

## **TWELVE POINT POLICY FOR SAN FRANCISCO'S HOMELESS**

Approved by the County's Board of Supervisors: 4/18/88

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## PREAMBLE

Homelessness is a problem which victimizes society's most vulnerable members -- the elderly and disabled, women and children, war veterans and refugees, the undereducated and unskilled. Financial costs range far beyond the millions spent on emergency shelter, and the social costs have begun to *erode* the quality of life in our community.

Efforts to address this problem have been short-term and crisis-oriented. The resulting service system is a patchwork rather than a network which often perpetuates the problems it seeks to prevent. The absence of a unified vision and a comprehensive strategy has obstructed responses to both the acute and chronic aspects of this problem.

The homeless problem transcends all jurisdictional boundaries and can only be resolved through the involvement of all segments of the community, including the homeless themselves. Such an effort requires consensus and collaboration between both the public and the private sector. The basis of such a relationship is outlined in the following Twelve Point Policy for San Francisco's Homeless.

The primary purpose of this policy is to initiate a positive approach which focuses attention on the availability of affordable, permanent housing as the only acceptable solution to the homeless problem and upon adequate, appropriate support services as the means to facilitate those in transition toward that end.

The conceptual basis for the successful implementation of this policy is a continuum of coordinated services that provides timely, effective intervention at the lowest possible cost. Such a service system would:

- 1) provide protection and essential services for those unable to care for themselves;
- 2) replace disincentives for getting off welfare with rewards for independence;
- 3) establish an assistance process which is not itself subject to abuse;
- 4) serve as a mechanism for future response to changing community needs; and
- 5) identify both obvious and hidden costs to demonstrate that the type of policy outlined herein need not require significant additional funding but rather a reallocation and better use of existing resources, including in-kind contributions.

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## **POINT I: Comprehensive Planning**

### **PROBLEM:**

The existing "system" of services for San Francisco's homeless population evolved as an emergency response to a problem originally perceived as temporary. Disjointed planning and uncoordinated programs have produced a crisis-oriented process with still-unresolved legal, administrative and economic problems that are costly in both human and financial terms. No centralized agency or group has been either the authority or responsibility to coordinate the activities of the governmental and community agencies serving the homeless. As a consequence, myths, misperceptions and misinformation have come to dominate policy discussions, causing efforts to become confused and accountability diffused.

In the absence of clear policy direction, there is no basis for integrating public and private sector support targeted toward these populations.

### **PRINCIPLE:**

The problems of homelessness can most efficiently and effectively be addressed through centralized, information-based planning process incorporating government, business, civic and community interests. The homeless must also have opportunity for input in both the policy-development and program-planning processes.

### **POLICY:**

A single body with representation from local government, community agencies, the private sector and the homeless shall be designated to maintain communication and collaboration in local efforts that address the problems of homelessness. This group shall be charged with the task of initiating and evaluating homeless policy and program proposals. Funding allocations in this area should require a commitment to coordinate with existing activities.

### **PLANS:**

- 1) Develop a legislative mandate for comprehensive planning and system-wide coordination.
- 2) Establish a coordinating body, with equal representation from government, business and community interests, which will be responsible for monitoring implementation of San Francisco's homeless plan.
- 3) Maintain ongoing data collection as a basis for developing future policy recommendations.
- 4) Designate one local authority to be responsible for ensuring compliance by various agencies within City government.

## **POINT II: OUTREACH AND POINT-OF-ACCESS TO SERVICES**

### **PROBLEM:**

Homeless people seeking assistance often find there are insufficient services dispersed from separate locations through complex administrative procedures. Some persons who need survival assistance lack the knowledge, language skills and functional capacity necessary to find and receive them. Others, particularly youth and substance abusers, may be distrustful of the service system: and unwilling to become involved in available programs, Moreover, the services are generally concentrated in the central city area and do not address the growing needs in other neighborhoods.

### **PRINCIPLE:**

Those with immediate survival needs should receive appropriate services at accessible locations.

