

Report to Albany City Council: the first 90 days July 2 – September 23

Activities To-Date

The Berkeley Food and Housing Project (BFHP), in partnership with staff of the Solano Community Church (SCC), began formal outreach and engagement activities to persons residing in the Albany Bulb on July 1, 2013. The program, entitled Project HOPE (Housing Opportunities Expanded), intended to build upon the existing rapport the Church had with households residing in the Bulb, given the outreach they had been conducting for many years previously in an informal, episodic manner.

Project Hope activities began with housing-centered outreach to all residents of the Bulb. Of the approximately 70 that were estimated to be residing on the Bulb, 56 were willing to engage in outreach conversations with BFHP staff. Of those 56 individuals, 40 have been willing to complete a housing assessment. The others although willing to engage in conversation are not willing at this time to provide any formal information to BFHP staff. The assessment included: last permanent residence prior to becoming homeless, disability status, prior evictions, criminal history, HIV status, age (particularly to determine if 62 and older), and veteran status. This information is critical to determining eligibility for various subsidy programs, tax credits and affordable housing. Additionally, residents were assessed on their use of various services (i.e. housing, shelter, medical) from other agencies, their monthly income, rental history, co-signer availability, household status and number of members, and availability of basic identification. All of the aforementioned information is critical to determining what below-market-rate units the household can afford to secure and sustain.

Of the 40 residents who have completed an assessment, 22 have shown some interest in housing and were willing to share the personal information necessary to complete an HMIS intake. The intake includes such information as demographics and date of birth, all of which was then entered into the centralized Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) database.

For the 22 people that successfully completed both an assessment, BFHP's housing team arrived at the Bulb every Tuesday and Thursday with a mobile laptop and printer to show photos and relevant information (e.g. neighborhood maps, amenities) regarding available units. Once the client(s) expressed interest in physically viewing the unit(s), BFHP staff scheduled an appointment to tour the site. The time and day of the viewing was strictly determined by the client and could occur on any weekday (M-F) within reason, pending the availability of the property owner. (If the viewing occurred during a Tuesday or Thursday (BFHP's regularly scheduled onsite days), staff posted a notice on the Community Message Board letting other Bulb residents know that we would be off site.) If a client was not present for a viewing appointment, BFHP staff made a number of follow-ups via telephone and in-person. During the non-outreach days of Monday, Wednesday and Friday, BFHP staff continued to research properties to have on hand to show clients upon traveling onsite to the Bulb.

To-date, staff has accompanied seven people a total of sixteen (16) different times to view rental units located in the cities of Oakland, Richmond and El Cerrito. (see attached log sheet) The

remaining 15 people have not yet seen available housing stock that meets their specifications so have not seen any value in housing search with BFHP staff. (i.e. rent burden, pet ownership, geography etc)

One (1) single adult male has been successfully housed; the client did not require the assistance of ESG monies. The client was housed within three (3) weeks. Throughout the entire process, from outreach to placement, the client demonstrated an active commitment to his housing placement and stabilization plan. The individual had employment at the time of initial outreach, intake and assessment, but experienced a loss in employment as the housing search was ramping up. Fortunately, BFHP's Employment and Income Services Program was able to assist the client in securing new employment, thus allowing the housing process to continue with minimal interruption.

*While the presence of income proved to be invaluable to housing this client successfully and efficiently, **BFHP's housing location and placement services are not contingent on a client having income at the time of initial contact.** To this end, we have provided some activities in this reporting period through BFHP's Employment and Income Services Program. This program is able to assist clients with vocational soft skills activities, assistance with completing applications to mainstream benefit programs (i.e. SSI offers sufficient income for procuring housing), and linkages to workforce development specialty providers for more intensive training.*

As written in our RFP, we assumed that during the first 60 days much of our activity would be spent in the initiating and development of a working relationship with Albany homeless residents, learning their needs and beginning the initial steps of working with them to develop housing plans. As described in our work timeline, we anticipated that housing search activities would not begin until the 3rd service month which started September 1st.

We had anticipated providing housing search and placement activities for about 20 people in late August and through September. The following challenges will describe why our estimated numbers are not met as to date.

Challenges

As you might imagine, there have been a number of programmatic challenges starting up a new service especially an outreach service.

