

Housing First Collaborative
Year One Evaluation Report

CHARLES AND HELEN
SCHWAB *foundation*

HOMELESSNESS

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

LEARNING DISABILITIES

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This report was prepared by LaFrance Associates for the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation.

CHARLES AND HELEN SCHWAB FOUNDATION

Cassandra Benjamin
Homelessness Program Officer
1650 S. Amphlett Blvd., Suite 300
San Mateo, CA 94402
650.655.2410
www.schwabfoundation.org

LA FRANCE ASSOCIATES, LLC

Nancy Latham, Lead Consultant
Laura Jaeger, Research Assistant
Steven LaFrance, Project Director
1242 Market Street, 3rd Floor
San Francisco, CA 94102
415.252.1068
www.lfagroup.com

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i. introduction

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, and in collaboration with two nonprofit homeless service providers — the Emergency Housing Consortium and InnVision — and the Santa Clara County Housing Authority. Housing First is an approach to ending homelessness that was pioneered by Beyond Shelter in Los Angeles, and has since been implemented in a variety of ways by a number of community-based organizations and other entities around the country. Housing First programs 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.

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.¹ The evaluation design is both formative and summative: our goal 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 program in rapidly re-housing homeless families and preventing recurrence of homelessness.

This is the first of three yearly reports we will produce over the course of the three-year pilot project.² The purposes of this report are to document the start-up phase, assess progress made in project implementation, and provide information about immediate and medium-term family outcomes. The process evaluation portion of the report is based on interviews with four members of the Housing First team and four members of the Housing First Steering Committee and observation of quarterly Housing First Advisory Committee meetings. Interviews were conducted in February and August 2004. The outcome evaluation portion of the report makes use of participant-level data collected at program enrollment, at time of housing acquisition, and via a follow-up survey administered to participants three months after program entry. This report also includes excerpts from several participant profiles that were written by Housing First case managers.

¹ The evaluators use the pronouns “our” and “we” throughout the report. These pronouns are short-hand for LFA, not the Housing First or Schwab Foundation staff.

² In addition, a progress evaluation report was written nine months into the project.

ii. overview of the evaluation

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of the evaluation is to document and describe the Housing First Initiative implementation. The evaluation is primarily designed to inform the Schwab Foundation and the organizations that are participating in Housing First. Other audiences for this report include funders who are interested in supporting this type of effort and other providers who can learn from the experiences of implementation in Santa Clara County.

The evaluation is both formative and summative, focusing on both documenting the implementation and providing ongoing information that will inform the Housing First Collaborative as well as providing information about outcomes for participants and agencies that participate in Housing First.

This is the second of four reports to be produced over the course of the three-year pilot, and is the first of three yearly reports.

B. THE ROLE OF THE EVALUATOR




LFA was engaged to document and evaluate the Housing First Collaborative on three levels:

1. Participating families,
2. The collaborative and its implementation of the Housing First methodology, and
3. The system of care for homeless families as a whole.

The evaluation began at the same time that the Housing First Collaborative was launched, providing an opportunity for integrating program and evaluation planning.

LFA worked with the Housing First team to develop a program logic model that identifies the project's desired results, the types of activities to be performed, performance indicators and indicators of project success, as shown on the following page.

Exhibit 1
Housing First Collaborative Evaluation Logic Model

Desired Results <i>Long term vision for the project</i>	Indicators <i>Data indicates whether desired results have been achieved</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development of new collaborative relationships among homeless service providers and the Santa Clara County Housing Authority 2. Families who receive assistance through Housing First remain in stable housing and do not experience recurrent episodes of homelessness 3. Reduction in the number of homeless families who enter, remain in and re-enter the shelter and transitional housing system in Santa Clara County <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">  </div>	<p>Collaborative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stronger collaborative relationships among EHC, InnVision and the Santa Clara County Housing Authority <p>Participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acquire and remain in stable housing ▪ Have an increased knowledge and utilization of community resources and services ▪ Children’s school attendance maintained and/or increased ▪ Knowledge of money management skills increased ▪ Financial stability maintained and/or increased ▪ Individual goals and action plans achieved <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased options for homeless families in Santa Clara County ▪ Reduced number of homeless families entering and remaining in the shelter system in Santa Clara County
Program Strategies/Activities <i>Broad categories of services and approaches that will be used</i>	Program Performance Measures <i>Data about service provision and direct outputs of services provided</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Housing services to help participants find and acquire appropriate permanent housing 2. Direct financial aid to assist with move-in costs 3. Access to Section 8 vouchers for 100 participants 4. Home-based case management to stabilize families 5. Access to donated goods and other resources provided to clients of EHC and InnVision <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 20px;">  </div>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 125 first-time newly homeless families re-housed  2. 100 subsidized housing vouchers provided 3. (A minimum of) 25 market-rate housing options provided 4. 125 families received financial assistance for move-in costs, as needed 5. 125 families received intensive home-based case management for first 90 days and up to one year, as appropriate 6. 125 families’ short- and long-term goals and action plans developed and monitored 7. Families linked to community resources and services, as appropriate 8. 95 of 125 families (80% of the 100 families in Sect. 8 housing, 60% of 25 families in market rate housing) complete the program (are re-housed and participate in up to one year of case management)

LFA also provided support to the Housing First team as they developed and refined their participant intake and follow-up assessment forms. These tools were designed with the goal of integrating the evaluation data collection process as much as possible into the ongoing data collection that will be done by program staff in the course of working with their clients. The database that is used for ongoing program monitoring is also being used for evaluation purposes. For the core components of the evaluation, therefore, Housing First staff have the capacity to collect, enter and use data on an ongoing basis.

C. DATA SOURCES

Several data sources were used for this evaluation:

- ★ In-person interviews with four members of the Housing First team in February 2004;
- ★ Phone interviews with two members of the Housing First team in August 2004;³
- ★ Phone interviews with three members of the Housing First Steering Committee in February 2004;
- ★ Phone interviews with two members of the Housing First Steering Committee in August 2004;⁴
- ★ Observation of three quarterly Housing First Advisory Committee meetings,
- ★ Participant-level data collected at program enrollment and through 3-month, 6-month and 12-month follow-up surveys.

Data analysis and presentation

Qualitative Data

Much of the data gathered to document the implementation of Housing First is qualitative data. Quotations in side bars are used to illustrate points made in the text of the report. Due to the small number of key informants, confidentiality was not guaranteed. However, names are not given in the report because the purpose of including quotations was not to provide individual opinions but to provide support for themes that emerged during the interviews.

Quantitative Data

For all relevant quantitative data elements, the evaluators present information about the frequency and percentage of participants with a particular characteristic (e.g., race/ethnicity, age, etc.) or who provided a particular response to a question.

³These were the two remaining members; by August 2004 the other two original members had left the team. Between the time that key informant interviews were performed and the report was written, a new committee member joined the team.

⁴By August 2004, two members of the steering committee had left. One of the original members was interviewed, and the individual who had replaced one of the departing members was interviewed. There was not yet a replacement for the third departing member.

A series of charts and graphs are used to illustrate the text. For all charts and tables, “n” refers to the number of respondents for whom data were available. Exhibit 2 below provides an example.

Exhibit 2
Example: How to Read Tables Used Throughout Report

Characteristic		Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Gender (n=70)	Female	58	82.9%
	Male	12	17.2%



“n” indicates the number of respondents for whom data were available

iii. the housing first approach

A. NATIONAL TRENDS

The philosophy behind Housing First is that the primary need of homeless families is a home, and that families will be better able to take advantage of social services and supports after they are in secure, permanent housing. Organizations throughout the United States are adopting a “Housing First” approach and designing programs that rapidly re-house homeless families and provide home-based case management services to help them maintain their housing. This approach is being promoted by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the Pew Charitable Trusts and others as a cost-effective approach to ending family homelessness.

B. THE NEED FOR HOUSING FIRST

Increasing poverty and a growing shortage of affordable housing have contributed to the devastating rise in homelessness over the past two decades. Nationwide, an estimated 35.9 million Americans (12.5% of the population) had incomes that were below the federal poverty line in 2003, up 1.3 million from 2002. The number in extreme poverty (with incomes below one-half of the poverty threshold) increased to 15.3 million from 14.1 million in 2002.⁵ With the widening gap between incomes and housing prices, housing has moved even more out of the reach of many Americans. According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, between 1970 and 1995 the gap between the number of low-income renters and the amount of affordable housing units grew significantly, from no shortage to a shortage of 4.4 million affordable housing units.⁶ Based on analyses done by the National Low Income Housing Coalition to calculate a “housing wage,” the amount of money a household must earn in order to afford (paying no more than 30% of income for housing costs) a two-bedroom home in different parts of the country, there is a significant and troubling lack of affordable housing in America. One of the fastest growing group of homeless people in the nation consists of families with children.⁷

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau; Poverty in the United States; 2003. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/p60-226.pdf> (accessed 10 September 2004)

⁶ National Coalition for the Homeless; “NCH Fact Sheet #1: Why are people homeless?” (Published September 2002). <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/causes.html> (accessed February 23, 2004).

⁷ National Coalition for the Homeless, “NCH Fact Sheet #7: Homeless Families with Children,” (June 2001). <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/families.html> (accessed February 23, 2004).

The recent economic boom in Silicon Valley and the greater San Francisco Bay Area has exacerbated housing problems for poor families in the region; the cost of housing in Santa Clara County is the highest in the country. In 2003, in order to afford a two-bedroom apartment in Santa Clara County, a family would need to earn \$35 per hour.⁸ According to the 2000 Census, an estimated 124,470 individuals (7.5%) were living in poverty in the county, and children under the age of 18 are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population.⁹

C. LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR HOUSING FIRST IN SANTA CLARA COUNTY

In 2002, the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation developed a new program area in homelessness. Drawing upon research conducted by the National Alliance to End Homelessness and documented in “A Plan: Not a Dream. How to End Homelessness in Ten Years,” as well as interviews conducted by Cassandra Benjamin, homelessness program officer, the Schwab Foundation issued a report that outlined its program goals and grantmaking strategies for ending homelessness. These strategies are in alignment with the NAEH’s four recommendations: close the front door (prevent homelessness), open the back door (house the homeless), build the infrastructure for affordable housing, and plan for outcomes.¹⁰ A core component of the foundation’s homelessness program to house the homeless is to promote a Housing First approach among homeless assistance providers.

To combat the growing problem of family homelessness in Santa Clara County, the Schwab Foundation initiated a local planning process to develop a pilot program that would meet the needs of first-time homeless families who became homeless primarily for economic reasons. In September 2002, the foundation convened a planning group consisting of homeless service providers, housing authorities and funders to design a Housing First pilot project in Santa Clara County. Beyond Shelter provided an overview and training to orient the planning group to their approach, and the group discussed how best to implement the Housing First strategy locally. In February 2003, the Schwab Foundation issued a targeted RFP to organizations that participated in the planning group. The foundation also engaged two other funders to support the pilot project, the Sobrato Family Foundation and the Housing Industry Foundation.