### **POLICY:**

Early identification and intervention shall be promoted as the basis for providing services to those living on the streets. Centralized intake sites in multi-purpose programs shall be used to minimize duplication and maximize effectiveness of services rendered. Services shall be available in neighborhoods where there is need

### **PROGRAM PLANS:**

- 1) Establish a city-wide, street-based outreach capability to provide emergency access to needed services. Expand existing outreach services for youth.
- 2) Utilize centralized intake facilities to assist special needs populations, providing intervention and referral as appropriate.
- 3) Develop a system of support services relevant to the problems being encountered. These services should be available on a daytime drop-in basis and implemented through a peer-oriented, self-help approach.
- 4) Maintain an up-to-date flow chart correlating functional relationships and role responsibilities within the service delivery system.
- 5) Create on-site access to benefit entitlement systems at intake sites to minimize both undue hardship as well as duplication possibilities.

## POINT III: HOUSING

### **PROBLEM:**

The lack of adequate, affordable housing is both a major cause of homelessness and a major roadblock to its solution. The available housing alternatives are not adequate to the demand. There are just over three thousand emergency shelter beds for the estimated six thousand adults (and families) in San Francisco County. There are barely fifty beds for as many as one thousand homeless youth.

### **PRINCIPLE:**

Shelter is a basic human need, the absence of which destabilizes both the homeless individual and the community at large. The City is a safer and healthier environment when everyone has a suitable place to sleep and tend to their personal needs. Transitional and long-term housing are the best investment options and should be considered a priority for available resources

### **POLICY:**

The opportunity for safe and decent housing should be available to all in need. The configuration of the homeless service system shall promote movement from the streets to self-sufficiency through linkage between emergency shelter, transitional living and affordable permanent housing programs.

### **PROGRAM PLANS:**

- 1) Develop a unified city-wide approach to retention and expansion of low-cost housing that is affordable to people who receive public assistance.
- 2) Make the creation of safe, livable housing for the elderly and disabled, women and families, and emancipated minors a priority in the development of new housing units.
- 3) Create incentives for joint ventures between private and public sectors, between for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, religious and secular institutions. Promote involvement by civic and philanthropic entities.
- 4) Explore and implement innovative housing alternatives such as shared housing, transitional living situations and rehabilitation of vacant housing units, etc.
- 5) Direct public funds wherever possible toward non-profit neighborhood housing development corporations which are able to acquire and rehabilitate existing housing units with the assistance of federal and state funds. This form of subsidized housing is more affordable to low-income residents and builds equity into the local supply of low-cost housing.

## POINT IV: EMPLOYMENT

### **PROBLEM:**

In a highly competitive employment market, homeless persons face imposing obstacles when trying to rejoin the work force. The absence of clean clothes, a phone to make appointments and get messages, a clear resume and sharp interview skills is often compounded by a lack of education, local references and self-confidence. Additionally, many who lost decent-paying blue-collar jobs during the; seventies are not trained for the minimum wage service industry jobs which dominate the "economic recovery" of the eighties.

### **PRINCIPLE:**

Anyone capable of working should have the opportunity to secure gainful employment.

### **POLICY:**

Initiatives launched through collaboration between the public and private sector will create incentives for hiring the homeless and provide skills training, job-readiness support, and transitional employment when necessary.

### **PLANS:**

- 1) Foster development of educational, pre-employment, job-readiness and skills development programs within the shelter system.
- 2) Establish a computer-linked network constellation for communication and coordination between job development and placement services to share employment leads, improve referral matching, etc.
- 3) Create hiring incentives to reward employers who utilize the homeless in their labor force.
- 4) Develop a "revolving loan" fund to provide minimal expenses necessary to facilitate transitions to self-sufficiency.
- 5) Initiate major publicity campaigns promoting this effort.
- 6) Organize short-term living arrangements for those who become employed but not yet able to pay rent.

