



THE WAY HOME
Transition House

HOUSEWORK

news from transition house • santa barbara, california • spring 2013

My Housing Plan

By Isabelle Walker

Nicole H. is a petite brunette, soft-spoken and smartly dressed in a black cardigan and jeans. Sipping iced coffee at a corner café, no one would believe this young mother was living with her son in a motel five months ago—struggling to scrape enough cash together to pay the weekly rent that kept them off the streets.

Today Nicole is well on her way to turning her life around. She, her son and new husband Brian moved into Transition House’s emergency shelter last September. She and Brian have found full-time jobs. In the coffee shop, Nicole thumbs through a stack of papers that contain the blueprint for her family’s future stability—a workbook her Transition House case manager asked her to complete. The workbook, entitled “My Housing Plan,” helped Nicole grasp the true cost of living in Santa Barbara—both what is required to move into a rental unit and what is needed to stay on top of expenses into the future.

But when she first looked through the workbook, Nicole said she was overwhelmed. Using it, absorbing the chart of average rental prices here and answering the questions about her family’s income, helped her understand that unless she got a better job, she and her family couldn’t afford to stay here. So she enrolled in a pre-nursing program at Santa Barbara City College.

“I think I’ve learned more about keeping my finances in order than I have ever known in my life,” Nicole said.

“My Housing Plan” workbook was created by Tom Williams, a Transition House social worker, in 2006. Though he no longer works at the nonprofit, every client is required to use his tool as they advance through Transition House’s three-stage program that gradually returns families to self-sufficiency.

“It’s not used to make people feel bad, but to help them see what their situation actually is so they can move forward,” said Emily Young, a Transition House case manager.

The workbook asks clients to find examples of actual prop-



One young resident’s dream house.

erties that would be suitable for their family and to use them to come up with two strategies—one less expensive than the other. It asks them to estimate the cost of moving in, including security deposits and utility connection fees. And then, on the last page, it asks them to review the results:

“Can I save enough money to afford move-in costs and earn enough money to cover both monthly expenses and rent for an apartment or a room in shared housing? If not, what else can I do?”

Emily Young said most clients try to find a way to stay in Santa Barbara. About 10 percent opt to relocate.

Dulce L. is a 32-year-old single mother of three daughters ages four, eight and 11. The first time she looked at the prices detailed in “My Housing Plan,” and the recommendation that clients spend no more than 40 percent of their monthly income on rent, she cried. Like Nicole, she realized that the \$11 she was making in her job per hour as a preschool teacher wouldn’t allow her to stay in Santa Barbara.

“I cried. It was really hard, seeing the prices of living [here],” Dulce said.

New Methodologies for Helping Homeless Families

By Kathleen Baushke

Recently, I attended the National Alliance to End Homelessness' (NAEH) annual conference on family and youth homelessness, held this year in Seattle. This Alliance is the primary education and advocacy group for our industry, and it plays a major role in promoting best practices and interpreting federal policies that affect affordable-housing developers and homeless service providers.

When I began attending this annual conference ten years ago, the discussion often focused on the need for more federal funding to help us meet the increased demand for shelter and affordable housing. We don't even talk about this anymore. As a result of the recession—and other factors—the annual budget for the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has remained flat for three years, except in the area of veterans programs.

This year, the conference's programs and speakers focused on data-driven principals and successful practices for doing more with less.

As many of you are aware, for years Transition House operated without a waiting list. Until three years ago, we didn't need one. As I write this, we have 50 families on our wait list. To put this

in perspective, we can only serve about 22 families at a time in our shelter. Even more horrifying, seven of these wait-listed households are living in vehicles.

At the NAEH conference, I learned that many other shelter programs are experiencing long wait lists, too. Some cities are focusing on only the hardest to serve (and therefore, the most vulnerable). They are using Rapid Re-housing (i.e., providing cash for security deposits and first month's rent) as a means of moving people back into housing quickly so more can be served. Rapid Re-housing is typically combined with case management after the family is rehoused so that the issues that led them to homelessness can be addressed. This support is critical to maintaining housing. In other communities, permanent supportive housing is being directed more towards the hardest to serve. When Transition House began developing affordable housing, we wanted to provide reasonably priced housing to families who needed additional time to achieve their goals. Using supportive housing in this manner is becoming a luxury in many localities. Instead, Rapid Re-housing programs are becoming the primary tool to get people back into housing. Permanent supportive housing, such as the kind Transition House has developed, is directed towards those who may need it for a lifetime.


