with prioritizing the welfare of the families, and especially the children. This meant developing programming that ensured that once families were housed, they remained connected to a caring, supportive community.

Raphael House used this tension between rapid re-housing goals and concern for children's needs as the inspiration for a new program – the ChildReach program. The reasons for this program as articulated by the Program Director say it all:

With a reduction in the lengths of stays through Housing First, children have had fewer opportunities to experience all of the activities that Raphael House has to offer families while they are in shelter. Thus, we have realized we need to shift to an approach that supports children and their families no matter where they live, focusing on providing children with an extensive array of services in their new communities. This year we are investing more staff and resources into our AfterCare services for children called ChildReach. Through our ChildReach central tracking system, staff members maintain contact with several hundred children who live around the Bay Area, ascertain their changing needs, connect them with appropriate services that we and other agencies can provide, and make sure that they are improving in their academic and social performance.

The strategy for supporting children's success actually represents a success strategy for the whole family: if the children are thriving, the parents are too. It is “a fun, interactive way for families to stay connected, and it is increasing family contacts after they exit from shelter, enabling us to better track family stability outcomes and to assist families quickly if their housing becomes jeopardized for any reason.” By building connections for children (through educational, cultural, and sports and recreational activities), ChildReach builds a social network for the parents as well.

With the success of the new programming, staff resistance to the rapid re-housing model softened, and staff trainings contributed to the shift as well. During Housing First trainings, staff had a forum

where they could deconstruct the concept of housing readiness in a collective setting, and to question program assumptions and decisions. But most convincing to staff was the fact that their fears were *not* being realized: rapid re-housing did not turn out to be simply a way of moving the families into housing and saying goodbye. Instead, families were excited about the great services that the agency was providing for their children, and these services encouraged families to stay connected to Raphael House.

Once staff saw how they could stay connected with families after shorter shelter stays, Raphael House was able to more easily institute new rapid re-housing practices.

The new Program Director also changed the intervention model from therapy-focused to goal-specific case management. Her background in child development shifted programming to the

“We were running an intensively therapeutic practice – case management was basically therapy.”

perspective of seeing “through a child’s eyes.” Goals for programming moved from solving all of a parent’s problems, to minimizing the disruption that homelessness can cause in children’s lives.

As the new Program Director put it, case management was “tightened up” – no longer was it therapy, and it included reviews at 30, 60, and 90 days to assess progress that families had made toward moving into independent housing. Case managers changed forms and timelines to put this philosophical shift into practice. The goals they previously had for families to accomplish in 30 days could actually be accomplished in two weeks – and the new six-week goal was to have a housing plan (e.g. exploring viable housing options and registering for housing subsidies) in place.

Raphael House staff learned that with their new service delivery model, they shorten bouts of homelessness while maintaining their caring community, while serving even more families.

By the end of the initiative, families were staying at Raphael House for an average of three months rather than six months. They had accomplished this with only a 5% increase in their budget, with the extra dollars put mostly toward financial assistance that families used to move into permanent housing.

“Rapid re-housing had very large ‘bang for the buck:’ with only a 5% increase in the budget, we doubled the shelter capacity.”

Raphael House learned not only about the efficiency of providing move-in grants to shorten stays, but how to tailor their rapid re-housing program so that it continued to create a caring community for its families. The Executive Director and Program Director still see shelter services as vital to helping families thrive, but even more effort is now devoted to their AfterCare program. Their ChildReach program offers scholarships for educational and extracurricular activities, but key to this program has been the emphasis on engaging child-centered activities: weekend field trips, special events, and holiday celebrations. With events such as family day at the beach, or hiking in the woods, ChildReach has made programs fun for the kids, and in doing this has drawn the parents in as well.

Tri-City Homeless Coalition

Tri-City Homeless Coalition (TCHC) began in 1988 as a winter relief program, relying on church facilities for sleeping sites and a St. Vincent de Paul site for a day program and dinner service. At the

beginning of the Shifting Gears Initiative, TCHC had two shelters (one year-round, one winter relief), two transitional housing programs, and an outreach program using a mobile van to provide health services, mental health counseling, and case management to people living on the street.