## POINT V: SUPPORT SERVICES

### **PROBLEM:**

Services available from most public agencies are not always designed to address the needs of people with multiple problems. With limited resources to respond to immediate needs and minimal coordination with programs outside their jurisdiction, such agencies have difficulty dealing with complicated situations and dysfunctional individuals. Unless appropriate support services are available for some of these persons, their difficulty in managing life's responsibilities (i.e. resources, appointments. etc.) will result in homelessness and/or costly institutionalization.

### **PRINCIPLE:**

People unable to cope with existing social support systems should be assisted in accessing available services. Appropriate utilization of resource entitlements is the most cost-effective approach to the problems of special-needs populations. Peer-oriented support services provide a source of security and stability to those who have become isolated by their incapacitating condition.

### **POLICY:**

Those unable to seek, find or access needed services shall be located and assisted in this process. City departments dealing with different needs (i.e. health, welfare, housing, etc.) of the same -population shall coordinate their efforts. Support service workers shall promote inter-agency coordination by serving as advocates for those in need.

### **PLANS:**

- 1) Short-range: Establish pilot project(s) providing comprehensive support services on a person rather than problem-oriented basis, targeting the most vulnerable special populations
- 2) Mid-range: Expand the pool of support workers at access points and within programs targeting special-need populations.
- 3) Long-range: Establish an Ombudsman Component that has the capacity to coordinate intervention by available service providers in special-need situations.

## **POINT VI: HEALTH NEEDS AND SERVICES**

### **PROBLEM:**

Many homeless people suffer from a wide variety of health problems, which are as often a cause as a consequence of homelessness. Existing medical, mental health and substance abuse services are all insufficient to meet this need, and early identification and intervention services are virtually non-existent. The absence of timely and adequate intervention allows problems to become more chronic and resulting conditions more acute. Additionally, the lack of appropriate community-based care programs leaves no alternative to those released from treatment facilities but to return to the streets, where the cycle of illness is perpetuated.

### **PRINCIPLE:**

Individuals incapacitated by mental or physical disabilities require treatment of a type and in a location appropriate to their situation.

Individuals with functional impairments, as well as society as a whole, can benefit from programs of sufficient quantity and variety which provide the services necessary to help them live as independently as possible. Prevention and early detection strategies are the most effective and least expensive approach to dealing with health problems.

### **POLICY:**

Adequate treatment services shall be available in an environment that is least restrictive and most likely to protect the individual and others from harm. The system of services should be integrated, timely, effective and appropriate.

### **PROGRAM PLANS**

- 1) Develop a mechanism for coordination of existing programs, and a means for communicating updated service information to all providers within that system.
- 2) Expand existing services which have long waiting lists.
- 3) Specify the homeless as a high priority target population within the public health and mental health public policy planning system.
- 4) Improve coordination between access points (e.g. emergency shelters and primary care medical facilities, providing capacity for assessment, transportation, referral and other required services.
- 5) Modify existing health services to make them more receptive to homeless people and more relevant to the often complex and interrelated health and social problems characteristic of the homeless.

## POINT VII: HOMELESS YOUTH

### **PROBLEM:**

There are an estimated 1,000 homeless youth living on the streets of San Francisco for whom there are fewer than fifty safe sleeping accommodations available. As often "throwaways" as "runaways," most of these youth leave home -- most often from other counties, states or even countries -- to escape physical and/or sexual abuse. Many are "system failure" youth whose needs have not been met through multiple placements in traditional service system programs. Many must support themselves through illegal means -- usually prostitution and drug-dealing -- which leave them-- vulnerable to exploitation, the spread of AIDS and other endangering circumstances. For many, neither family reunification nor foster care is a available option.

Despite numerous directives in recent years by the Social Service Commission, the San Francisco Department of Social Services has yet to implement a plan for services to this population; its current practice is to provide these youth with a bus ticket back to the homes where they had been abused.

### **PRINCIPLE:**

Children are our most valuable resource. Those exposed to the elements should be offered support and protection.