Many national programs are also adopting a technique called "progressive engagement." Using this approach, clients are assessed at the point of entry to the shelter system and then given the minimal services required to return them to housing. National data has shown that many families can return to housing with limited service intervention. If a family fails to find housing, a higher

level of service and support is then offered.

In the past, we have always offered the same menu of services to all families entering our shelter. Of course, Santa Barbara's environmental factors—its high rents, low-vacancy rates, high unemployment, and a job market with over 50 percent of available positions in the low-paying service sector—dictate a unique approach.

While we begin providing families interventions as soon as they join our waiting list (i.e., referrals to other agencies, attempts to prevent homelessness through cash assistance and negotiations with landlords, etc.) so many families will still need our emergency shelter services. We too are adopting Rapid Re-housing and progressive engagement methodologies to economize our service delivery and move families through the shelter as quickly as possible.

In the midst of so much need, the conference gave me the opportunity to see how communities are working collectively using local data and existing conditions to come up with not only creative, but sound, strategic approaches to getting more people stably housed without spending more money. You would think at this point there would be serious battle fatigue in our industry, but it just isn't there. Indeed, there is plenty of impressive thinking—and action!—taking place.

If you have further interest in what is happening around the country, the NAEH website has a plethora of interesting information. You can find them at www.naeh.org. 



Kathleen Baushke
Executive Director

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What made it worse for both women is that they grew up here and have family here.

In fact, Dulce had been living with her parents before she moved into Transition House. There were ten people in a three-bedroom house—she shared a space with her girls in the family living room, set off by two curtains.

“It was hard. It was our bottoming out,” she recalled. But when they moved into Transition House’s emergency shelter, they had a room to themselves with two bunk beds, two closets, a TV, a fan, a window and a dresser. All their food was provided.

But Dulce didn’t have as many options as Nicole, as she was already in school, studying at Santa Barbara City College towards an Early Childhood Education degree. An additional job was out of the question. She couldn’t take any more time away from her children, who were already missing her and under stress.

“I asked people for advice. I prayed for wisdom and patience and peace.”

One day, she noticed a posting for a position at Transition House’s new in-

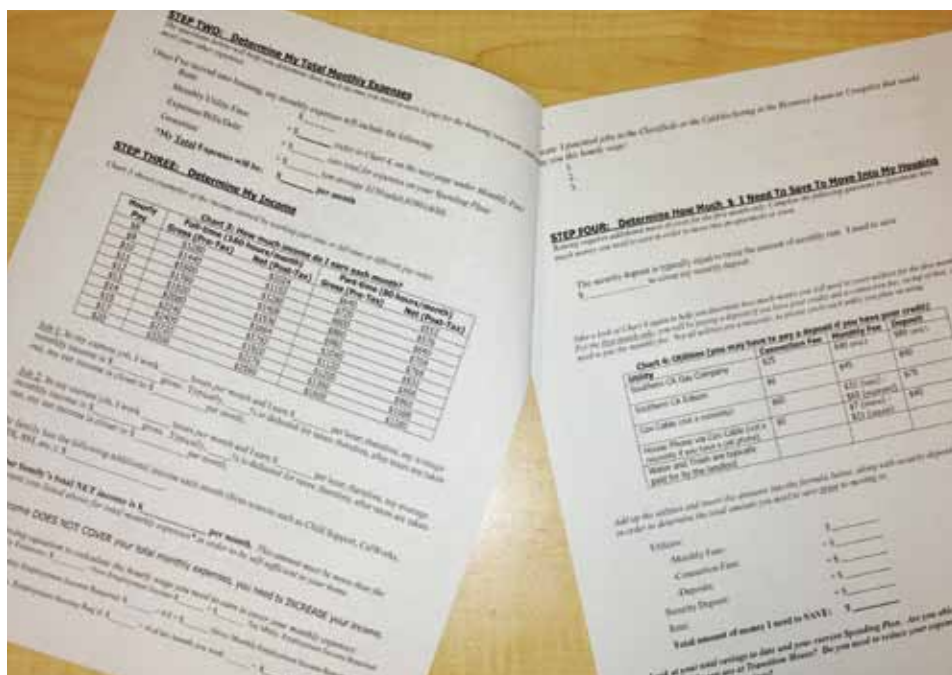
fant care center. She applied for the job and was hired. She now makes a dollar more per hour and receives benefits. According to her case manager, the job also has “growth potential.”

