

**Proposed Response to San Diego County Grand Jury Report Entitled
Give Me Shelter
An Inquiry Into the First Year of Operation of Connections Housing**

Pursuant to California Penal Code Section §933 (c), the San Diego City Council provides the following responses to the findings and recommendations included in the above referenced Grand Jury Report.

The City Council does not direct the day-to-day operations of Connections Housing. Per a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of San Diego and the San Diego Housing Commission (SDHC), SDHC administers the contract with People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) to operate Connections Housing on behalf of the City of San Diego. The City Council's responses are based on information provided by SDHC, and reviewed by the City's Economic Development Department and the Mayor's Office.

FINDINGS

Finding 01: *Connections Housing is accomplishing its goal of reducing the number of homeless in the quarter mile radius around the facility.*

Response: The City Council agrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

Homelessness within a quarter-mile radius of Connections Housing dropped 70 percent in Connections Housing's first year. People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) will continue to target outreach to the quarter-mile radius and work closely with individuals to move them from street to home.

Finding 02: *By splitting the responsibilities Alpha Project and PATH sometimes disagree on the selection and handling of residents for the Interim Housing beds.*

Response: The City Council partially disagrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

PATH works closely with Alpha Project by holding weekly face-to-face staff meetings in addition to daily phone and email contact. This allows for frequent discussion of issues related to new client admissions as well as current residents. This collaborative approach allows different perspectives to be shared and solutions to be identified that are in the best interest of the client.

Finding 03: *The participants appeared to not respond well to being rushed through the meal.*

Response: The City Council agrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

PATH agrees that the facility's breakfast hours should be expanded from 30 minutes to 60 minutes. To encourage residents to access services and work on their service plans by the time the PATH Depot opens at 8:30 a.m., breakfast will be provided from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m., which will help residents get to services offered by the PATH Depot by the time it opens.

Finding 04: *Vending machines are not accessible during hours when residents are more likely to need them.*

Response: The City Council partially disagrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

Individuals may be escorted to the vending machines after meal hours on a case-by-case basis. Eating or storing food on the interim housing floors is discouraged in order to avoid unwanted pests.

Finding 05: *Having a food category in the budget would allow better planning and stability.*

Response: The City Council agrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

All necessary meals for the residents of Connections Housing are provided through in-kind donations by Urban Angels, which has a budget to cover these food costs. In the future, PATH will include these expenses in the overall Connections Housing budget, identified as in-kind donations, to provide further clarification.

Finding 06: *Health Services need to have more accessible hours, including weekends.*

Response: The City Council disagrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

The on-site health center, and the hours associated with it, are managed by Family Health Centers of San Diego (FHCSO) under the terms of the Conditional Use Permit (CUP). According to the CUP, the health center is approved to be open, "Monday through Friday no earlier than 6:00 a.m. and close no later than 9:00 p.m., Saturday open no earlier than 8:00 a.m. and close no later than 5:00 p.m., Sunday open no earlier than 8:00 a.m. and close no later than 12:00 p.m." Currently, health center hours at Connections Housing are Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Health Center hours are determined by FHCSO based on demonstrated need. According to FHCSO, there is no demonstrated need for health care services at Connections Housing beyond what is currently provided. Residents of Connections Housing have "open access" at the health center 40 hours per week, allowing them to schedule an appointment in advance, or if needed, they may walk in for a same-day appointment. Additionally, FHCSO physicians have rotating on-call responsibilities during evenings

and weekends. Call activity during this time suggests extended hours are not needed at this time. If a demonstrated need for services on nights or weekends arises, the health center will consider all available options within the terms of the CUP. PATH continues to work with FHCSO to identify appropriate hours for Connections Housing residents.

It is important to note that FHCSO serves as a primary health care provider, and is not intended to provide emergency services. All PATH staff receive training in appropriate emergency procedures as well as access to a list of local urgent care and emergency facilities that can provide care during off-hours. Case managers educate residents on emergency phone numbers and resources to ensure that clients have access to appropriate medical care at all times.

Finding 07: *More than two people would greatly improve the ability to address the needs of the homeless in the targeted area.*

Response: The City Council agrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

In July 2014, PATH hired one additional street outreach worker to support the San Diego outreach team, bringing the team to a total of three full time staff who are focused on outreach efforts in downtown San Diego.