⁸ National Low Income Housing Coalition, “Out of Reach 2003: America’s Housing Wage Climbs Out of Reach,” <http://www.nlihc.org/oor2003/> (accessed February 23, 2004).

⁹ Santa Clara County California County-wide Five Year Homelessness Continuum of Care Plan, 2001-2006, p.24. <http://www.endhomelessness.org/localplans/santaclara.pdf> (accessed February 23, 2004)

¹⁰ The National Alliance to End Homelessness, “The Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness,” <http://www.endhomelessness.org/pub/tenyear/index.htm> (accessed 23 February 2004).

Housing First Participant Profile: Juan, Teresa and Eduardo

Juan and Teresa have a son, Eduardo, who has cerebral palsy. The only income for the family is a Social Security disability benefit that comes to Juan, who is disabled. Financial stress caused Juan and Teresa to separate. With only one income to support two households, the family quickly fell behind on rent payments. Just one month before being accepted into Housing First, Juan and Teresa reconciled. By this time, however, they owed over \$2,000 to their landlord, who was threatening eviction.

Both Juan and Teresa expressed that they wanted the family to stay together and that housing would help them do that. With the assistance of their Housing First case manager, the family obtained a housing voucher and implemented a strategy to pay their current landlord what they owed him. Their case manager also provided them with gas and food vouchers.

Teresa soon found a new home. Housing First helped her with the application process and provided money for the rental deposit and new appliances. While Teresa wants to go back to work, she has had to stay home to take care of her husband and son; the family's case manager provided her with referrals to community agencies that could help her deal with this situation. Teresa told her case manager that she is overwhelmed by the many ways that Housing First has assisted her family.

iv. project implementation

IN THIS SECTION YOU WILL FIND:

- ★ Staffing
- ★ Project administration
- ★ Service provision
- ★ Transitioning to a new program model in Year Two

This section addresses two central evaluation questions related to project implementation:

1. What progress has been made to date in implementing the Housing First collaborative in Santa Clara County?
2. What barriers has the Housing First Collaborative encountered; how have these been overcome; and how have they affected project implementation?

This section answers these questions as they pertain to issues of staffing, project administration, providing services to Housing First clients, and modifying program design as the Initiative enters its second year.¹¹

A. STAFFING

Staffing Housing First

In the original design for the project, there are four FTE staff positions within the Housing First Collaborative. These positions include: project director, case managers (2) and a housing specialist.¹² The project director oversees the Housing First program, supervises Housing First staff, approves financial transactions, is responsible for data collection and reporting, and serves as liaison to funders and evaluator. The project director will also serve as the case manager for the 25 participating families in market rate housing. Two case managers provide up to one year of home-based case management services for participating families. The role of the case manager is to help families work toward goals they have

¹¹ Some of the barriers to implementation were related specifically to the hazards of cross-agency collaboration. These barriers, and how they were overcome, will be addressed later when we discuss issues of cross-agency collaboration.

¹² Early on, this position was called “housing resource specialist,” currently it is called “housing search specialist.” For simplicity’s sake, we will call it “housing specialist” throughout the report.

identified in their Family Action Plans and to act as service broker to help connect families with mainstream services in their communities. The housing specialist assists families in securing permanent housing, including negotiating lease terms, move-in costs and security deposit. This staff person also serves as liaison to landlords, property managers and industry associations.

Departure of a Case Manager

The EHC case manager left the team in June 2004.¹³ She was not replaced until August, as hiring a new person took several months. The months without her on the team meant that the project director and the InnVision case manager took over the EHC case manager's caseload (29 families), thus expanding their own caseloads. These expanded caseloads meant not only more work for the remaining team members, but also that these families had to forego some case management. The EHC case manager's former clients, however, were past their initial period of intensive case management, and did not need intense involvement from a case manager. When they called the Housing First team, they would usually be told that "your new case manager will be starting soon." In addition, the InnVision case manager handled the crises that arose for this group of clients until the new EHC case manager came on board in August.

The Withdrawal of the Housing Authority from the Collaborative

In the original design of the Housing First program, a primary component was the provision of Section 8 vouchers to clients. The original plan called for 100 vouchers released during each year of the initiative, and the involvement of the Housing Authority in the collaborative was premised on this Section 8 program component. As events unfolded, the release of vouchers was suspended in November 2003, and the housing specialist reduced her participation. She had been devoting 40 hours per week to the project. After November 1, she cut back to four hours per week, functioning as the contact person for landlords and helping a few families with their housing searches. At the end of July 2004, the Housing Authority re-committed to releasing the vouchers that had been suspended the previous November, but was not able to commit to the 100 vouchers per year as originally planned. At this point, they formally withdrew from the collaborative. (This story will be more fully addressed in a later section of this section).

¹³This was a voluntary separation and does not indicate a challenge the team needed to handle.

B. PROJECT ADMINISTRATION

Developing Eligibility Criteria

One of the first projects undertaken by some of the members of the Housing First team was to develop and refine criteria for program participation (see Eligibility Criteria, below). By focusing the pilot project on homeless families who did not have a prior history of homelessness or significant current barriers to housing (including active substance abuse, recent domestic violence experience, etc.), the project intentionally selected a population of homeless people who had been “priced out” of housing or who had encountered some unfortunate set of circumstances so that they had become homeless relatively recently.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR PARTICIPANTS

Target Population: Homeless families and families at immediate risk of becoming homeless; homeless families must consist of:

1. At least one (1) parent/guardian; and
2. At least one (1) minor child under the age of 18 in parent/guardian’s custody for at least 51% of the time.

Definition of Homeless: Families are considered homeless if they lack a fixed, regular and habitable residence, or if they are at immediate risk of becoming homeless and lack the resources and/or services needed to obtain housing.

Tenant Selection Criteria:

Homeless families who meet the Housing First criteria must:

1. Be homeless for the first time (see **Definition of Homeless** above)
2. Be homeless for less than 90 days
3. Have a history of housing stability:
 - a. History of two (2) consecutive years of housing retention
 - i. Allowed up to one 45-day moving period
 - b. No more than one unlawful detainer in the last two (2) years
4. Have a verifiable source of income
 - a. For referrals, client must be able to afford rent at market rate
5. Be willing to participate in home-based case management for one year
6. Household members with a history of substance abuse must be clean and sober for a minimum of six months with continuing participation in recovery process
7. Household members who have been the victim of domestic violence must have at least six months away from her/his batterer
8. Household members who have been the perpetrator of domestic violence must currently be engaged with or completed a domestic violence education program
9. Household members under the age of 18, who have been the victim of child abuse, must have no contact with his/her abuser or be engaged in a family reunification program
10. Household members who have been charged with or are under investigation for child abuse must have completed or currently be engaged in a family reunification program.

Setting up a Data Management System

The start-up of Housing First also required the development of a new set of materials for tracking service utilization and outcomes. With the assistance of LFA, the Housing First team developed forms for intake, assessment, case management and follow-up. By the time the first participants entered the program, the Housing First team had a data collection and tracking system in place so that they could monitor service delivery and track their project results.

EHC's database manager assisted by developing a database to ease data entry, management and analysis.

Enrolling Participants

At the end of August 2004, a total of 86 families were enrolled in the Housing First program: 52 in the Section 8 program and 34 in the Market Rate program. The collaborative anticipated enrolling 100 in the Section 8 program, and 25 in the Market Rate program. It exceeded its Market Rate goal by 36%, but enrolled only 52% of the Section 8 clients it expected to.

Several factors significantly affected project implementation related to enrollment. Because a majority of the participants in the Housing First program (100 out of 125) were to receive Section 8 vouchers, the first focus of program enrollment was to identify participants for these vouchers. One of the regulations governing the distribution of Section 8 vouchers requires that they be administered on a "first come, first serve basis." In Santa Clara County, as in most other jurisdictions throughout the country, the Section 8 waiting list has been full and closed for several years. Before the Housing First staff could offer Section 8 vouchers to homeless families that enroll in the Housing First program who were not already on the waiting list, they were required to first screen all of the families on the waiting list for eligibility. Recognizing that this would place an enormous burden on the program, the Housing Authority sent out a brief survey to 4,000 families on their waiting list to elicit responses from families who met the Housing First eligibility criteria. A total of 892 families responded to the survey. This is the list from which the Housing First staff have culled participants for participation in Housing First.

The need for this process has had two major effects on Housing First implementation. First, Housing First staff have spent a lot of time screening families who were not eligible for

We are not getting the kind of families we thought we would get. We thought we could work with some from the shelter. We are seeing only those at risk of homelessness.

- Housing First Team Member

their program. Second, it has also meant that nearly all of the families who have received Section 8 vouchers to date through Housing First have been “at risk” of homelessness rather than homeless at the time of program entry. Because of the method used by the Housing Authority - sending out a survey to an address and requiring it be returned within a certain timeframe - this meant that families in more transient and insecure housing situations were less likely to respond. As one staff person described it, “the people on the Section 8 waiting list have never been made it to a shelter. They had people to rely on, they generally have temporary shelter.”

Implementation has been successful once we were able to sit down and really fine-tune things: the guidelines, forms, collaboration of the agencies [and other] program matters.

- Housing First Team Member

For the market rate housing slots, Housing First staff have found that their selection criteria make the pool of potential participants rather small. Housing First staff have held one information session for other homeless service providers to inform them how to refer clients to their program. As of the end of August, most of these clients were referred by Emergency Housing Consortium (24 clients). Four clients were referred by InnVision; three clients were referred by Housing Authority; two clients were referred by friends; and African-American Community Services, HIF, Social Services, Support Network for Battered Women and Ways to Work Family Loan Program all referred one client. Raising the number of referrals from other agencies has been a focus during the past six months, and staff have conducted more outreach to referral agencies to inform them about the program. However, the project director reported at 15 months that this was an area the team should continue to emphasize and improve.

Developing Administrative Forms

As with any new venture, there were bumps in the road during the early stages as the team developed standard operating procedures. Both team members, when asked about progress in implementation of the Housing First project during interviews 15 months into the project, commented on the challenges they had faced early on when “we didn’t have any forms in place.” Progress in this area is indicated by the extent to which the team has been able to codify the standard procedures in administrative forms. A team member pointed to the way that these forms had helped them to smoothly handle their caseloads: “Now we’ve got our forms in place for pre-screening for the Section 8 and market rate groups – it’s down pat.”