Both Nicole and Dulce are living at Firehouse now, which is transitional housing provided by Transition House. It’s stage two of the three-stage program. To stay there, clients have to have saved at least \$2,000 during their stay at the shelter. While living at Firehouse, they must save 80 percent of their income, a level that prepares them for moving into their own place.

“It’s nice,” said Nicole. “It prepares us for being on our own again, because we pay rent, \$350 a month.”

Emily Young recalled how difficult it was for Dulce when she first looked at the “My Housing Plan” workbook. But, she said, Dulce and her family have since gone back and revised her responses using her new higher income.

“My biggest major dream of all is to have our own place where we can do our own thing,” Dulce said. “I want to get to the place where every day is not an uphill battle.” 🏠



My Housing Plan

2012 Shelter Statistics

Number of clients served

Children	196
Adults	118
Total families	87
Two parent families	31
Single parent families	56

Ethnicity

Asian/Pacific Islander	0%
African American	11%
Anglo	25%
Latino	59%
Native American	3%
Other	2%

Adults Only

Drug/Alcohol Issues	34%
Mental Illness	25%
Dual Diagnosis	18%
Other disabilities	16%

Employment

Number of families maintaining or increasing income	75	86%
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Education level for adults

High school	84	71%
Attended college	35	30%
Average grade completed		11 th

Residence before Transition House

Santa Barbara City	186	59%
Goleta	72	23%
Carpinteria	25	8%
SB County/Ventura	17	7%
Other zip codes	14	3%

Disposition upon exit from the shelter

Housing in SB	141	45%
TH-owned housing	81	26%
Other program	9	3%
Relative	36	11%
Other shelter	11	4%
Motel	7	2%
Unknown	29	9%

Keeping the Holidays Merry for Homeless Families

By Caley Mark

The holiday season is a wonderful time to celebrate with friends and loved ones. Most of us have a place to call home, the means to provide a holiday meal to share with the ones we cherish, and presents for our children. But for the families at Transition House, the holidays can be a difficult time. Parents living in our shelter want to be able to continue their own family traditions, but in their current circumstances, it just isn't possible. They don't want to see their kids miss out. That's why we are especially grateful to the many groups and individuals who joined together to make the holiday season merry and bright for the residents of our emergency shelter, Firehouse, and HOMES programs.

Our Secret Santa program was a huge success! Because of the generosity of our supporters, we were able to provide gifts to 110 children in our program and to over 150 impoverished children in the community who were referred to our agency by other social service providers. Many Secret Santas chose items from the wishes hung on our giving tree and placed on our Amazon.com wish list. Some adopted a child or family and

purchased items from their lists. Other groups and individuals held toy drives and holiday parties to collect gifts for the children in our program. No matter how they contributed, each Secret Santa played a vital role in ensuring that our families had a merry Christmas.

We would like to extend special thanks to Bartlein and Company for adopting eight families and to Novacoast for providing one youngster with a laptop! We would also like to thank St Barbara's Parish, BEI Sensors, New Life Church, Toy Crazy and All Saints Preschool for donating 50 or more items each from our children's wish lists. The children in our program were so grateful. When asked what she got for Christmas, one little girl replied, "Everything I wanted!" Our Secret Santas made that happen!

Joining our Secret Santa program was just one of the ways the community showed support for our families this Christmas. The Deckers Outdoor Corporation and Ugg Australia partnered with Transition House to supply every child in our shelter with a new pair of shoes. It was a total surprise to our clients, and the kids were thrilled to have a

new pair of comfortable, sturdy, trendy shoes or boots.