PATH has also established a comprehensive, integrated street outreach team that incorporates outreach workers from the San Diego Police Department's Homeless Outreach Team (HOT), Downtown San Diego Partnership, Family Health Centers of San Diego, and Downtown Fellowship. Together, this partnership provides a minimum of five additional outreach workers.

Beginning in June 2014, PATH joined in the development of the 25 Cities Initiative in downtown San Diego. The purpose of the 25 Cities Initiative is to accelerate efforts toward ending Veterans' homelessness by 2015 and chronic homelessness by 2016. Participation in this initiative has already brought together representatives from more than 25 local organizations to conduct outreach; coordinate client assessments; and identify housing options for downtown's most vulnerable homeless individuals.

Finding 08: *There is more need for the Depot to be open during the Holidays.*

Response: The City Council disagrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

PATH recognizes that the holidays can be a time when depression and other issues are more common among the people it serves. To combat this, case managers work closely with residents this time of year to help them address depression; identify appropriate ways to deal with unpleasant feelings that arise; and create a sense of community and support with other residents.

The PATH Depot was open and staffed throughout the month of December 2013, with the exceptions of December 13 (due to a staff holiday party), December 24 (Christmas Eve), and December 25 (Christmas Day). PATH respects staff's dedication to the program by giving them holidays off to spend time with their families. To ensure that these rare PATH Depot closures do not burden residents, PATH ensures that capable volunteer groups are present to lead meals and activities on these days.

Finding 09: *The dual responsibility has caused confusion for the SRO units.*

Response: The City Council partially disagrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

Since Alpha Project provides after-hours monitoring of the Single-Room Occupancy (SRO) units (also known as special needs units), there are times when Alpha project staff must interact with the SRO residents. PATH is working closely with Alpha Project to reduce any confusion by ensuring Alpha Project staff have appropriate and updated information for each resident's individualized needs.

Finding 10: *SRO tenants pay rent and are entitled to use the Community Room and adjacent Patio without having to wait to be escorted.*

Response: The City Council disagrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

Unrestricted access to the permanent supportive housing program's community room and patio is reserved exclusively for residents of the building's permanent supportive housing units. SRO units are not part of the permanent supportive housing and SRO tenants do not pay rent or security deposits. Therefore, SRO residents are not issued keyless entry devices, known as key fobs.

Finding 11: *Because of the limited time the Community Room is open it is under-utilized.*

Response: The City Council agrees with the Grand Jury's finding.

Currently, the community room is managed by Solari Enterprises, Inc. and is not open at night or on the weekends. This shared space is locked to ensure equipment (TV's, etc) is secure overnight and during non-office hours since staff are not available to monitor use of the space 24 hours a day. The community terrace, garden and smoke areas are open for access beyond business hours (8 a.m. – 5 p.m.) Any decision to amend the community room's hours or policies would be approved and enacted by Solari. PATH has opened communications with Solari to discuss the possibility of extending community room hours to include some nights and weekends.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 14-86: *Make the Connections Housing budget more transparent by clearly defining all categories.*

Response: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be in the future.

Connections Housing's budget is a public document and, as such, is available to anyone who wishes to view it.

Because Connections Housing is a collaborative, involving multiple partner agencies, the budget must be designed to accommodate multiple funding sources coming through multiple agencies. The complicated nature of such a budget can be confusing. To attempt to alleviate some of this confusion, PATH is working to create a simplified version of the budget that breaks down the basic funding sources and line item expenses for the FY 2016 budget.

Recommendation 14-87: *Increase the number of people who participate in street outreach.*

Response: The recommendation has been implemented.

In July 2014, PATH hired one additional street outreach worker to support the San Diego outreach team, bringing the team to a total of three individuals. For more information, see the response to Finding 07.

Recommendation 14-88: *Require a regular head count for meals in order to obtain a realistic number of diners.*

Response: The recommendation has been implemented.

Connections Housing currently tracks all residents attending meals at the facility. According to this data, the facility serves 150 breakfasts and 150 dinners every day, seven days a week. All details gathered by this tracking report are provided as part of PATH's monthly report to the San Diego Housing Commission on behalf of the City of San Diego.

Recommendation 14-89: *Expand the breakfast hours from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. to allow more people access to the most important meal of the day.*

Response: The recommendation has not been implemented, but will be in the future.