C. SERVICE PROVISION

Helping Families Access Permanent Housing

As of the end of August 2004, the project had successfully housed 76 of 86 families (88.4%) who are currently enrolled in the program.¹⁴ A total of 34 families are enrolled in the Market Rate program, while 52 are in the Section 8 program. In helping families access permanent housing, the Housing First team faced two major challenges. First, providing Section 8 vouchers to participants turned out to be far more problematic than originally anticipated. Second, the housing specialist was not able to provide the level of support that most of the clients needed. We discuss each of these challenges below, and how they were handled.

The Section 8 Voucher Crisis

While the Housing First approach does not depend on the provision of housing subsidies to program participants, in areas where Housing First programs have been able to provide Section 8 and other housing vouchers this has had a tremendously positive effect. Due to the high cost of housing in Santa Clara County, even two-parent households with full-time employment have difficulties finding housing they can afford. For this reason, it was an enormous boon to the project when the Santa Clara County Housing Authority was able to offer 100 Section 8 vouchers to the Housing First collaborative in its first year.

The Housing First Initiative's housing component has been implemented in a way that is different from what was originally anticipated, largely due to unplanned changes in the regulations governing the distribution of Section 8 vouchers. These changes have been beyond the control of the Housing First staff and the Housing Authority. First, in the fall of 2003, HUD implemented a new policy that required third-party verification during the pre screening process. Actual documentation of employment, receipt of public benefits, etc. have to come directly from the person or entity (an employer, public agency or bank) who can

Not that many families fit our criteria. Most families need to increase their income to qualify.

- Housing First Team Member

Getting Section 8 is like winning the lotto. [We are] changing families' lives. That's what we've done at this point.

- Housing First Team Member

The ideal model of how we were going to start up changed because of the addition of the vouchers. If [we] didn't have the vouchers [we would have operated] at a slower pace...No one thought about what impact that made on case management and the housing search component of this. All of us running around with 'our heads cut-off,' that is the end result.

- Housing First Team Member

¹⁴This number does not reflect current enrollment. After the evaluators received data for analysis, enrollment rose by 13%, as the team added 10 new families over the next few weeks.

substantiate income and assets. This significantly slows the process of screening all families for eligibility for Section 8 vouchers, not just for those in the Housing First program, because it is difficult and time consuming to obtain income verification information.

The Housing First project was affected on an even more significant level by a further change in the availability of Section 8 vouchers.

The Santa Clara County Housing Authority typically “overleases,” issuing more vouchers than they have. They use this strategy because, with attrition, the number of leases actually used on average equals the number of vouchers the Housing Authority has been allocated. (The concept is similar to airlines’ overbooking of flights – there are always some no-shows and airlines don’t want to fly with empty seats). However, in September, HUD communicated to Housing Authorities that a

new rule would soon go into effect: Housing Authorities could no longer overlease. Once this happened, vouchers would no longer be available to Housing First clients. Recognizing this fact, and wanting to issue as many vouchers as possible to Housing First families, Housing

The Santa Clara County Housing Authority and the National Section 8 Voucher Crisis

The Section 8 voucher crisis that hit the Housing First Collaborative is part of a larger story about Housing and Urban Development (HUD) policy changes, and how those changes have undermined the efforts of Housing Authorities across the country to house low-income families. In April 2003, HUD announced funding cuts to Housing Authorities, forcing them into fiscal crises which meant some combination of halting voucher issuance, taking vouchers away from families, and raising the amount of rent that each family had to pay. HUD also announced a variety of new rules that made it more difficult to issue vouchers, among them third-party verification of income and an end to the practice of “overleasing.”

The Housing Authority committed 100 vouchers per year to Housing First before the announcement of new HUD policies. Once the policy change was announced, the Housing Authority was in the difficult position of trying to accommodate the demand for vouchers under conditions of dwindling supply and hostile regulation. They used a number of strategies to help people into homes and keep them there. Primarily, they continued to lease up for as long as they could, before the rules prohibiting overleasing went into effect. But because Santa Clara County was overleased, HUD refused to release funds allocated to the Housing Authority which they used to pay clients’ rents. The Housing Authority then used their own cash reserves for rent, because they were determined not to let anyone lose a home.

The Housing Authority thus faced a serious fiscal crisis and also a crisis of relations with HUD. Nevertheless, they remained committed to the initiative and – in the midst of a great deal of uncertainty and resource scarcity – did what they could to release vouchers to Housing First families.

Authority staff urged the Housing First staff to lease up as many vouchers as possible, giving them a goal of 60 vouchers before November 1.

This required a significant change in plans for the staff who expected a “trickle-in” of participants which would allow them to focus on a smaller number of families at any one time. Although Housing First staff embraced this challenge, recognizing how much of a benefit Section 8 vouchers would be for participants, this rush to enroll participants and get them into housing did take its toll. It affected staff roles, workload and morale. Initially, the role of the case managers on the Housing First team looked nothing like the positions for which they had been hired. The rules and restrictions governing Section 8 vouchers are complex, and all of the staff had to be trained in the process. They were not able to provide the initial in-depth case management support that was part of the original program design because they had to shift their focus to getting applicants pre-screened for Section 8. Due to the time pressure to have 60 Section 8 vouchers issued by November 2003, all of the staff put in significant amounts of overtime. The case managers also experienced a lot of frustration in this role. While they understood the goal that they were working toward, the pressure and the challenge of the work were demoralizing to the newly formed team.

Ultimately, changes in the availability of Section 8 vouchers had an adverse affect not just on staff but on participating families. By the end of October, the team had issued vouchers to 47 families, but – in an effort to reach the goal of 60 – had begun the Section 8 process with 13 additional families and had promised them vouchers. On November 1, however, further voucher issuance was suspended, causing a housing crisis for these 13 families. Since these families were not homeless but *at risk of* homelessness, nine of them were able to resolve their own crises by staying where they were currently, or finding another housing situation. Four of the families faced a deeper housing crisis because they had already given notice to their landlords and did not have another housing option. Two of these four families entered EHC shelters, and two of them cobbled together shelter by moving around among motels, and staying with friends and family members.

Although the vouchers were frozen in November, the Housing Authority let the Housing First team know that once their new fiscal year began on July 1, 2004, they would be able to once again release vouchers, and would be able to release the remaining 53 at that time. In the beginning of April 2004, however, they informed the project director that due to the overleasing and fiscal crises they faced, they could not commit to releasing the remaining vouchers after all. Between April and July 2004, the future of the vouchers was uncertain; the Housing First team therefore operated under the assumption that the vouchers would not be forthcoming.

However, at the end of July, the Housing Authority was able to commit once again to releasing the remaining 53 vouchers. At this time, the Housing First team was able to begin again the process of aiding families gain access to Section 8 housing. In mid-August, seven of the 13 formerly displaced families received vouchers, and two of the families are currently going through the Housing Authority's eligibility process. The remaining four families, having found other alternatives, have disenrolled from the program.

Need for Additional Housing Search Support

As originally staffed, the Housing First team included a Housing Authority employee who acted as the housing specialist. The job of the housing specialist was to include the following tasks: assist families in searching for housing, including negotiating lease terms, move-in costs and security deposit; and serve as liaison to landlords, property managers and industry associations. However, enrolling Section 8 clients became an unexpectedly time-consuming process. The housing specialist had responsibility for scheduling and performing inspections, issuing vouchers, briefing the clients on how to effectively search for housing, and acting as the liaison to landlords and property managers. As a result, she did not have sufficient time to assist clients much beyond helping to issue the vouchers. This was not due to lack of commitment to the initiative – indeed, Housing Authority involvement exceeded the expectations of the Schwab Foundation. The foundation's homelessness program officer noted that “the Housing Authority embraced the project. They spent way more staff time than we paid them for. It hasn't been simple, but they put so much more into this project than I would have expected.”

Nevertheless, clients needed more housing search support than the housing specialist was able to provide. First, as pointed out above, the housing specialist simply did not have the hours necessary to make the investment the clients needed in terms of assistance with the housing search. Second, she was not housed at the Georgia Travis Center, but across town (about a 20-minute car ride) at the Housing Authority. For clients who often have difficulty with transportation, this could be a significant barrier to consulting with her. Third, she reduced her involvement to four hours a week after the Housing Authority suspended the release of vouchers in November 2003. And, in July 2004, the Housing Authority formally withdrew from the collaboration (although they remain committed to assisting Housing First clients with obtaining their vouchers).

The project director and the steering committee, in searching for a new partner to replace the Housing Authority, concentrated on finding an agency that would be able to meet the needs of the participating families. As the project director put it: “the housing search specialist will

make this project what it is.” The project director was able to recruit a new partner, Sacred Heart Community Service, which will be able to provide a staff person with the needed skills and capacity. This will be discussed in more detail later when we address making the transition to the second year of the Housing First Initiative.¹⁵

Offering Financial Assistance for Move-in Costs

One of the major benefits for families that participate in Housing First is that they can access funds to pay for move-in costs, including deposits, utility fees and other one-time expenses. Families are able to access up to \$2,000, but they are not guaranteed this amount. The amount that families receive depends upon their level of need. To date, Housing First has provided a total of \$75,051 to participants in move-in costs.¹⁶ The program has provided participants who have moved into housing an average of \$988. Six of the participating families did not receive any monetary move-in assistance; three families received the maximum of \$2,000 for move-in costs.

This aspect of the program’s services has been provided in the way that was anticipated. Although there were several challenges in getting this program component going at the beginning, the project director is now administering these funds and is able to fast-track requests for funds. According to one staff member, “We have a better system now for making the money available on a seamless basis.”

Providing Home-Based Case Management

During the first six months of the project, case managers were primarily involved with helping participants navigate the Section 8 pre-screening process so that they could access their vouchers. Case managers were not able to provide the intensive case management that they intended to make available to Housing First participants during the first three months after they are re-housed. Instead, case managers were only able to focus their time on helping Housing First participants through crises that emerged. As one team member put it, “We have not addressed case management in the way that we should. With the deadline, we

We enrolled [the clients] and would say: “okay, here’s your listing, go off and find housing.” We put it on them to find housing, and then would help them after that.

- Housing First Team Member

Our ability to cover [move-in costs] is critical. A huge part of why this population needs Housing First is that they can’t afford move-in costs.

- Housing First Team Member

¹⁵The Housing First team is currently interviewing for this position.

¹⁶This reflects only the amount given at the time of move-in. Often, clients receive monetary assistance throughout their year in the program for utility payments, rental assistance, gift cards, etc.

pushed that aside. We haven't done as much as we planned. My efforts have focused on lease-up. We will do more."