In our Children's Program, we spent the month of December learning about winter, holiday traditions and the spirit of giving. A group of dancers visited and performed traditional holiday dances. Two long-time volunteers, Jill Link and Nancy Lee, threw a holiday party for the children that included fun crafts, music and a snack table where the kids created their own holiday treats. We also made lots of holiday decorations and artwork.

We truly appreciate the numerous volunteers who served dinner during the holidays. Many of our groups made their meals festive with special decorations, music and traditional holiday foods. Our friends from Congregation B'nai B'rith organized a wonderful Christmas Day meal that brought our many families together to share food and friendship in our shelter. Our residents were thankful for the meal and the warm hospitality.

From Transition House and all of its families, THANK YOU to all of you who supported us throughout the holiday season! 🏠



Representatives from Deckers present footwear to all the children living in our shelter. TH client Vanessa and her three children are on hand to accept their gifts and place the rest of the packages under our Christmas tree.



It wouldn't be the holidays without extra treats provided by our dinner groups. We particularly like the ones with whipped cream!

TLC and Trying New Things: Green Eggs and Ham

Technology and Literacy for Children (TLC) is a Transition House program that promotes literacy among homeless children. Our program was developed in response to the academic disadvantages homeless children often experience. Three days a week, children living at Transition House have the opportunity to hear a specially selected book read aloud, and engage in related activities that reinforce the learning experience.

In celebration of Dr. Seuss' birthday on March 2nd, youngsters at Transition House read "*Green Eggs and Ham*," and prepared a "healthy" Green Eggs and Ham feast.

After the book was read, Children's Program staff talked with the kids about "trying new things." They were asked if they had ever tried a new food thinking

they wouldn't like it, only to discover that the new food tasted pretty good. All of them could recall such an experience.

Not only were new foods discussed, but staff also asked about times when trying new things might be scary. Many of the children offered that they were scared on the first night they entered the shelter. This gave staff the opportunity to talk with them about how they felt about being in the shelter after that first night. The kids admitted they were scared because they didn't know what to expect, but now things were better because they had made friends and found there were fun activities (such as TLC) to participate in.

The discussion was followed by a cooking class which focused on healthy foods. Instead of using green food coloring, the children were given spinach and



broccoli to add to their eggs. In order to participate, they had to promise that they would at least "try" the eggs. All of them did, and only one little boy gave them a thumbs down! For the rest, trying a new thing turned out to be pretty tasty. 📌



Volunteer Spotlight: Allen Gersho

TH: *Tell us a little about yourself.*

Allen: I was born in Canada and went to high school there. I studied electrical engineering in the US at MIT and Cornell. Then I worked at AT&T Bell Labs in New Jersey.

After that I came to Santa Barbara because I was invited to become a professor at UCSB. I was there for 19 years in the Department of Electrical & Computer Engineering, from 1980, when we moved to Santa Barbara, until I retired.

I became a student at Santa Barbara City College to learn Spanish because I thought it would be nice to learn the language. I learned Spanish and then switched [to studying] media art and technology to learn digital imaging, web design, etc.—for fun!

I am married [to Roberta] and have two sons, who both have two kids. They live out of town and Roberta and I travel often to visit them.

I started doing volunteer work at Cottage Hospital about six years ago in the interpreter's office. I wasn't a credentialed interpreter but was able to do interpreting for physical therapists, psychologists and social workers, whenever someone who spoke Spanish was needed to communicate with a patient. I enjoyed that. It was occasionally for doctors, too.

TH: How did you first hear about Transition House?

Allen: I came to Transition House because I wanted a chance to speak Spanish. I first encountered Transition House as a member of the Congregation B'Nai B'rith. The Congregation organizes an event once a year called Mitzvah Day where people meet and are invited to explore what they can do to help others and do volunteer work for all different

purposes. There was one group led by Glen Serbin [former Transition House board member and current volunteer] who was seeking help for the construction of Transition House's playground about five or six years ago.

They needed help digging the ground to install the playground. So this project made me aware of Transition House.

