

Housing First Collaborative  
Year One Evaluation Report  
Executive Summary

CHARLES AND HELEN  
SCHWAB *foundation*

HOMELESSNESS

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

LEARNING DISABILITIES

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This executive summary was prepared for the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation by LaFrance Associates, LLC, a research and evaluation consulting firm serving organizations in the nonprofit, philanthropic and public sectors.

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# overview

## THIS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY COVERS THE FOLLOWING TOPICS:

- ★ Need for and origins of the Housing First project
- ★ Evaluation
- ★ Goals of the Housing First project
- ★ Project activities to help participants acquire and retain housing
- ★ Results for participants, the collaborative and the community
- ★ Development and change of the Housing First program
- ★ Added value of collaboration
- ★ Success stories of Housing First families

## NEED FOR AND ORIGINS OF THE HOUSING FIRST PROJECT

Over the past several decades, falling real wages for low-income earners and escalating housing prices have put homes out of reach for a rising number of California families. To combat the growing problem of family homelessness in Santa Clara County, the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation convened a group of homeless service providers, individuals from local housing authorities and funders in September 2002 to design a pilot Housing First project.

Programs that use a “Housing First” approach share the common goal of rapidly re-housing homeless individuals and families into permanent housing. Most Housing First programs provide home-based case management services after families have been re-housed to help them maintain their housing and become better connected to mainstream services that can help to stabilize and sustain them.

The county presents a challenging environment in which to pilot a Housing First project, which the Schwab Foundation launched in July 2003, with the Housing Industry Foundation as a funding partner, in collaboration with two nonprofit homeless service providers — the Emergency Housing Consortium and InnVision — the Santa Clara County Housing Authority. Each of these organizations participated in planning for the project and was funded to staff positions within the Housing First team. (In July 2004, the Housing Authority formally withdrew from the collaborative, although it continues to provide support to the project. A new partner, Sacred Heart Community Service, came on board in August 2004.)

The Housing First team consists of a project director, two case managers, and a housing search specialist. The collaborative also includes a steering committee, and an advisory group. The steering committee currently has one member from each of the participating agencies; the advisory group consists of the steering committee members, in addition to representatives from the Housing Authority and the Schwab Foundation.

The original design of the Housing First project included a Section 8 program and a Market Rate program. The Housing Authority was to provide 100 vouchers per year to Housing First clients, and the team also had a goal of housing a minimum of 25 families in market rate housing.

The project's primary goal is to reduce the length of time that participating families are homeless and to prevent recurrence of homelessness. Beyond that, the pilot project was designed to build stronger relationships among agencies that provide services to homeless families. By strengthening collaboration and promoting the Housing First approach across agencies, the project has the potential to have a larger impact on the services available to homeless families in Santa Clara County.

## THE EVALUATION

In May 2003, the Schwab Foundation hired LaFrance Associates, LLC (LFA) to document the implementation and assess outcomes of the Housing First pilot project in Santa Clara County. The purpose of this evaluation is to provide ongoing information that will support learning and reflection among the project funders and other project stakeholders, as well as to assess the effectiveness of this effort.

This is the first of three annual reports LFA will produce over the course of the three-year pilot project. It is based on interviews with members of the Housing First team, members of the Housing First Steering Committee, and a representative of the Schwab Foundation; observation of quarterly Housing First Advisory Committee meetings; and participant-level data collected at program enrollment, at the time of housing acquisition, and through a follow-up survey administered to participants three months after program entry.

## GOALS OF THE HOUSING FIRST PROJECT

The Housing First project has a range of objectives for participants, the collaborative, and the community. These are listed below:

### *Goals for Participating Families*

- ★ Acquire and remain in stable housing
- ★ Maintain or increase financial stability
- ★ Increase money management skills
- ★ Maintain or increase children's school attendance

### *Goals for the Collaborative*

- ★ Stronger collaborative relationships among the participating organizations

### *Goals for the Community*

- ★ More options for homeless families in Santa Clara County
- ★ Fewer homeless families entering and remaining in the shelter system

## PROJECT ACTIVITIES TO HELP PARTICIPANTS ACQUIRE AND RETAIN HOUSING

The Housing First team engages in a range of activities to rapidly re-house its clients and to help them remain stably housed. These activities are summarized in the table below.