In February 2004, case managers were able to shift their focus from helping participants get re-housed to providing case management, as was intended in the project design. By August, Housing First team members gave very positive reviews to the case management component of the program. They reported feeling that this component allows them to effectively help families access their own internal resources that will help them to remain stably housed and to build better futures for themselves and their families. One team member reported that: "We've developed tons of case management tools that have been great – they help us find out the needs of our clients. We're able to get more deeply into what's going on in their lives – more than [we can] in a shelter..."

A lot of my clients say they don't know where they would be without the services. [It's] beyond the money; it's about the case managers. [The clients] need someone to brainstorm with about what to try – what to do. The intensive case management is a great model.

- Housing First Team Member

D. TRANSITIONING TO YEAR TWO

The exigencies of the collaborative's experience during its first year led the Housing First team and steering committee to make a number of changes as it transitioned to its second year. The Section 8 voucher crisis and the withdrawal of the Housing Authority from the collaborative have both led to the two major changes in the Housing First Initiative: (1) refining the approach to market rate housing; and (2) bringing a new partner into the collaborative. Both will be explored below.

Refining the Approach to Market Rate Housing

The major challenge of the collaborative's first year was, of course, the Section 8 voucher crisis. In the original program design, the Housing Authority was to provide 100 vouchers to Housing First clients during each year of the initiative. Due to Section 8 overleasing in Santa Clara County, the Housing Authority was forced to suspend the issuance of new vouchers in November 2003. While the Housing Authority was able, in July 2004, to recommit to releasing all 100 vouchers planned for the first year, it will not be able to issue any additional ones. In addition, after the suspension of the vouchers, the Housing First team understood that they could not count on these housing subsidies to bolster the success of the initiative.

Facing the new reality that most Housing First clients would have to search for market rate housing, the project director and the steering committee worked together to modify the program in a way that would optimize housing outcomes for clients. They extensively researched similar programs in other parts of the country in order to find out how these programs have been able to succeed without Section 8 subsidies. After reviewing these program designs, and taking into account the context of the housing market in Santa Clara County, the team designed a *multi-tier system* of financial assistance. The table below summarizes this new system:

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"> ▪ Move-in costs (including security deposit and first month's rent) ▪ As-needed assistance throughout the year (e.g., utilities) for those families who do not use up their initial \$2,000 allotment 	49
2	Need for periodic financial assistance throughout the year	\$3,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Move-in costs ▪ As-needed assistance throughout the year 	10
3	Need for consistent financial support throughout the year	\$4,600	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Up to \$1,000 for move-in costs ▪ Shallow subsidy up to \$200/month for 12 months to provide support for monthly rent and utilities 	20

This system will allow the collaborative to flexibly target its financial assistance to families 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.

Bringing a New Partner into the Collaborative

With the formal withdrawal of the Housing Authority, the collaborative had the opportunity to bring on a new community-based partner. The focus of the search for a new partner was on the ability of that agency to provide a housing specialist with the capacity to meet the housing needs of the Housing First families. In August, the team brought on Sacred Heart, an agency with a focus in housing issues.

This new team member will be full-time, and so will have more hours to dedicate to the clients than did the previous housing specialist. In addition, the new housing specialist will be on-site. This will allow participants to enroll, and then go down the hall to meet with the housing specialist in order to immediately take the steps to get housed (look at credit history and issues of credit repair, assess financial barriers, generate listings for potential homes, etc). This set-up will capitalize on the momentum provided by enrollment, provide greater client satisfaction, and increase the effectiveness of the families' housing searches. Beyond helping families to get started in their housing searches, the housing specialist will serve as an advocate for families with landlords. In addition to one-on-one services, the housing specialist will operate weekly workshops and classes for enrolled clients on a variety of topics. These workshops will help clients acquire the tools and connect with the community services they need in order to remain stably housed.

The housing specialist will focus not only on families, but also on the opportunities for housing in Santa Clara County. This aspect of the job will include creating marketing materials to recruit new housing providers, and also networking regularly with landlords, apartment managers and associations in order to market Housing First to housing providers. The goal of cultivating these relationships is two-fold. First, the housing specialist will be "in the know" about the housing units that can be made available to Housing First clients, thus facilitating the housing search for these families. Second, by marketing the Housing First solution as a way to raise the quality of life for Santa Clara County residents, s/he can also enlist housing providers in the effort to end homelessness in their communities. Through these efforts, the housing specialist will be able to help expand the opportunities for housing that the collaborative can offer to its clients.

Housing First Participant Profile: Duong, Giang and Quan

During the eight years before coming to Housing First, this family of three (Duong, his wife, Giang, and their 8-year old son, Quan) lived in a single room. After seven years of living in a mobile home, they were forced to leave, and moved to another single room in a three-bedroom house. Seven months after moving in, the landlord decided to sell the property, and they were forced to move once again.

Before enrolling in Housing First, the family was at risk of homelessness, as they could only afford around \$500 a month in rent. With their enrollment in the program, the family received a Section 8 voucher. The voucher, coupled with case management services, has helped the family obtain and remain in stable housing. Through the family's income has remained about the same (around \$1,300 a month from employment), they have been able to consistently save money each month. They also have been able to enrich their lives through school, job training and volunteer experiences — things they were unable to do when they were living in a cramped room wondering where they might be the following night. Duong and Giang have enrolled in ESL classes, and Quan in youth services. Duong has volunteered at the EHC and has decided to enroll in SJSU in order to study to become a social worker.

v. the challenges and rewards of cross-agency collaboration

IN THIS SECTION YOU WILL FIND:

- ★ History of competition between EHC and InnVision
- ★ Facing the operational challenges of cross-agency collaboration
- ★ Value-add of cross-agency collaboration

The Housing First collaborative embodies a particular type of cross-agency collaboration in which personnel from separate agencies work together as a team. This type of joint venture necessarily brings with it specific operational challenges of how to combine resources and policies, and how to structure lines of authority. In addition, implementation of the Housing First Initiative faces another challenge: EHC and InnVision are competitors within their field, and healthy competition has sometimes spilled over into personal friction between employees of EHC and employees of InnVision.

During the first year of implementation, the Housing First team and steering committee have been able to navigate well these challenges of cross-agency collaboration. Below we discuss more specifically what the challenges have been, and how they have been handled. Cross-agency collaboration has meant more, however, than obstacles to be overcome; there have also been notable advantages to including multiple agencies in the initiative. These advantages, centering mostly around access to additional resources, will also be discussed below.

A. HISTORY OF COMPETITION BETWEEN EHC AND INNVISION

All team and steering committee members noted that EHC and InnVision have a history of competition and friction, and that – for this reason – the collaborative does not constitute a natural partnership. This context of friction has set the stage for some of the operational challenges discussed below. More generally, it has meant that the team and the steering committee have had to work to establish trust across agency lines.

The collaborative met this challenge of competition in several ways:

- ★ Capitalizing on collaborative momentum generated during the program design process;
- ★ Consciously setting aside the issue of competition in order to focus on the shared goal of the initiative's success;
- ★ Emphasizing open communication in order to forge an identity as a team and to foster collegiality.

Collaborative Momentum Generated During the Design Process

The Schwab Foundation laid the groundwork for collaboration by involving in the program design process the organizations that would ultimately participate in implementation of the initiative. Staff of the SCHA, EHC and InnVision who participated in the planning process appreciated the extent to which they were able to engage in this process. As a result, when they submitted proposals to the foundation, they understood what they were applying to do and they were already invested in the project's success. Members of the planning group said this was a unique experience, and one that they felt was very well managed by the foundation.

Focusing on Shared Goals, Rather than on Competition

As mentioned above, the staff of participating agencies were invested in the project's success. All participants have thus largely been able to set aside issues of competition to focus on the mission of the initiative. Some team members observed that this has not *always* been the case (and this will be discussed below in the section on sharing resources), but for the most part the team and steering committee have kept their eyes on the prize.

Collaborative members have been able to set aside their status as competitors partly because the personal friction has historically been mostly confined to the upper management of EHC and InnVision. One steering committee member pointed out that “there is a new generation

Being part of the design team that led to the RFP was a unique process. That component alone led to a high level of investment. [We] wanted to see it succeed.

- Steering Committee Member

Watching the different agencies pull together and work on the project together [exceeded my expectations].

- Steering Committee Member

I actually think that when people got stuck, they called, and [a steering committee member] intervened and got people to the table. There were a number of times the project seemed stuck, and each time they got it back on track. The project learned as it went and did good problem-solving.

- Funder

taking leadership responsibility, [and] we play nicely together.” Another committee member offered the analysis that “collaboration has gotten much better because communication occurs two or three levels down the chain of command. The people on the ground are – and want to be – oblivious to what is [happening] above.”

There is abundant evidence that collaborative members focused on their shared goal of the initiative’s success. Whenever the initiative faced external challenges, the members came together for collective problem-solving. When it became clear that the case managers were overburdened with pre-screening participants for Section 8, the project steering committee helped refocus their attention on case management and shifted the responsibility for this work to staff of the Housing Authority who have more expertise in this work. Another indicator of the focus of participants on shared goals rather than on competition can be found in the collaborative’s process of reapplying to the Schwab Foundation for a second year of funding for the initiative. During the first year, the participating agencies had each received funding separately from the foundation. In reapplying for the second year, the EHC and InnVision elected to request one grant award, with that award made to the EHC. The EHC would then distribute the award to the Housing First Collaborative members.

Emphasizing Communication to Build Collegiality

The unique process by which the Housing First team was created has had several implications for project implementation. Because participating organizations selected individuals to staff the Housing First project, forging a Housing First *team* has been an ongoing challenge, which in turn has required ongoing attention by team members to build collegiality and strong working relationships with one another. Nine months into the project, Housing First staff reported that they continued to meet weekly in order to forge these relationships. Fifteen months in, formal weekly meetings had been replaced with frequent informal communication between the project director and InnVision case manager. In the intervening six months, working relationships had improved sufficiently for there to be less need for formal weekly meetings. (It should be noted that, with the addition of the new EHC case manager hired in August, weekly staff meetings have been reinstated).

We have strong personalities on this team. It was not a team that was formed organically.

- Housing First Team Member

I feel like there were issues and they kept getting worked out. I held a couple of meetings to try to foster the cooperation, and the steering committee was willing to participate in that.

- Steering Committee Member

Partnership among the agencies has been fostered not only in the day-to-day operation of the Housing First program, but also by forming a Housing First steering committee and Advisory Group which come together as needed, as well as at regular intervals. These groups are comprised of staff who were part of the original design group, senior level staff within the project partner organizations, and project funders. These groups have been very helpful in providing guidance and support to the project director throughout project implementation.

B. FACING THE OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES OF CROSS-AGENCY COLLABORATION

As mentioned in the introduction, bringing together the personnel of different agencies to work together as a team comes with two inherent operational challenges: clarifying a reporting structure and finding a process for creating access to the resources across agencies. These challenges, and how each was handled, will be discussed below.