For TCHC, which had already begun to shift its focus from transitional to permanent housing as the solution to homelessness, the Shifting Gears Initiative presented an opportunity to accelerate changes already in progress. TCHC management believed that expanding the supply of affordable and supportive housing was key to any strategy to end homelessness in their county. Thus, TCHC used the Shifting Gears grant to hire a Housing Campaign Coordinator (HCC) who would coordinate TCHC's

“When we started out, we were all about shelter. By the time we joined Shifting Gears we were much more focused on permanent housing.... Once we got the Shifting Gears funding, that really accelerated everything we did around housing. It was a question of momentum – [Shifting Gears] was a great vehicle to help sell the concept.”

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) development and lead an advocacy effort for housing-based homelessness solutions in Alameda County. By the end of the initiative, TCHC had 65 PSH units and had played an important role in the County's new focus on permanent supportive housing.

The HCC was also responsible for championing a Housing First approach internally. There had been no explicit plans for TCHC to move toward harm reduction in its shelter and transitional housing programs, but this in fact became the most important manifestation of the agency's cultural shift. As TCHC revisited its zero tolerance policies and adopted a harm reduction approach, residents using alcohol or drugs were not necessarily evicted. If they were not disturbing the community, they were able to remain in shelter or transitional housing, while staff supported them in understanding how substance use may interfere with health and housing goals.

The Shifting Gears grant supported TCHC's new focus on developing permanent supportive housing.

One goal of the Shifting Gears project was to build the capacity of TCHC to construct housing, and to pursue actual housing construction. For the two program years, TCHC aimed to develop 50-75 units of housing. During the first year of the grant, TCHC formed a partnership with Allied Housing, a nonprofit organization focusing on the development of special needs and permanent supportive housing and operating several rental subsidy programs augmented by case management services; Allied

“We're never going to build another emergency shelter or transitional housing. We're only going to build permanent supportive housing.”

“It helps to have our own housing – rather than continuously looking for housing in someone else's building, we can put them in our own houses.”

Housing is now a subsidiary of TCHC. Since the partnership was formed, TCHC has taken on the 40 units that Allied Housing already had, and together they began pursuing the development of additional units. They have purchased an apartment building, 26 units of which will be gradually converted to PSH for individuals and families with special needs, as well as those with low and very low incomes. TCHC has become much more proactive about creating PSH opportunities and increasing the housing stock in Alameda County, and estimates that it will be able to develop least 1,000 new units of PSH over the next 10 years.

TCHC's Housing Campaign Coordinator helped promote permanent supportive housing within Alameda County.

TCHC included an advocacy component in its project. Advocacy is an activity that can have great potential to help nonprofits achieve their missions, but service providers rarely have the capacity to

pursue it. TCHC, interested in supporting systems change at the county level, chose to use the Shifting Gears grant to create staff capacity dedicated to advocacy. The HCC was tasked with: (1) educating Housing and Human Services staff in three cities in southern Alameda County (Fremont, Newark, and Union City) about Housing First research; (2) coordinating efforts to develop a southern Alameda County Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness; and (3) leading a process with the Housing and Human Services staff and elected officials in the three cities to create policies to encourage the development of affordable housing.

TCHC's advocacy contributed to the emphasis on housing development in the County's EveryOne Home plan (their 10-year plan to end homelessness) and to Fremont's adoption of this plan for their city. In addition, the fact that the HCC was involved in the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) planning process meant additional resources for the homeless coming to southern and eastern Alameda County that might not otherwise have been available to housing and mental health providers in this region:

The [County's 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness] is about developing housing, and that's partly because we were at the table pushing for that – helping to convince others that housing and services are the wave of the future.

- More Full Service Partnership dollars to the southern & eastern parts of Alameda County;
- New MHSA funding including 20 permanent housing subsidies and subsidies for supportive services for severely mentally ill individuals and families; and
- New THP-Plus funding to provide housing and supportive services to an additional 20 emancipated foster youth.

As TCHC moved toward a greater focus on PSH, and also consciously promoted the Housing First model, there evolved an unanticipated shift away from zero tolerance in shelter and transitional housing.