Summary of Program Activities	
Service Categories	Activities of the Housing First Team
Housing services to help participants find and acquire permanent housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A housing specialist works as a member of the Housing First team. The duties of this staff member are to assist families to locate housing and negotiate lease terms, aid Section 8 families through the voucher process, and serve as liaison to landlords and property owners.</li> <li>• Due to changes in HUD rules regarding Section 8 vouchers and the need to enroll Section 8 Housing First clients from the Section 8 waiting list, the housing search specialist had to spend more time on Section 8 issues than the collaborative had anticipated. Therefore, she was not able to spend as much time with the Market Rate clients as originally planned.</li> </ul>
Direct financial aid to assist with move-in costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To date, Housing First has provided a total of \$75,051 to participants in move-in costs. The program has provided participants who have moved into housing an average of \$873.</li> </ul>
Access to Section 8 vouchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Despite the difficulties involved in issuing Section 8 vouchers to participating families, the Housing First team issued 47 vouchers before further issuance was suspended in November 2003.</li> <li>• In July 2004, vouchers were once again made available and, in August, the Housing First team issued vouchers to seven families.</li> <li>• Section 8 housing enrollment will continue until the team has issued all 100 vouchers.</li> </ul>
Intensive home-based case management to stabilize families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For the first six months of the project, case managers were primarily involved with screening families for the Section 8 program.</li> <li>• In February 2004, case managers were able to shift their focus to providing intensive case management.</li> <li>• Case managers are able to find out a great deal about the needs of their clients, and clients appreciate the extensive assistance they get with accessing services and making progress on their Family Assistance Plans.</li> </ul>

<p>Access to donated goods and other resources provided to clients of EHC and InnVision</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families have had access to the warehouses at both EHC and InnVision, and have been able to choose clothing and furniture, in addition to other household items.</li> <li>• EHC and InnVision have given to participating families food vouchers, school supplies, toiletries and Christmas gifts.</li> <li>• Beyond move-in costs, EHC and InnVision have also given families financial assistance to help them pay utility bills and meet monthly rent.</li> </ul>
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## RESULTS FOR THE PARTICIPANTS, THE COLLABORATIVE AND THE COMMUNITY

Results of the Housing First project for participants are overwhelmingly positive, and results for the collaborative and the community are very positive also. Of special note are the findings on acquisition and retention of housing for participating families.

- ★ Out of 76 families housed by the end of August, only *one* client had lost housing (due to non-compliance with Housing Authority rules for Section 8). None had lost housing due to financial reasons, nor had any clients – aside from the one client who did not comply with Section 8 rules – lost housing due to behavioral issues. This is strong evidence that the financial assistance and case management of the Housing First team helped these families remain stably housed.
- ★ In addition, it took these families an average of only *19 days* to become housed. How does this compare to the length of time it takes homeless families to get housed when they participate in emergency shelter and transitional housing programs? An exact comparison is not available, but statistics of average length of stay in Emergency Housing Consortium (EHC) shelter and transitional housing programs can be used for the purposes of a rough comparison. EHC has a very high success rate in getting its emergency shelter and transitional housing clients placed in permanent housing – nevertheless, the average length of stay in each program is 106 and 235 days, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed look at this comparison, see the full report, Section VII B.

Below is a table summarizing the results of the Housing First project, and the extent to which it has accomplished its goals.