### **POLICY:**

Youth living on the streets shall be provided access to safe stabilized living arrangements where immediate problems and long-term solutions can be fully explored and effectively realized.

### **PROGRAM PLANS**

- 1) San Francisco Department of Social Services shall provide financial and programmatic support for the services needed to meet the needs of the homeless youth population, either internally or through contracting with community programs.
- 2) The existing network of services, organized through Youth Emergency Services Coalition, shall be evaluated in terms of its scope of services in relation to the scale of existing needs.
- 3) Collaboration between public and private sector funding sources shall delineate responsibilities for various elements of the on-going operations of the services system.

## **POINT VIII: OTHER SPECIAL POPULATIONS**

### **PROBLEM:**

Although the hallmark of the homeless population is its diversity, there are many discernable sub-group that constitute a list of society's most vulnerable members. Their unique circumstances make the prevention and alleviation of their condition most complicated. Dealing with the issues of these groups within the context of generic approaches to the general population is usually inefficient, often ineffective and sometimes inappropriate.

### **PRINCIPLE:**

Women and families, seniors and disabled, veterans and refugees of war, persons with AIDS or ARC, newcomers and those with emotional disturbances have already burdensome problems which, when compounded by homelessness, are often overwhelming. Special attention and consideration is warranted in these situations. Because the configuration of problems is often unique to a specific subgroup, services should be provided in manner that best addresses the distinct set of needs of the target population.

### **POLICY:**

Specialized services shall be targeted to the specific needs of the particularly vulnerable subgroups within San Francisco's homeless population.

### **PROGRAM PLANS**

- 1) Staff assigned to outreach and intake duties shall be trained to identify persons with characteristics common to target subgroups.
- 2) Specialized programs offering emergency and/or transitional housing and on-site support services shall be established to best serve the unique need of specific subgroups of the homeless population.
- 3) Long-term stabilization shall be achieved through advocacy within existing case and entitlement systems, ongoing case management programs, and alternative living arrangements.

## **POINT IX: Benefit Entitlements**

### **PROBLEM:**

Homelessness has a direct relationship to General Assistance and other entitlement programs. The lack of central coordination between immediate, short-term and permanent assistance entitlements available through City, State and Federal agencies creates an intimidating and confusing system which inhibits rather than facilitates access by those in need.

Approximately one-third of the homeless are military veterans, half of those from the Vietnam era. Unlike every other government benefit adjudication process, those denied VA benefits are effectively prevented from pursuing judicial review since a Civil War era law prevents the lawyers appealing that decision from earning more than \$10 from working on the case.

### **PRINCIPLE:**

All persons in need of public assistance should be afforded timely access to these services

### **POLICY:**

Benefit programs shall provide reasonable access to those eligible for assistance available, taking into account their functional limitations and immediate needs.

### **PROGRAM PLANS:**

- 1) The proposed General Assistance Reform Package recently passed by the Board of Supervisors and vetoed by the Mayor should be reexamined. Points of concern substantiated by objective data should be considered separately, and the main thrust of the reform effort revived.
- 2) The client advocacy component should be strengthened SO that those receiving GA benefits or eligible for social security/SSI or other entitlements can be facilitated in their transition to these systems.
- 3) A strong "job-readiness" component should be established to enhance the job search requirement imposed by the GA program.
- 4) Federal legislation should be immediately initiated ending the judicial review exclusion and attorney fee limitation on Veterans Administration cases.

## **POINT X: STREET SANITATION AND PUBLIC SAFETY**

### **PROBLEM:**

The lack of available public toilets and secured garbage cans creates public health hazards. People sleeping on the streets are often victims of violence, increasing instability and insecurity within both the homeless population and the rest of the City.

### **PRINCIPLE:**

The availability of facilities which enable people to meet basic needs creates an hospitable civic atmosphere conducive to both the social and economic interests of those who live there.

### **POLICY:**

Access to public toilets, daytime drop-in services, night time emergency shelter and appropriate support services shall be maintained in reasonable proportion to the need for such services.