Clarifying a Reporting Structure

One of the challenges that arose from the collaborative nature of the Housing First project is a lack of clarity around supervision and lines of authority within the team. While the Housing First project has a project director who is responsible for overseeing the project and ultimately guiding the work of the team, the other team members each have supervisors within their own organizations as well. This situation has been difficult, both for those who are supervised and those who are supervising.

The Housing First team handled the lack of clarity around supervision through being patient and also addressing specific challenges as they arose with open communication. Twice the steering committee met and assisted with handling these difficulties, and over time the team worked out a reporting structure that functions well. For example, the project director now writes the InnVision case manager's yearly evaluation, signs her timesheet and approves vacation time.

Lack of Equal Access to Resources

Finally, staff implementing the project have experienced some of the challenges they anticipated in terms of competition between EHC and InnVision. Several staff on the

I'm the supervisor [of the case managers]...For the InnVision case manager, I'm still learning. The first few months I didn't know whom to go to [in order] to figure out what she was supposed to be doing. Even the simple things you don't think of - like, who does the yearly evaluation?

- Housing First Team Member

Housing First team made comments about tension that had developed within the team when EHC and InnVision's resources were not equally accessible to all participants: if a participant gets assigned to the case manager from one agency, the case manager was not able to offer the same resources as the case manager from the other agency could. While there have been some concerted efforts to change this proprietary spirit, and all participants received gifts through EHC's Christmas program, it remained an issue among Housing First staff several months into the project. By nine months into the project, this problem has been addressed within the Housing First team, and began to decrease in severity as the project moves forward.

I wish the organizations had a working relationship before this project started. We are trying to get something done for our clients. [I've had some] problems getting things for my clients.

- Housing First Team Member

Fifteen months into the project, these issues seemed to be mostly worked out – nevertheless, access to the resources of the other agency was still salient as a problem to one team member. She reported that: “It was more than a year before I could actually go and get stuff from the warehouse [of the other agency]. Furniture, toiletries, whatever. [My agency], same thing. I feel like I've been a beggar, and practically a thief.” This team member did not view these problems as issues of the Housing First team itself, but of the upper management in the participating agencies: “I would have liked to have seen more collaborative support from both sides. That has been *the* hardest [issue] for me, being between these two agencies, and the way they view territory and political stuff, restricting one agency from using stuff. [...] What everyone promised to contribute is not forthcoming.”

Despite this lingering resentment about restricted access, it should be noted that currently, team members *do* have access to the warehouses of one another's agencies. They have worked this out among themselves. For example, team members have introduced their colleagues to the staff at their own agencies' warehouses. Once a given Housing First team member has this “in,” she has been able to access the warehouse of the other agency.

C. VALUE-ADD OF CROSS-AGENCY COLLABORATION

One of the most striking benefits of cross-agency collaboration has been the fact that each agency has access to resources it would not have had without collaboration. Signs of this resource-sharing arose early in the initiative. For example, the Housing First team expected to move into new office space at the renovated Georgia Travis Center in July 2003, but the build-out of their office space was not completed until November 2004. Although it was

inconvenient for staff not to be able to settle into their space at the outset of their work, the Housing Authority was able to step in and provide temporary office space to house the project. As a result, the project implementation timeline was not affected by this logistical challenge. This was an enormous benefit to project staff members, some of whom had been “working out of their cars.” It also enabled all four staff members to be located at the same office for the first six months of the project; going forward, three of the four will have office space at the Georgia Travis Center. The housing specialist continued to work out of the Santa Clara Housing Authority office.

I’ve had a wonderful experience collaborating.

- Housing First Team Member

Access to resources across agencies was also an important component of the collaborative’s ability to manage the voucher crisis. Thirteen families were not issued the Section 8 vouchers they had been promised. Drawing on the resources of EHC and InnVision, the Housing First team found temporary housing for those who needed it. The project was also able to make use of InnVision’s monetary emergency fund for some of these families.

As the project matures, these benefits have persisted, as 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. A team member said that “this was incredible [for us].” She also reported that another team member had emailed her, saying “this is the reason that a collaborative works.”

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.

Housing First Participant Profile: 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.

vi. disseminating the housing first model

By involving the two largest providers of homeless services in the county and the local Housing Authority, the collaborative has the potential to significantly change the options available to homeless families and to change service providers' concepts of how best to serve homeless families in Santa Clara County. This is, in fact, an important goal of the initiative: to spread the Housing First model within the field of homeless service providers. When a representative of the Schwab Foundation was interviewed 15 months into the project, she spoke of this as one of her expectations of the initiative: "Overall, [my expectation is] that the [Housing First] concept would start to take hold in the various agencies; that they would begin to embrace that model." She emphasized that she did not expect to see this happen in the first year, but hoped at least to see that "just the people working directly on the project [would] start to get it and, maybe in the next year, start to espouse it to other colleagues within the[ir own] agency."

I've learned a lot from the Housing First Initiative. I really embraced it during the [initial] collaborative process, even before we got the award. I took that back to [my agency], and we've created a lot of good energy around it. Housing First is known now.

-Steering Committee Member

At nine months into the project, there was evidence that those involved in the initiative were indeed embracing the model. As one person described it, "The impact we are seeing is more of seeds being planted. More people are becoming familiar with the Housing First philosophy. As another described it, "Bringing Housing First on changed the focus of the family division.... I'm much more committed to the Housing First model."

Fifteen months into the project, it appears that participants have already met the funder's expectations for the second year. Members of the steering committee, as well as the project director, spoke enthusiastically of "proselytizing" about the Housing First approach, and promoting it within their own agencies. One committee member reported that: "I've pushed for the agency to shift to a Housing First approach, and that has been really well received. [...] I've been asked to speak about Housing First at board meetings twice, and at agency-wide meetings twice. [...] There's buy-in from the executive director [of my agency]." The other steering committee member spoke similarly about disseminating the Housing First

philosophy, saying simply: “I’m proselytizing about it at [my agency].” This participant also spoke of efforts to make the model operational within the organization, by incorporating it into the agency’s strategic plan.

This committee member spoke about his commitment to promoting the model not only within his agency, but within the field of homeless service providers as well. His strategy is to educate others about the future of funding in the field. He argued that the field is “reconfiguring and old funding streams are starting to dry up.” He plans to “let [other agencies] know that if we don’t start making this shift [to Housing First], we’ll lose our opportunities for a lot of future funding streams.”

Participants in the Housing First Initiative have learned a great deal from their participation, have discussed it with others in their own organizations, and have promoted it within the field of homeless service providers. Staff from both EHC and InnVision report that their agencies are taking steps toward a Housing First model. As the two largest providers of homeless family services in Santa Clara County, these agencies will likely influence other providers. In terms of disseminating the philosophy of Housing First, evidence points toward early indicators of success.

Housing First Participant Profile: 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 \$1,000, 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.

vii. housing first results

IN THIS SECTION YOU WILL FIND:

- A. Participant Characteristics
 - ★ Demographic characteristics
 - ★ Dependents characteristics
 - ★ Challenges, barriers and special needs
 - ★ Income
 - ★ Prior living situation
 - ★ Case management needs
- B. Housing Outcomes
- C. Survey Data Gathered at 3, 6 and 12 Months
 - ★ Living situation, finances and children's education
 - ★ Progress toward goals
 - ★ Satisfaction with assistance from Housing First
- D. Participant Profiles

This section answers two main questions related to Housing First results:

1. What are the characteristics of families served through Housing First?
2. What immediate and medium-term outcomes do families experience as a result of participation in Housing First?

As of the end of August 2004, Housing First had enrolled a total of 86 families. Seven additional families had been enrolled previously, but had dropped out of the program. The following provides a basic description of the families participating in Housing First and some early results. So far, only four families have completed a 12-month exit survey. As more time passes and more families “graduate,” additional information regarding program effects and outcomes for participants will become available.

A. PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

Demographic Characteristics

To date, Housing First has enrolled a diverse set of clients:¹⁷

- ★ Most of the clients in the Housing First program are female (81.4%).
- ★ Housing First clients range in age from 20 to 70 years old, with an average age of 36 years.

¹⁷The term “client” is used to describe the primary adult in each Housing First household. Demographic data includes only the primary head of household. Data are available for 86 families; 58 are headed by a female parent and 12 by a male parent.

- ★ Among Housing First clients, there is no one majority group in terms of race/ethnicity. The largest group of clients are Hispanic; the second most numerous racial/ethnic group is Black/African American.
- ★ More than 60% of the clients have no college experience; more than one-third do have a high school degree.
- ★ While most of the clients' primary language is English (88.4%), Vietnamese is the primary language of eight clients (9.3%), and two clients primarily speak Spanish (2.3%).
- ★ About two-thirds of the clients are not married nor with a partner: 39.5% identify as single; 12.8% are separated; 11.8% are divorced; and 3.5% are widowed. About one-third are not single: 22.1% are married, and 9.3% are with a partner.
- ★ Housing First is a program for homeless families, meaning at least one adult who is living with one or more children under the age of 18. The number of individuals in participating households ranges from 2 to 8. The number of dependent children in participating households ranges from 1 to 7.

Exhibit 3
Housing First Clients' Demographic Information

Characteristic		Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Gender (n = 86)	Female	70	81.4%
	Male	16	18.6%
Age Group (n = 86)	20-25	17	19.8%
	26-30	14	16.3%
	31-35	16	18.6%
	36-40	11	12.8%
	41-50	19	22.1%
	Over 50	9	10.5%
Race/Ethnicity	Hispanic	44	51.2%
	Black/African American	16	38.1%
	Asian/Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian	12	28.6%
	White	10	23.8%
	Multiracial	4	9.5%
Highest Level of Education (n = 86)	Some college	29	33.7%
	Less than high school graduate	26	30.2%
	High School graduate	26	30.2%
	College graduate	5	5.8%
Primary Language (n = 86)	English	76	88.4%
	Vietnamese	8	9.3%
	Spanish	2	2.3%

Housing First Clients' Demographic Information cont.

Characteristic		Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Household Status	Married	19	22.1%
	With Partner	8	9.3%
	Single (never married and not with partner)	34	39.5%
	Separated	11	12.8%
	Divorced	11	11.8%
	Widowed	3	3.5%
Number in Household	2	17	19.8%
	3	32	37.2%
	4	20	23.3%
	5 or more	17	19.7%

Dependent Characteristics

Clients who are eligible for Housing First include at least one adult and one child under the age of 18. Among the 86 Housing First families, there are a total of 224 dependents.¹⁸ Over three-quarters (79.7%) are under the age of 18. The age and relationship of dependents to the Housing First client are described in more detail in Exhibit 4.