Summary of Housing First Accomplishments in Relation to its Goals	
Initiative Goals	Accomplishments of the Collaborative
Participating Families	<p>Acquire and remain in stable housing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ As of the end of August 2004, the project has enrolled 86 families and successfully housed 76 (88%) of them.</li> <li>★ It took families only 19 days, on average, to acquire housing.</li> <li>★ 52 families are enrolled in the Section 8 program, and 47 of them are housed. The goal for year 1 was to have 100 housed, but vouchers were suspended from November 2003 to July 2004. The vouchers are once again being issued.</li> <li>★ 34 families are enrolled in the Market Rate program, and 29 of them are housed, thus exceeding the goal of providing 25 families with Market Rate housing in year 1.</li> <li>★ One family has lost housing due to Section 8 non-compliance; all other housed families have kept their homes. Financial assistance and case management from Housing First has helped these families remain stably housed.</li> </ul>
	<p>Financial stability maintained or increased</p> <p>Of the 69 clients who turned in surveys:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ The incomes of 29% of the families had increased since enrolling in Housing First.</li> <li>★ 46% of the families had accumulated some savings.</li> <li>★ 56% reported that their financial situation had improved.</li> </ul>
	<p>Knowledge of money management skills increased</p> <p>Of the 69 clients who turned in surveys:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ 84% reported having drawn up family budgets.</li> <li>★ Of those who did not already have a checking or savings account, 17% had opened one.</li> </ul>
	<p>Children's school attendance maintained or increased</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ At baseline, 95% of school-aged children were enrolled in school. In surveys, clients report that 90% of children are enrolled. This apparent drop in enrollment is probably an artifact of the way the question was asked; it does not specify school-aged children, so some clients with children under 5 may have answered "no" to "are your children enrolled in school?"</li> <li>★ Of the 69 clients surveyed, 36% reported that the school attendance of their child(ren) had improved.</li> </ul>

Collaborative	Stronger collaborative relationships among participating organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ EHC and InnVision entered the collaborative with a history of competition. Housing First team members and members of the steering committee have consistently set aside issues of competition and turf in order to further the mission of the initiative.</li> <li>★ Members of the Housing First team have committed to forging collegial relationships by emphasizing open communication, and the steering committee has assisted in this process.</li> <li>★ After initial difficulties in making EHC and InnVision warehouses open to the clients of the other agency, team members have worked this out; each now has access to the warehouse of the other.</li> <li>★ When reapplying to the Schwab Foundation for Year 2 funding, EHC and InnVision submitted a joint application, requesting that the funds be granted to ECH, which would disburse them to collaborative members. This joint application indicates growing trust between the two agencies.</li> <li>★ Although the Housing Authority withdrew from the collaborative, it developed a stake in the success of Housing First and continues to aid in issuing vouchers to Housing First clients.</li> </ul>
Community	Increased options for homeless families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ The goal of Housing First is to prevent and end homelessness; however, the initiative is only in the beginning of its second year. The community objectives are unlikely to be achieved so early in the project – therefore, these outcomes were not measured for the Year 1 report. Nevertheless, there are two reasons to believe that progress toward these goals is in fact being made:</li> <li>★ Year 1 outcomes for families are very encouraging in terms of families finding permanent housing rapidly, and remaining stably housed (thus avoiding the shelter system).</li> <li>★ Collaborative members are making concerted efforts to expose others in the community to the Housing First concept, and they are achieving buy-in at their own organizations. As the two leading homeless service providers in Santa Clara County, they have a great deal of influence over the direction that agencies will take in the future.</li> <li>★ As a greater number of agencies shape their programs according to Housing First principles, both the options and prospects for homeless families will increase.</li> </ul>

## DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE OF THE HOUSING FIRST PROGRAM

During its first year, the Housing First Collaborative faced a range of challenges related to the Section 8 housing voucher crisis. The crisis ultimately meant that the Housing Authority could not issue 100 vouchers per year to Housing First clients. While these challenges made program implementation difficult, the collaborative used them as opportunities to further develop their program and create greater opportunity for their Market Rate clients.