Outreach

Solano Community Church did a great job providing outreach prior to our collaboration. Although the Church's previous outreach was extremely helpful, there was much our own team needed to do to come up to speed in Albany once we began active outreach ourselves. Reasonably enough, since we were not representatives from the known SCC but instead an outside services agency, the Bulb residents have been cautious in their encounters with us. As we

anticipated, we needed to initiate and develop our own relationships with Albany's chronically homeless residents who might be reasonably wary of social services agencies. We needed to let them know the scope of our work in Albany and what we might be able to offer through our networks.

Given the various surrounding issues that are particular to the project at the Albany Bulb, especially the history of previous interventions that is still fresh into the minds of some of the residents, engagement has been an uphill, incremental process and one that requires constant contact and relationship cultivation. BFHP sees the outreach it has provided to-date as a foundation that is viable and may be further built upon.

Housing related challenges

ID's

On a more practical note, throughout many of our initial outreach conversations, it became evident that many of the residents had no form of identification (ID). While ID is not mandatory in every case, it is highly difficult to access permanent housing without it.

Fortunately, BFHP has an extensive network of property management partners with whom it works regularly. Some of these partners are amenable to overlooking a lack of ID when the client/applicant presents at a viewing, assuming that BFHP is endorsing the applicant and working with the client on securing an ID prior to move-in.

But to cover all of our bases, BFHP staff provided 15 residents of the Bulb with ID fee reduction documents that would reduce the cost of obtaining an ID from \$24.00 to \$7.00. Additionally, BFHP offered to escort clients to the Social Security Administration to submit for a Social Security Card; and in certain circumstances we provided transit passes. (20).

Following are additional challenges specific to housing outcomes

- Ownership of multiple dog(s), particularly with respect to breed and/or size, which significantly limits the scope of available rental properties.
- Poor credit which is not of itself an insurmountable barrier, particularly if the household agrees to BFHP being a representative payee.
- Prior evictions which, again, is not of itself an insurmountable barrier, as BFHP has robust referral relationships with organizations whose core competence is to assist

households in dealing with these issues, namely the East Bay Community Law Center and the Homeless Action Center.

- Bulb residents who do not wish to relocate to areas outside of the Bulb or the City of Albany. Given the high median rental prices of many of the cities around the Bay Area, including Albany and Berkeley, the majority of low income housing is located in cities such as Oakland, San Leandro, Richmond, Hayward and San Lorenzo.
- Bulb residents who do not wish to be housed. One resident in particular exhibited a marked anxiety regarding the windows, locks and doors that are inherent in housing units.
- Missed rental viewing appointments and lost-to-follow-up. Many of the residents with whom BFHP staff scheduled appointments did not answer their telephones when staff called for reminder checks or, in the case of them missing their appointment, to reschedule.
- Hesitancy in spending a portion of their monthly income on housing even with the assistance of rental subsidies such as Section 8 and Shelter + Care.
- No income While the presence of income at initial contact is not mandatory for BFHP staff to work with clients, income (employment or through mainstream benefits) is critical to obtaining and sustaining permanent housing.

Step by Step BFHP 's Housing Case Management Program

Step 1: Do an assessment and determine barriers

If barrier is I.D. or social security card, we offer I.D. fee reduction and bus pass, if barrier is social security card we take them to social security office

Step 2: Determine where the client wants to live, what he/she wants to pay, and assess barriers such as multiple pets

Step 3: do credit check and eviction hx

Step 4: If evictions exist and there is poor credit, we offer to pay a larger deposit.

If evictions appear to be the barrier we refer client to East Bay Community Law Center.

(Cleaning up credit, criminal, and eviction history takes much longer than the housing process and we could only get them started toward that process in the time allotted for our contract in Albany. However, since there is the potential for them to get housed in the future even with these barriers, we will now begin to follow through on these longer solutions.)

Step 5: Find Properties

Step 6: Show properties

Step 7: Apply for units;

Plans for the next 30 days Oct 1 – Oct 31

Given all the challenges both related to developing effective outreach services and providing services that would provide benefit to Albany homeless residents we are suggesting two new activities in the next 30 days

1. Begin an effort to determine if for any of the clients with little or no income, if there might be friend or family who might be willing to provide housing. If there are, we will work on family reunification and use Albany contract fund as needed to cover any practical reunification costs.
2. Services Fair to create a fair at the Bulb to provide additional resources brought in by other community agencies such as health services, behavioral health services, shelter services, and benefits advocacy.