The HCC worked with TCHC's program developers to focus all of its program planning around the Housing First model. To the extent that this meant getting families rapidly re-housed, such an approach fit well with current practice, and aroused no significant resistance from front-line staff. However, participation in the Shifting Gears Initiative also led TCHC management to revisit zero tolerance policies in their shelter and transitional housing programs. As the initiative participants learned more about harm reduction, and front-line staff were brought to Initiative-sponsored harm reduction trainings, debate about zero tolerance policies was opened up.

TCHC discussions of harm reduction practices dovetailed with the organization's foray into PSH. With more program participants housed in their own homes, TCHC staff found themselves less in a position to sanction residents for drug or alcohol use than when the participants were shelter residents. This shift away from a zero tolerance approach for PSH residents soon spread to shelter and transitional housing programs: staff began to feel that all residents should be treated similarly. So without explicitly changing their shelter or transitional housing policies, they began to change their practices.

This transition to a harm reduction approach was not, however, without its challenges. The zero tolerance policies were not simply regulations, but were also in accord with front-line staff attitudes. At TCHC, the program staff were often recovered alcohol and substance users themselves and believed passionately in sobriety. TCHC handled this challenge by moving slowly – not rewriting policies yet, but instead allowing the practices to gradually evolve. Some of the steps taken to gradually shift to a harm reduction approach included:

- Conducting trainings where staff could engage with the harm reduction approach, learning that sobriety can still be a goal within a harm reduction context;
- Supervisors working one-on-one with sober staff who felt betrayed by harm reduction,
- Using “case conferences” at staff meetings to explore how staff could handle specific difficult situations from a harm reduction perspective; and
- Basing decisions about particular residents not on substance or alcohol use itself, but instead on *behavior* (requiring that the behavior of the client remain compatible with the communal living of a shelter environment).

Homeward Bound of Marin

Homeward Bound, established in 1974, is an organization infused with the ethic of care: the staff care about the families, bond with the parents and their children, and want to ensure that after the trauma that has culminated in homelessness they have a safe and nurturing place to be – and a place that they can stay as long as they need to. In practice this has meant programs very much in line with the continuum of care model and with the principles of housing readiness. Homeward Bound had an emergency family shelter, short-term transitional housing, longer-term transitional housing, and long-term transitional housing (with stays of up to two years). Families tended to “graduate” from one to the next.

Because the tightening housing market and increasing poverty meant that client families were staying at Homeward Bound longer and longer, the agency responded by building their service capacity. As they added services (including family therapy, family skills training, trauma counseling, parenting programs, health education, and after-school activities), staff saw these services as key to the process of healing from the trauma of homelessness and critical to the future of housing stability. While staff knew that all the clients would need permanent housing in the future, their focus was on connecting clients with the right services and therapeutic progress.

[Before Shifting Gears,] we were adjusting [to increases in family homelessness by] enhancing services – we weren’t going in the housing direction. [We said to ourselves:] “If people are going to be here forever, we’ve got to provide them with more services.”

The Executive Director and Program Director, the two members of senior management who attended Shifting Gears convenings, both experienced a radical shift in perspective soon after the beginning of the initiative, and they embarked on an effort to turn Homeward Bound’s response to family homelessness 180 degrees. Instead of responding to a housing crisis by continuing to extend stays and build out services, Homeward Bound would address all the factors within their control to help families get into permanent housing. By the end of the initiative, their programs were concentrating in four areas to get families into housing: changing client perspectives so that they focused on finding housing; helping clients with the housing search; raising client incomes; and working with landlords to encourage them to house Homeward Bound clients.

There was early resistance to the new approach, but senior management worked actively with staff to build buy-in.

As senior management began to put forward the rapid re-housing principles, staff were challenged to incorporate these new views. They resisted the idea that the values on which they had been building the Homeward Bound approach were not the “right” ones – were the ways in which they currently worked with the clients counterproductive? The Executive Director met this challenge with the argument that what had gone before was *not* invalid. She affirmed that the services the staff

had developed were excellent and helpful, and that they could be even more helpful when made available to clients when they were in housing.

Another way that she lessened the “shock to the system” represented by rapid re-housing principles was to avoid imposing them from the top down. Instead, she made clear that this was a conversation rather than a dictum, and that staff were invited to shape the new approaches. Service delivery models were a constant topic of conversation – at weekly staff meetings, staff retreats, and during a strategic planning process.