In the fall of 2003, the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) announced significant changes to the funding and rules for Section 8 vouchers which

left Housing Authorities across the country without the funds needed to cover all of their vouchers. The Santa Clara County Housing Authority let the Housing First team know that they should lease up as many vouchers as possible, or they risked losing them due to this budget crisis. In November 2003, after 47 vouchers had been released to Housing First clients, further voucher release was suspended, and the future of the vouchers was uncertain. At the end of July 2004, the Housing Authority began to once again release vouchers to the Housing First clients, committing to issue 53 additional ones: the balance of their year 1 allocation to Housing First clients.

HUD also imposed new third-party verification rules, which required contacting employers, banks and other institutions to verify the income of Section 8 applicants. For approximately six weeks, before these tasks were handed over to Housing Authority staff, the Housing First team had responsibility for this extremely time-consuming process of third-party verification.

The Housing First team could not have anticipated the challenges related to accessing Section 8 vouchers for participants. During the first several months of the project, much of the attention of the Housing First team turned to screening participants for eligibility for these vouchers, helping them through the process of accessing the vouchers, and dealing with the reduction in the availability of vouchers and its implications for the project. As a result, case managers were not able to spend as much time on case management as was needed to fully address the needs of the participating families.

The collaborative turned the challenge of voucher suspension into an opportunity. While 53 vouchers were eventually made available again, there was a period of months during which the collaborative knew that they could not count on them for the success of the project. Therefore, they researched other Housing First projects around the country that do not depend on Section 8 housing subsidies, and used what they learned to come up with a new strategy for financial assistance. This system will allow the collaborative to flexibly target its financial assistance to 79 families in year 2 with different types and levels of need. Such flexible targeting will allow the collaborative to allocate financial assistance efficiently – dollars will go where they are most needed in order to maximize the number of families effectively served within a given set of budget constraints. The multi-tier system of financial assistance is summarized in the table on the following page.

Multi-Tier Financial Assistance				
Tier	Family Need Profile	Assistance Amount	Details of Financial Assistance	Target Number of Families to Serve
1	Need for move-in costs only	\$2,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Move-in costs (including security deposit and first month's rent)</li> <li>★ As-needed assistance throughout the year (e.g., utilities) for those families who do not use up their initial \$2,000 allotment</li> </ul>	49
2	Need for periodic financial assistance throughout the year	\$3,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Move-in costs</li> <li>★ As-needed assistance with other expenses throughout the year (e.g., utilities)</li> </ul>	10
3	Need for consistent financial support throughout the year	\$4,600	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ Up to \$1,000 for move-in costs.</li> <li>★ Shallow subsidy up to \$200 month for 12 months to provide support for monthly rent and utilities.</li> </ul>	20

## THE ADDED VALUE OF COLLABORATION

Those involved in planning for the collaboration between the Emergency Housing Consortium, InnVision and the Santa Clara Housing Authority knew they would be forging a new and not an entirely easy partnership. It required a lot of persistence and enthusiasm to build a team of four staff from three different agencies during the first nine months of the project. In particular, the staff of the project have faced some challenges getting the two homeless service providers to develop trust and share resources for the project. In the end, resource-sharing became one of the most striking benefits of collaboration.

The collaborative has been able to extend greater help to the families by pooling its resources. For example, a client of an EHC case manager was in crisis, and EHC was able to access InnVision resources in order to help that family. The house of this family had burned down, and EHC had delivered furniture. As it turned out, the furniture was bug-infested. EHC,

however, does not have the resources to pick up from clients – but InnVision does. The InnVision case manager went to a supervisor, who gave the go-ahead to pick up the furniture from this family. The collaborative was able to help the family out during this difficult time, whereas EHC alone would not have been able to offer this particular type of support.

Another important benefit to a collaborative is the opportunity it creates for pooling knowledge within the team and among the participating agencies – knowledge that can be put to use in helping homeless families. One of the Housing First team members emphasized that her colleague is “a wealth of knowledge about resources in the area,” and that her input is often helpful as she manages her own cases. But beyond sharing her knowledge with others in the Housing First team, this case manager also emails information to any others who need it at the partner agency. Creating this type of access to the knowledge of others provides individuals and organizations with an extremely efficient mechanism for knowledge sharing.