Applicable statutes shall be enforced by those who choose not to avail themselves of such services and refuse/fail to conform to established standards for acceptable public behavior.

### **PROGRAM PLANS**

- 1) Public toilets should be installed in locations where homeless people congregate.
- 2) Hire homeless and/or low-income residents into short-term transitional employment positions responsible for regularly cleaning up the central city area.
- 3) Maintain outreach teams to locate those unable to seek or find needed services; provide beat cops and other public safety personnel with emergency referral information.
- 4) Establish a communication and coordination system to facilitate referrals of those picked up off the streets.

## POINT XI: FUNDING RESPONSIBILITY

### **PROBLEM:**

Homelessness is a problem that transcends geographic boundaries. However, both the State and the Federal governments have abdicated their responsibilities to the cities and counties, which lack sufficient resources to adequately address this problem.

Further, homelessness is a problem whose solution transcends categorical program areas (i.e. housing, welfare, employment). Disagreements among these systems regarding who pays frequently means that no one pays.

Although the costs of homelessness have an enormous financial impact on both the private and public sectors, there is as -- yet no effect partnership fostering coordination of resources from these respective areas.

### **PRINCIPLE:**

Homelessness is a societal problem that can most effectively be addressed through coordinated efforts accurately targeted and effectively utilized. Good stewardship of public funds is essential. City, county, state and federal officials must accept leadership responsibility for establishing core support of primary programs. Government, community and business efforts must be integrated.

### **POLICY:**

Human need and fiscal accountability should receive balanced consideration in that development and implementation of necessary programs. Available resources should be directed toward solution-oriented approaches, rather than programs and procedures that perpetuate homelessness.

### **PLANS:**

- 1) The City and County of San Francisco, in conjunction with other local jurisdictions, must lobby strenuously for additional federal and state financial support.
- 2) Recruit local lenders among the public and private sectors to join forces and work at all levels for increased funding support for this issue.
- 3) Devise strategies by which long-term "hard money" commitments can be made by the public sector to primary program areas, and private sector support can be targeted toward service gaps, demonstration projects, etc.
- 4) Develop a mechanism for public/private joint ventures to expand projects which have demonstrated their effectiveness.
- 5) Develop memoranda of understanding between jurisdictions which have financial responsibility for problems being addressed.

## **POINT XII: PUBLIC EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

### **PROBLEM:**

There is inaccurate information and insufficient public understanding of homelessness as well as the policies and programs designed to address this problem. Inefficient utilization of resources and an absence of coordinated effort are the direct result of this situation.

### **PRINCIPLE:**

Open public discourse, conducted through an orderly process based on accurate, accessible information, produces policies and actions of higher quality, broader scope and greater responsiveness to the -- needs of all concerned.

### **POLICY:**

Policies and programs serving the homeless shall be presented to local officials for decision through an open, orderly and widely publicized process that encourages citizen participation.

### **PLANS:**

- 1) Regularized public forums shall be sponsored to discuss strategies for mitigating the impact of homelessness on individuals as well as on the residential and business communities of which they are a part.
- 2) Input from these forums shall be communicated to the body designated to coordinate the homeless plan (see "POINT I: Comprehensive Planning).
- 3) Mandate executive-level participation by government agencies and encourage department-wide cooperation in this public policy development process; educate department heads on needs and how such cooperation is in their self-interest.
- 4) Encourage print and broadcast media to develop, substantial commitment to the promotion of this process with regular updates and in-depth exploration of the issues and proposals identified.
- 5) Assess the financial needs of existing programs, and the adequacy of their current funding -- minimum, moderate and adequate. The current uses of existing resources (including those of many City departments such as Public Health, Police, Recreation and Park, Public works, Sheriff, Social Services, District Attorney, Public Defender, the courts, etc.) which, in some fashion, now do respond to the homeless, should also be re-examined.
- 6) Re-examine definition/standards for "affordable" programs to ensure persons in minimal and low/moderate income groups have access to adequate housing.