Homeward Bound helped residents to shift their perspective from “taking advantage of access to services,” to “finding housing as soon as possible.”

As part of the Shifting Gears project, Homeward Bound hired a Housing Specialist, and one of her first projects was to reshape the client intake process. Before Shifting Gears, the goal of intake had been largely to plan the services that the family would participate in, and the housing search would begin only as a family approached the end of their time in transitional housing. Now the housing search begins at intake, when the caseworker lets the client know what income they will have to earn to afford housing and what it will take to get there. With the new process, clients now get realistic views of the type of housing they can afford, and set income goals to put that housing within their reach. Clients also set goals to find housing as soon as possible.

We need to ingrain into residents as soon as they come in the door – the whole reason for being here is to move.

Supporting an attitude shift among clients continues past intake. Case managers meet with clients often to revisit their rapid re-housing action plans, and one-on-one counseling sessions emphasize such practical matters as the housing search, credit repair, and employment search.

Homeward Bound also has traditionally held weekly community meetings with clients, but the focus of those meetings changed over the course of the Shifting Gears project. Instead of being a forum for talking about “house issues” (e.g. keeping common spaces neat), meetings have become a place to reaffirm the commitment to becoming housed. Clients share housing resources with one another and focus their attention on the various tasks associated with securing housing such as credit repair and job search activities.

Homeward Bound began working with clients to help income match housing options.

With the movement away from the philosophy of housing readiness, Homeward Bound reconceived the problem of homelessness as an economic one: the mismatch between incomes and housing options. This led to a new focus on vocational issues. Recognizing that clients needed jobs that paid \$8-\$10/hour in order to afford even subsidized housing, Homeward Bound staff took on new responsibilities, helping people with employment searches and resume development. During the first year of the grant, Homeward Bound was already having success with helping people to find jobs at these wage levels. Over the course of the grant, Homeward Bound increased its working relationship with organizations that are able to help residents with employment: CalWORKS, Marin Employment Connection, and Marin Family Action.

Now we see rapid re-housing is possible. Now we're thinking in terms of how we can use our services to get people in housing as quickly as possible.... It's: “can we speed up the process? What do we do to get them working?” It's gotten us focused on addressing the realities to get people housed.

To help clients find and maintain housing, Homeward Bound has developed a network of landlords, and helps to broker the landlord/tenant relationship.

Lack of income is not the only barrier to market-rate rental housing for the formerly homeless, homeless families can have a difficult time finding landlords who will rent to them due to histories that may include bad credit, eviction, or property damage. These families pose a financial risk to landlords and property managers that they are often not willing to bear. By cultivating relationships with landlords, agencies can act as a “trust intermediary,” brokering the relationship between tenant and landlord. In this way, they dramatically reduce the perceived financial risk of renting to homeless families and expanded housing opportunities for each agency’s clients. Landlords housing Homeward Bound clients trust the agency because of the work that the Housing Specialist has done in working with landlord and tenant as any issues arise.

Homeward Bound’s Executive Director sees the major achievement as “agency-wide acceptance of the concept of Housing First.”

Staff have been able to keep their minds open about rapidly re-housing clients whom – in the past – they would have seen as “not ready for housing.” Now, they help clients move into housing even if unresolved issues remained. Although before the Shifting Gears grant they would have been skeptical about this, moves had been successful and these families remained housed and employed.

[For clients with substance use issues,] employment has become a vital piece of their recovery – a job and staying on track with their housing goals are now seen as things to stay clean for.

Once they began to shift their perspective, staff at Homeward Bound realized that there were some clients who had been staying in shelter and transitional housing longer than they truly needed to. Because the approach had put therapy at the center, clients often “spent more time analyzing [therapeutic] issues rather than focusing on their own housing search.” After Homeward Bound began to focus increasingly on practical issues such as the housing search and raising incomes, staff found that “our residents have been less angst-ridden about their other issues (e.g. recovery, legal issues, etc).” Ultimately, staff have been cheered by their client successes and by the realization that focusing on housing works. Homeward Bound’s Executive Director says that: “From the board, through the leadership team, to the line staff, we recognize that every homeless person is ready for a roof over their head. This has led to a cultural shift away from a one-size-fits-all method of service delivery. We recognize that not everybody needs all of the services that we provide, but everybody needs housing.”