Exhibit 4
Description of Housing First Dependents

Characteristic		Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Age Group (n = 222)	0 - 5 years	53	23.9%
	6 - 10 years	71	32.0%
	11 - 17 years	53	23.9%
	18 years and older	45	20.3%
Relationship to Client (n = 222)	Son/Daughter	179	79.9%
	Spouse/Partner	26	11.6%
	Grandchild	12	5.4%
	Other	5	2.3%

Because homelessness often has an adverse affect on the ability of children to attend and excel in school, Housing First staff collect information about children's school enrollment and attendance. From data collected at baseline, however, it does not appear that dependents of Housing First clients have experienced significant barriers to school. Among 130 youth between the ages of 5 and 17, 124 (95.4%) were enrolled in school at time of entry into Housing First. Of these enrolled, only one child was not regularly attending school.

¹⁸The number of dependents for whom demographic data are available varies. Regarding age and relationship to client, data are only available for 222 participants.

Challenges, Barriers and Special Needs

Housing First clients have experienced a number of challenges that contributed to their housing stability and, ultimately, to their homelessness. The most common reasons for homelessness noted by Housing First case managers were “a lack of affordable housing,” “need or notice to vacate,” “low income” and “recent unemployment.” As one would expect, given the selection criteria for the Housing First program, most of the participants were at risk of homelessness or homeless at the time of program entry due to economic hardship and the lack of affordable housing, rather than other barriers to housing such as domestic violence or active substance use.

Exhibit 5
Reason for Homelessness*
(n=86)

Reason	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Need or notice to vacate	47	54.6%
Lack of affordable housing	44	51.1%
Low income	33	38.3%
Recent unemployment	25	11.5%
Relationship breakdown	17	29.0%
Underemployment	12	13.9%
Rent increase	10	11.6%
Eviction	9	10.5%
Physical/Emotional abuse	7	8.1%
Physical health problems	7	8.1%
Difficulty affording childcare	6	7.0%
Incarceration	1	1.2%
Substance abuse	1	1.2%

* The question allowed respondents to “check all that apply”; percentages add to more than 100%.

In addition to their immediate reason for homelessness, Housing First families have a number of special needs and barriers to success, as shown in Exhibit 6.

Exhibit 6
Special Needs/Barriers to Success*
(n=86)

Reason	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Domestic Violence	21	24.4%
Legal Problems	15	17.4%
Physical Disability	14	16.3%
Criminal History	13	15.1%
Developmental Disability	12	14.0%
Child Abuse	3	3.5%
Bankruptcy	2	2.3%
Drug Abuse	2	2.3%
Mental Illness	1	1.2%
Alcohol Abuse	0	0.0%
HIV/AIDS Related Disease	0	0.0%
Other	53	61.6%

* The question allowed respondents to “check all that apply”; percentages add to more than 100%.

Almost two-thirds of participants noted a special need or barrier that did not fall into other categories. The most common of these are having children who are living outside the home, pregnancy, language barriers and other health problems.

Income

Housing First clients are required to have some level of income from work or benefits in order to be eligible for the program. Employment is the primary source of income for about half the clients (52.3%), while the remaining clients rely on a range of benefits from TANF to Social Security, as shown in Exhibit 7.

Poverty Definitions Example:

Based on the “Poverty Thresholds in 2002 by Size of Family and Number of Related Children Under 18 Years,”* the federal poverty threshold for a family that includes one adult and two children is \$14,494.

If this family had less than half of that income in a year they were grouped with other families in the “less than 50% of poverty” group. If this family had an income between \$14,494 and \$28,988, they would be in the “between 100% and 200% of poverty” group.

*U.S. Census Bureau, “Poverty 2002”
<http://www.census.gov/hhes/poverty/threshld/thresh02.html>

Exhibit 7
Primary Income Source
(n=86)

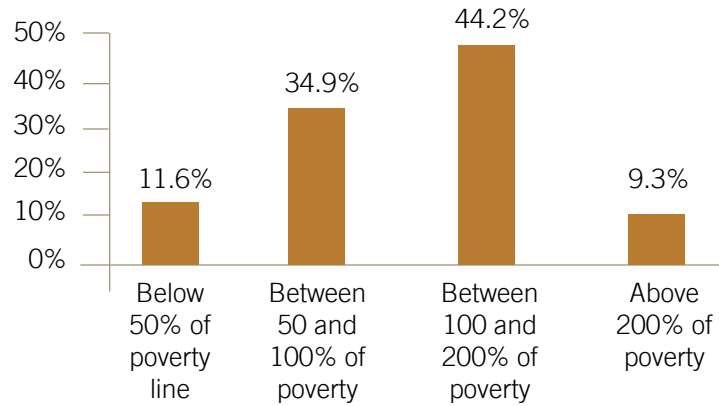
Source	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Employment	45	52.3%
TANF	18	20.9%
Unemployment	7	8.1%
Supplemental Security Income Benefits (SSI)	5	5.8%
Social Security Disability Benefits (SSDI)	5	5.8%
Child Support	1	1.2%
Social Security (SS/SSA)	1	1.2%
Other	4	4.7%

Participants in Housing First have very low incomes. In order to calculate participants' level of poverty, clients were grouped in one of four categories (with an income of less than 50% of the poverty threshold; with an income between 50% and 100% of the poverty threshold; between 100 and 200% of the poverty threshold; and above 200% of the poverty threshold), based on the number of dependents in their household and their total monthly income.

Recognizing that the cost of living in Santa Clara County is much higher than the national average, it is important to recognize that even those families who are between 100 and 200% of poverty are facing dire economic circumstances. While it is not the focus of Housing First to increase participants' level of income, for some clients this may be necessary in order for them to retain permanent housing.

Participants' monthly incomes ranged from \$107 to \$5,900. On average, participants have monthly incomes of \$1,559. Looking at Exhibit 8, we can see that their incomes place them near the poverty line. Almost half (46.5%) have incomes below the poverty line, and only 9.3% live above 200% of the poverty threshold.

**Exhibit 8
Income Level
(n = 86)**



Prior Living Situation

Prior to enrolling in Housing First, 44% of the client families were living in a family or friend’s home. The next most common living situation (34%) was in a home that the family rented or owned. Fewer than 10% of the participants were in a hotel or motel, street or domestic violence situation prior to program entry.

**Exhibit 9
Prior Living Situation
(n=86)**

Living Situation	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Family or friend’s home	38	44.2%
Rent/own house or apartment	29	33.7%
Shelter	11	12.8%
Hotel or motel	4	4.7%
Street (park, tent, car, vacant bldg.)	2	2.3%
Domestic violence situation	2	2.3%

Case Management Needs

At time of program entry, case managers worked with participants to identify their primary goals or needed resources. For close to half of the clients, Housing First staff identified a need for help with “education/career change,” “money management,” “promotion/salary increase” and “self-empowerment.”

Exhibit 10
Primary Goals or Needed Resources*
(n = 86)

Goal or Needed Resource	Number of Respondents	Percent of Respondents
Education/career change	51	59.3%
Money management	46	53.5%
Promotion/salary increase	43	50.0%
Self-empowerment	39	45.3%
Employment	27	31.4%
Childcare	27	31.4%
Transportation resources	24	27.9%
Counseling/crisis	21	24.4%
Legal matters	19	22.1%
Family matters	19	22.1%
Household management	18	20.9%
Advocacy	17	19.8%
Health matters	16	22.1%
Other (computer training, ESL)	14	16.3%

* The question allowed respondents to “check all that apply”; percentages add to more than 100%.

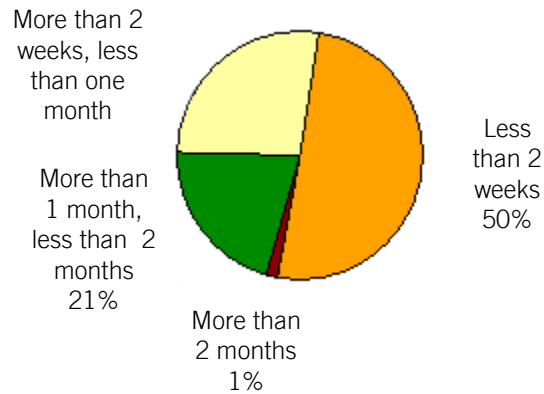
B. HOUSING OUTCOMES

The primary goal of Housing First is to help homeless families become re-housed. Among families enrolled in the program as of the end of August 2004, 76 of 86 (88.4%) were housed. In all, the project has helped to house 278 individuals, including 157 children under the age of 18. This is a high success rate for the new project.

Exhibit 11
Housing Outcomes as of the end of August 2004
(n = 86)



Exhibit 12
Length of Time from Program Entry and
Housing Attainment
(n = 76)



A major goal of the Housing First team is to reduce the amount of time that it takes families to get re-housed. Has it been successful? In fact, the team has housed its clients extremely quickly. Among Housing First participants *who attained housing*, it took an average of **19 days** for clients to become re-housed. The amount of time that it took these participants to attain housing ranged from 0 to 65 days. (For Market Rate clients, this time-to-housing number represents the time elapsed between enrollment and housing. For Section 8 clients, the clock starts ticking once they get their voucher, so time-to-housing represents the time elapsed between voucher release and housing.) As shown in Exhibit 12, it has taken half of the participants less than two weeks to attain housing and over three-quarters (78%) less than one month.

As of the end of August 2004, there were 10 clients who had not yet attained housing: five in the Section 8 program and five in the Market Rate program. All five Market Rate clients enrolled in August. The Section 8 clients had enrolled in October 2003, and were in the process of obtaining vouchers when further voucher issuance was suspended. Their vouchers were issued to them in August 2004. Therefore, Housing First has no clients who are waiting a long time for housing.

By any measure, these statistics are signs of success. But how do they compare with the length of time-to-housing for homeless families participating in other types of programs: emergency shelter and transitional housing? We have statistics from EHC that can help us to answer this question.¹⁹ Between October 2002 and July 2004, 186 families moved through EHC's emergency shelter program, with an average stay of 106 days. Of these families, 70% left for permanent housing or another stable housing situation (e.g., living with family), 20%

¹⁹ We do not have comparable data from InnVision.

went to a transitional housing program at EHC or elsewhere, and 10% went to unknown destinations or non-stable living situations (e.g., another emergency shelter, prison, etc). In this same timeframe, 84 families moved through EHC's transitional housing program, with an average stay of 235 days. Of these families, 92% went on to permanent housing, 3% went to another transitional housing program, 2% went to emergency shelter, and 3% were unknown.