Breakfast hours will be expanded. However, hours will be from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m., rather than from 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. For more information, see the response to Finding 03.

Recommendation 14-90: *Allow the residents to go to meals without an escort and eat within a reasonable amount of time.*

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

Due to the design of the building, PATH has determined that the most efficient way to ensure that all clients have access to meals is to use escorts to monitor the flow of residents through the stairwells and elevators. PATH will ensure that ample staff members are available to provide necessary escorts during established mealtimes to allow all residents enough time to participate in meals. Additionally, as discussed in Recommendation 14-89 and Finding 03, PATH has communicated that it will be expanding breakfast from 30 minutes to 60 minutes (7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m.).

Recommendation 14-91: *Provide an allocation for food in future budgets.*

Response: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be in the future.

All necessary meals for the residents of Connections Housing are provided through in-kind donations by Urban Angels, which has a budget to cover these food costs. PATH will include these expenses in the overall Connections Housing budget beginning in FY 2016, identified as in-kind donations, to provide further clarification. The Connections Housing program is grateful to have Urban Angels as a community partner.

In order to be transparent about current operations, PATH has reported that from January 2014 to June 2014 food costs incurred by Urban Angels totaled \$65,905. Consequently, PATH estimates that food costs for Connections Housing for one year are approximately \$131,810. In the event that Urban Angels is unable to continue providing these resources, PATH has communicated that they are able and willing to step in and cover these costs.

Recommendation 14-92: *Work with staff and volunteers to insure that the Depot be fully staffed during the month of December.*

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

The PATH Depot was open and staffed throughout the month of December 2013, with the exceptions of December 13 (due to a staff holiday party), December 24 (Christmas Eve), and December 25 (Christmas Day).

However, to ensure that these unstaffed days at the PATH Depot do not create a burden on residents, PATH ensures that capable volunteer groups will be present to lead meals and activities on these days. For more information, see the response to Finding 08.

Recommendation 14-93: *Assign the responsibility and related funding to Alpha Project so that Alpha Project may counsel and provide for the needs of all SRO residents.*

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

Adding the 16 Single-Room Occupancy (SRO) residents to Alpha Project's case load would reduce the amount of individualized attention these residents receive. The individuals living in the 16 SRO units (also known as special needs units) are a highly vulnerable population living with complex mental and physical health issues. As such, the residents of these units require a specialized and intensive form of care along with case management that is provided by an experienced individual with extensive knowledge of special needs populations. Additionally, this population requires individualized attention by a dedicated case manager.

PATH currently employs one case manager who is solely dedicated to serving these 16 residents. This individual possesses a master's degree in social work and has experience working with high-barrier populations, such as the residents served by the SRO units. Employing this dedicated social worker to serve these units allows an optimal staff-to-client ratio of 1:16. Alpha Project's case load ratio is currently 1:20, which does not include the SRO units.

The SRO residents receive the intensive case management provided by PATH during business hours. Alpha Project's staff provides after-hours monitoring for the residents of the SRO units. PATH ensures through the subcontract with Alpha Project that they are adequately compensated for these after-hours responsibilities.

Recommendation 14-94: *Issue key fobs to SRO tenants allowing them entry to the Community Room and adjacent Patio.*

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

Unrestricted access to the permanent supportive housing program's community room and patio is reserved exclusively for residents of the building's permanent supportive housing units (studios with kitchenettes). SRO units are not part of the permanent supportive housing, and SRO tenants do not pay rent or security deposits. Therefore, SRO residents are not issued keyless entry devices, known as key fobs.

Recommendation 14-95: *Arrange to have the Community Room open some nights and weekends.*

Response: The recommendation requires further analysis.

PATH has opened communications with Solari Enterprises, Inc., which manages the community room, to discuss the possibility of extending community room hours to

include some nights and weekends. For more information, see the response to Finding 11.

Recommendation 14-96: *Expand the health center hours to include Saturdays and Sundays.*

Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.

According to Family Health Centers of San Diego (FHCS), there is no demonstrated need for health care services at Connections Housing beyond what is currently provided. If a demonstrated need for services on nights or weekends arises, the health center will consider all available options within the terms of the CUP. For more information, see the response to Finding 06.