## SUCCESS STORIES OF HOUSING FIRST FAMILIES

### *Wanda and Oneda*

Before enrolling in Housing First, Wanda and her 10-year-old daughter, Oneda, were living in a garage. Wanda told her case manager that conditions were so bad where she lived that she cried herself to sleep every night. The landlord who lived in the house was very sensitive to noise, and when Oneda made noise when she was playing, the landlord would threaten Wanda with eviction. Wanda lived in fear of being homeless with her child.

Wanda was issued a Section 8 voucher and was able to find housing. Housing First was able to help Wanda with a security deposit, rent and gas vouchers to allow her to commute to cosmetology school. The program also provided vouchers for food and toiletries, and bought Oneda a backpack filled with school supplies. Housing First also adopted this family for Christmas in 2003, and gave them what Wanda called “the best Christmas they ever had.”

Wanda found the intensive case management valuable not only because of the referrals and support services, but also because it gave her someone to talk to – someone to help her hang on to the belief that she could accomplish her goals. She also appreciated the fact that her case manager would address any concern she had about income, school, rent or other issues by supplying information and helping her step by step through whatever process she faced.

This family has done very well in Housing First, having worked hard to accomplish their goals. Wanda matter-of-factly does what she needs to do to improve conditions for herself and her daughter. Once she is on her feet, she wants to come back to Housing First and offer her services as a volunteer.

### *Dave and Brendan*

Dave and his 10-year-old son, Brendan, were referred to Housing First after they applied for emergency housing at a homeless shelter. When his case manager first met Dave, he was going through a terrible divorce with a woman who was incarcerated for drug possession and sales. Dave is a former drug addict who chose to get sober and divorce his wife for the sake of his son. All he wanted was a stable home for Brendan, but he needed to leave his

wife and the lifestyle that surrounded them. He chose to stay with his mother since his wife continued to choose drugs. When Dave's mother recommended that they get their own place, Dave did not know what to do. Though he has been at the same job for eight years, he knew his income would barely cover rent, not to mention a security deposit, divorce lawyer fees, childcare costs and the other expenses needed to have a reasonable standard of living in Silicon Valley.

After Dave enrolled in Housing First, the program paid the security deposit and first month's rent for a nice two-bedroom unit, which was affordable in relation to his income. With the support of case management that helps him with budgeting, working toward goals and linking to community services and resources, Dave has remained in the two-bedroom unit for almost a year. During this time he has managed to save over \$1000, was finally promoted at his job, was awarded financial assistance for his son's daycare, and has paid off one of his credit cards. He has arranged for his son to visit with his mother (who has since been released from jail and enrolled in a recovery program). Dave has paid his rent on time every month and he is caught up on all his payments. He and his son have done very well in the past year and his case manager is proud to say that they will graduate with honors from Housing First in November 2004.

## CONCLUSION

By all accounts, the path that the collaborative has taken has not been a straight or smooth one. Nevertheless, it is clear that the participants came together to overcome its various challenges and forge a strong foundation for future progress. It has enrolled 86 families and housed 76 of them. These families found housing in a little less than three weeks, on average. The team has helped to put its clients on the road to continued financial, personal and housing stability. It used the Section 8 voucher crisis as an opportunity to revitalize the Market Rate program, creating a model for success even in the absence of Section 8 subsidies. It has survived the loss of the Housing Authority as a partner extremely well. The Housing Authority continues to support the goals of the initiative, issuing the remaining vouchers and aiding in releasing them to Housing First participants. The collaborative has also brought on an excellent new partner, Sacred Heart Community Service, which specializes in housing and which will provide an on-site housing specialist able to meet the needs of the families. Working toward the ultimate goal of ending family homelessness in Santa Clara County, the Housing First Collaborative is off to a strong start.