These numbers cannot provide a direct comparison to Housing First numbers. We would like to compare average time-to-housing across the programs, but for some of the families in the emergency and transitional housing programs, we don't know how long it took them to find housing after they left the programs (or whether they did). For a rough comparison, however, we can use the average lengths of stay in the EHC programs as a proxy for time-to-housing. We should keep in mind, however, that the average length of stay for the EHC clients is *less* than their average time-to-housing, since part of these groups left before they had found housing. Even with an underestimation of time-to-housing for the participants in EHC programs, the comparison between Housing First and EHC statistics is striking: 19 days for Housing First clients compared with 106 and 235 days for emergency shelter and transitional housing clients, respectively. In comparing Housing First clients to those who were in emergency shelter and transitional housing with EHC, Housing First appears to be much more effective in rapidly re-housing its clients. This is not to put EHC programs in a negative light; after all, the proportions of their clients leaving the programs for permanent housing are very high. Rather, this comparison is meant to highlight that, thus far, Housing First has proven an effective way to help families move out of homelessness and to make this move quickly.

Another important measure of the success of Housing First is the rate at which clients were able to retain their housing. One client lost housing due to the fact that she lost her Section 8 voucher for non-compliance with Housing Authority rules. However, results are very positive in terms of retention: the client mentioned above is the only one who lost housing, and *no clients lost housing for economic reasons*.

C. SURVEY DATA GATHERED AT 3, 6 AND 12 MONTHS

Housing First staff are conducting periodic surveys of clients in order to assess whether they're still in housing, monitor progress toward their goals, and assess satisfaction with the services they receive from their case managers and the program in general. Clients are asked

to complete and mail in a survey at the 3-month, 6-month and 12-month marks. Out of 74 clients who were due for any survey (i.e., clients who had reached at least the 3-month mark), 69 turned in at least one survey. For the analysis we used the *most recent survey turned in*. Of these 69 clients turning in surveys, 45 had turned in the most recent survey that was due – for the remaining 24 clients, we used the data from the previous survey (e.g., a client with a 6-month survey due had not turned it in yet, but had turned in a survey at 3 months). For four clients the most recent survey is from the 12-month mark, for 50 clients the most recent survey is from the 6-month mark, and for 15 clients the most recent survey is from the 3-month mark. This information is summarized in Exhibit 13 below.

Exhibit 13
Client Response Rates to 3, 6 and 12-Month Surveys

Survey Date	Client Due to Turn in a Survey*	Client Turned in Survey that Was Due	Client Turned in the Previous Survey	Client Turned in No Survey	Surveys Used in Analysis
3 months	5	2	NA	3	15
6 months	54	39	13	2	50
12 months	15	4	11	0	4
Total	74	45	24	5	69

*The numbers in this column equal the total of the numbers in the next three columns.

These surveys, though containing the same questions, are not exactly comparable since they reflect differing amounts of time that the client has spent in the program. As more time passes, evaluators will have data for a larger population that has moved all the way through the program and has had a chance to complete all three surveys. At that time, we will be able to examine more rigorously change for clients over time.

Living Situation, Finances and Children's Education

Exhibit 13 summarizes data available on clients' living situation, their income and savings, and the education of school-aged dependents. These results show very positive outcomes for Housing First families. In our interpretation below, we concentrate on what happened to the respondents returning 3-month and 6-month surveys, since only four clients have returned 12-month surveys so far.

Exhibit 14
Follow-up Survey Responses

Outcomes from Respondents' Involvement in the Housing First Program		3-Month Follow-up Survey (n = 15)	6-Month Follow-up Survey (n = 50)	1 Year Follow-up Survey (n = 4)	Total (n = 69)
Living Situation	In permanent housing	66.7%	96.0%	100%	89.9%
	"Satisfied" or "Very Satisfied" with living situation	46.7%	80.0%	100%	73.9%
Income and Savings	Income has increased	26.7%	28.0%	50.0%	29.0%
	Has a monthly budget	86.7%	86.0%	50.0%	84.1%
	Has saved money	33.3%	50.0%	50.0%	46.4%
	Has opened a checking or savings account	6.7%	18.0%	50.0%	17.4%
	Financial situation has improved	33.3%	64.0%	50.0%	56.5%
Children's Education	Children enrolled in school	93.3%	90.0%	75.0%	89.9%
	Children's school attendance has improved	26.7%	38.0%	50.0%	36.2%

Two-thirds of respondents have gotten into permanent housing by three months after enrollment; by six months, almost every respondent has. Many are satisfied or very satisfied with their living situations. It makes sense that this proportion is much lower for the group responding to the 3-month survey, since fewer of them are in permanent housing. Four families in this group were not in permanent housing, and none of them said "satisfied" or "very satisfied." Of the 11 families in permanent housing, 7 of them "satisfied" or "very satisfied."

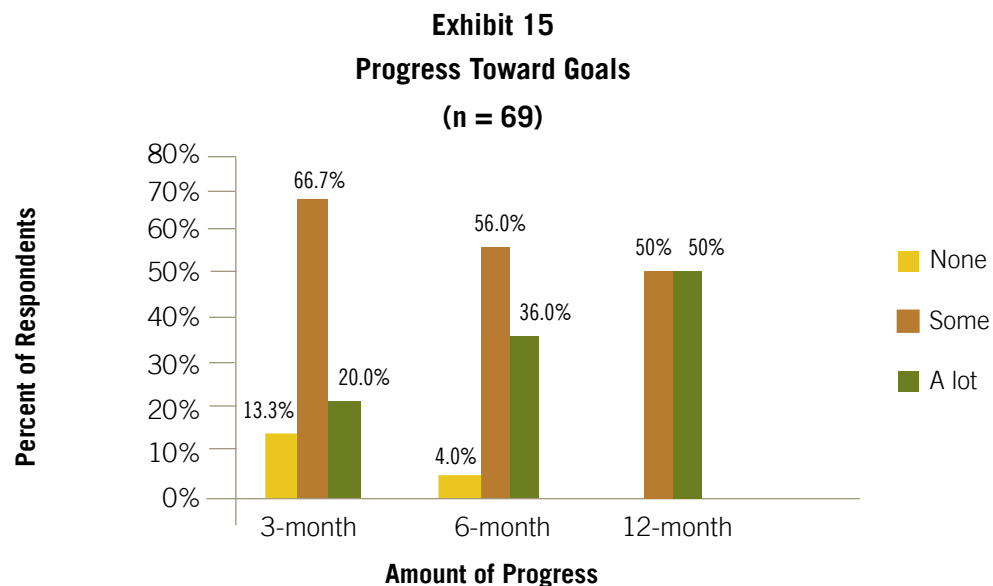
Results for income and savings are very encouraging. For the three-month and six-month groups, one-quarter report that their income has increased. This is a significant accomplishment, especially during these difficult economic times. Almost 90% of clients in both the 3-month and 6-month groups reported that they have monthly budgets. One-third of the 3-month group and half of the 6-month group reported having accumulated savings since enrolling in Housing First. Clients are taking control of their finances – an important

step that will enable them to remain stably housed. Sizeable minorities report having opened a checking or savings account, with the percentage larger for those who have been enrolled longer (and some clients already had such accounts opened before enrollment). As expected, given these other results, similar percentages report that their financial situation has improved.

The data on the enrollment of children in school are a bit puzzling, as it shows a drop from baseline. However, this may be due to the fact that the question simply asks whether their children are enrolled in school. Since “children” includes those younger than school age, a “no” answer may simply indicate that children are under five. In addition, if a client has more than one child and at least one not enrolled, s/he might answer no for this reason since it is not true that all her/his children are enrolled. Given these possibilities, these enrollment rates probably reflect something close to full enrollment of school-aged children, if not full enrollment. In addition, sizeable minorities report that their children’s school attendance has improved, with a greater percentage of the 6-month group reporting improvement (almost 30% for the 3-month group; almost 40% for the 6-month group).

Progress Toward Goals

Clients were asked about the progress they had been making toward their goals in their Family Action Plans. Their answers are displayed in Exhibit 15 below.



These data are very encouraging, since the trend is exactly what we would hope to see if the Housing First program is aiding the clients in making progress toward their goals.²⁰ Fewer

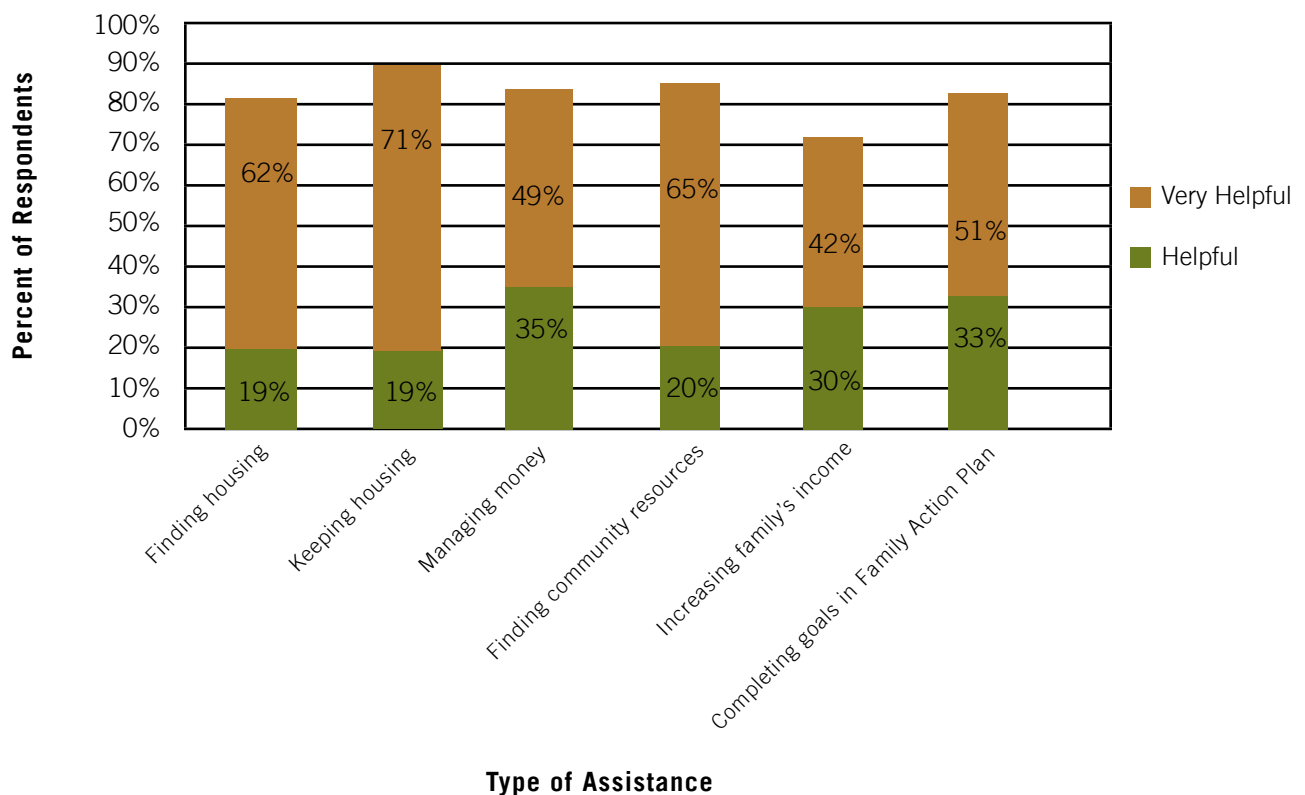
²⁰ Again, since there are only 4 clients who returned 12-month surveys, it is not reasonable to draw any conclusions from their responses. Still, it should be noted that data from these surveys do not contradict the trend shown in the 3-month and 6-month surveys.

clients at the 6-month mark than at the 3-month mark say that they are making no progress toward goals and no one says that at the 12-month mark. In addition, for groups that have been in the program longer, higher proportions of respondents say they have made a lot of progress. Overall, it appears that as time goes on and clients continue to use Housing First services and work to fulfill their Family Actions Plans, clients are less likely to say they have made “none” or “some” progress toward their goals, and more likely to say that they have made a lot of progress.