TH: Why and how did you first become a volunteer at Transition House?

Allen: In the process of doing interpreting, I ran into many low-income people. I became more aware of the difficulties under which people are living. Once the opportunity to be useful at Cottage Hospital was diminishing, I came to Transition House to become a volunteer, to use Spanish and talk to people and to get to know people who have experienced homelessness.

And what I enjoy the most in doing screening¹ and doing intake interviews² is getting to hear about people's lives, about what is going on in their lives. It's fascinating. There are so many stories and situations

So I enjoy talking to people and hearing about their lives. I like the opportunity to be helpful to others.

As a screener, I am assigned three or four families to meet with briefly and talk to [in the evening when they return to the shelter] and enter any relevant notes into their files so that their caseworker can be updated in between their meetings with the client. I see if they need things like vitamins for their kids or child care and discuss how they are progressing looking for a job. And I check on any problems they may be having.

TH: Do you think you are a good

listener?

Allen: Actually I really enjoy doing that [listening]. I tend to be that way with people. Rather than sound off about myself, I like to know about other people. People are interesting. I enjoy getting to know people.

Ironically, I was very shy and introverted as a kid, and I sort of gradually changed over the years. I'm still not a super outgoing person but I am much more people-oriented than I used to be when I was younger.

TH: What do you like about volunteering at Transition House?

Allen: I love the face-to-face interaction with someone who has come from a difficult situation, to see how they are doing, to see if they are happy. It just satisfies me to see that they are making progress and overcoming obstacles. I feel sad when people leave sometimes because one week I screen them and the next week I come and they are gone and I don't know anything about their lives from then on. I would like to locate them and visit them or at least find out how their family's lives are progressing.

TH: What did you learn about homelessness when you started volunteering at Transition House?

Allen: I didn't know much about homelessness before. I have also been participating, once a month, in providing food at Pershing Park for a Wednesday dinner [with the Uffizi Mission Project]. I haven't gotten to talk very much with them [the homeless individuals at the



Allen Gersho

park]. These are people that are sleeping on the street or in their cars, so it's very different [from a shelter environment].

At Transition House, I have learned that there are so many people who have just had bad luck or difficult circumstances and never had the opportunity to move up and get solid, stable lives.

For example, a man has a good job, the family is doing fine, and then he has an injury causing a disability and the family is out of luck and they are kind of stuck, you know. So I see how much people can use support and help.

TH: What do you wish other people knew about homelessness?

Allen: That the people on the street who are panhandling are not the whole story, only a small part. There's a world of people out there with families who are struggling to survive, often through no fault of their own.

TH: Why do you continue volunteering?

Allen: It's gotten to be a habit [laughs]! I particularly enjoy the intake interview for new arrivals, when I have a chance to do it, which is once or twice a month, because it's more in depth. I get the chance to know more about the family's life and what has been going on in their past and what led them to their current situation, questions I don't generally ask when I am screening.

I enjoy doing it. And it's nice to be there and be able to talk to people and feel that I am being helpful in as they work on returning to housing.

And the success rate of [getting] 70 percent of [clients] into more stable living situations is really a good thing.

TH: What would you tell someone who is thinking about donating or volunteering?

Allen: I would strongly encourage them to give some support and to consider

volunteering because it can be very rewarding. They can feel more that there is a purpose in their life. Some people don't have such a purpose.

This reminds me of a famous quotation of George Bernard Shaw:

"This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can.

I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no "brief candle" for me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.

TH: Thank you, Allen! ↑

Endnotes

- 1 Volunteer screeners assist Transition House case managers by meeting with clients twice a week to check on progress toward goals and any concerns clients might have.
- 2 An intensive client intake interview is conducted upon entrance into the shelter program.



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House art:

The drawings on page one and seven of this newsletter come from children living in Transition House. The California Housing Authority tells us the following: "A common activity for children, homeless or otherwise, is to draw. When homeless children are asked to draw what heaven looks like, they often draw houses. They do not draw mansions or palaces; they draw plain houses. This is their hope, a hope maintained in the midst of adversity." At Transition House, we have found this to be true, and are delighted to share with you these youngsters' versions of a perfect home.