Satisfaction with Assistance from Housing First

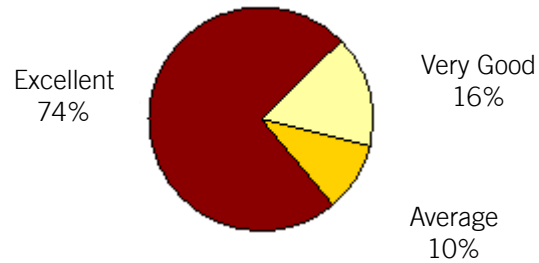
Clients were asked about their satisfaction with the assistance they had received from Housing First in various areas. There were four ratings they could give to the Housing First staff: “not helpful,” “somewhat helpful,” “helpful” or “very helpful.” Answers were overwhelmingly positive, with respondents recognizing the amount of assistance they have received from Housing First in finding and keeping their housing. Respondents were also appreciative of the help they received in other areas, from managing money to finding community resources. Results are summarized in Exhibit 16 below.

Exhibit 16
Helpfulness of Assistance Provided to Participants
(n = 69)



Clients were also asked about the quality of the assistance they had received from Housing First. They could answer “excellent,” “very good,” “average” or “poor.” No one answered “poor,” and almost three-quarters said “excellent.”

Exhibit 17
Overall Assistance Received from Housing First
(n = 69)



D. PARTICIPANT PROFILES

While quantitative data provides useful aggregate information about program participants, from this kind of information alone it can be difficult to get a sense of the individual families who comprise the larger picture. Each family has a unique and important story to tell. To discover some of these stories, we use excerpts from the files of case managers. We excerpted and edited these profiles, changing names and other identifying characteristics to protect the identity of the participants.

Housing First Participant Profile: Lillian and her Children

Lillian and her seven children were referred to Housing First by an EHC employee at the Department of Homeless Services. Six months before coming to Housing First, Lillian had an emergency cesarean-section which changed her life. She became disabled when the needle shifted while giving the epidural, striking a nerve and causing permanent damage. Unfortunately, she had to leave her job as an office manager (in which she was earning over \$5,000 monthly) and collect unemployment benefits, which barely covered her monthly rental amount. She had enough savings so that she could maintain her home, where she and her family had been living for over two years. But her money soon ran out. Within a couple of months, Lillian was forced to give her landlord a 30-day notice and file for bankruptcy.

Lillian sought help from homeless services but was consistently turned away due to having such a large family and/or having teenage boys. She and her children had been living out of her car and in motels for the two months before coming to Housing First. When Lillian's disability insurance was awarded it gave her enough money to afford rent but she still faced problems renting due to the poor credit she had due to a prior eviction and bankruptcy. She had called the Department of Homeless Services to inquire about motel vouchers and was referred to Housing First.

Lillian chose a three-bedroom house in San Jose close to schools and her physical therapist. Housing First was able to assist with move-in costs. She and her family are settled into their new home and she is very excited about participating in the services offered by Housing First for the next year.

viii. conclusion

The evaluation of the Housing First Initiative addresses the initiative's progress and effects on three levels: project implementation, the participating families and the system of care for homeless families in Santa Clara County. One year and three months after project launch, the Housing First Collaborative has made some significant strides both in terms of project implementation and helping participants. It is currently too early to see the initiative's ultimate impact on the system level, but the enthusiasm of participating organizations for the Housing First concept indicates that the initiative may indeed provide an impetus for important changes in Santa Clara County's approach to caring for homeless families. The table on the next page summarizes the results of the Housing First project. Following that table, we discuss progress made on each of the three levels, and look toward the transition that the collaborative is currently making to year two of the initiative.

Summary of Housing First Accomplishments in Relation to its Goals		
Initiative Goals	Accomplishments of the Collaborative	
Participating Families	Acquire and remain in stable housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ As of the end of August 2004, the project has enrolled 86 families and successfully housed 76 (88%) of them. ★ It took families only 19 days, on average, to acquire housing. ★ 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. ★ 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. ★ 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 to remain stably housed.
	Financial stability maintained or increased	<p>Of the 69 clients who turned in surveys:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ The incomes of 29% of the families had increased since enrolling in Housing First. ★ 46% of the families had accumulated some savings. ★ 56% reported that their financial situation had improved.
	Knowledge of money management skills increased	<p>Of the 69 clients who turned in surveys:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ 84% reported having drawn up family budgets. ★ Of those who did not already have a checking or savings account, 17% had opened one.
	Children's school attendance maintained or increased	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ 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?" ★ Of the 69 clients surveyed, 36% reported that the school attendance of their child(ren) had improved.

Collaborative	Stronger collaborative relationships among participating organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ 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. ★ 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. ★ 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. ★ 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. ★ 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.
Community	Increased options for homeless families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ 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: ★ 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). ★ 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. ★ As a greater number of agencies shape their programs according to Housing First principles, both the options and prospects for homeless families will increase.

Overcoming Challenges and Making Advances in Project Implementation

Those involved in planning for the collaboration among the Emergency Housing Consortium, InnVision and the Santa Clara Housing Authority knew they would be forging a new and not an entirely easy partnership. A history of competition between EHC and

InnVision created some unique challenges in implementation, requiring more effort to build a team spirit among the staff and attention to developing policies for the program. The Housing First team and steering committee, however, have been able to consistently work through or set aside issues of competition and turf and focus on the mission of their collaborative.

The most serious challenge to the initiative was the protracted Section 8 voucher crisis. Enrolling Section 8 participants turned out to be an unexpectedly time-consuming process, and this had a number of implications for the team. First, it meant that for a few months case managers had to focus on the Section 8 process rather than on intensive home-based case management with their clients. Second, the Section 8 duties of the housing specialist took so many hours that she did not have time to provide sufficient support to the Market Rate families. Beyond these difficulties, further issuance of vouchers was suspended in November of 2003, creating a housing crisis for 13 families who had already been promised vouchers, and creating uncertainty about the future issuance of the remaining 53 vouchers the Housing Authority had committed to.

Each of these challenges was navigated well by the Housing First team and steering committee. When the case managers became overwhelmed by the Section 8 process (the duties for which were well outside their job descriptions), the team renegotiated the division of labor in such a way that case managers were responsible only for pre-screening applicants, and the Housing Authority would handle the applications, third-party verification and voucher issuance. This took some of the pressure off the case managers, and gave them time to supply intensive case management to the families.

In order to manage the housing crisis that the voucher suspension had precipitated for 13 families, the team pooled its resources to ensure that families had what they needed during this time. EHC and InnVision found temporary housing for those who needed it, and the project was able to make use of InnVision's monetary emergency fund for some of these families.

Furthermore, the program director and steering committee turned the challenge of voucher suspension into an opportunity. While the vouchers were eventually made available again, there was a period of months during which the team 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 families 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 Impact on Participating Families: Getting Rapidly Rehoused and Making Progress toward a Better Future

At the end of August 2004, 76 families had been successfully housed - almost 90% of the 86 families enrolled. In all, the project has helped to house 278 individuals, including 157 children under the age of 18. In addition, it took these families an average of only *19 days to become housed*, with a maximum of only a little over two months. Although a perfect comparison cannot be made (since evaluators do not have data for a comparable population not participating in Housing First), it appears that this is a group that gets “rapidly rehoused.” But given that families may spend much longer than this amount of time in transitional housing programs (the average for EHC is about 8 months), the speed at which these clients get housed is impressive. In addition, the housing retention rate is very high: only one client had lost housing (due to non-compliance with Housing Authority rules for Section 8). Thus far, Housing First has shown to be an effective way to help families move out of homelessness and stay in their homes.

Access to services, and the assistance provided by intensive home-based case management, also appears to be having strong positive effects on the ability of the Housing First families to work toward improving their lives. Follow-up surveys administered at 3, 6 and 12 months show that most families are happy with their living situations, have children enrolled in school and are making progress in the area of finances. Results for financial progress are particularly striking, with about 29% reporting increased income, about 84% working with a monthly budget and about 46% having accumulated savings.

Families also report mostly “some” or “a lot” of progress toward the goals in their Family Action Plans, with those who have been in the program longer more likely to report “a lot of progress.” All of these results are extremely encouraging, indicating that the Housing First model of intensive home-based case management can help clients take action on their own behalf and create better futures for their families.

Re-Orienting the System of Care for Homeless Families in Santa Clara County: Early Indications of the Possibilities

It takes a great deal of time, effort and cultural entrepreneurship for a particular field to reorient the basic concepts that shape the work of the organizations within it. Currently, traditional case management and the idea of “housing readiness” dominate the approach of homeless service providers. In funding this initiative, the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation envisions a process in which organizations shift their approach from housing readiness to Housing First. It will likely be many years before we can know if such a shift has truly taken place, but in the meantime there are early indicators that the initiative is contributing to change.

By involving the two largest providers of homeless services in the county, the Schwab Foundation ensured that individuals influential within the field would be exposed to the theory and practice of Housing First. Interviewed 15 months into the project, the program director and steering committee members emphasized how much they had learned about Housing First, and the extent to which they had become advocates for it. They are bringing it back to their own organizations, creating buy-in there. They are also “proselytizing” about it to other providers within the field. Advocacy by individuals influential within a field is often a first step toward system-level change in that field. As the initiative matures, we may be able to assess the degree to which it has served as a model to other homeless service providers within Santa Clara County, and the degree to which it has been an impetus for change within the county’s system of care for homeless families.

Looking Back at the Foundation Established in Year One – and Looking Toward Year Two

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 housed 76 families and helped to put them 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.