



Evaluation of Jewish Family Service of San Diego's Safe Parking Program

Two-Year Summary Research Report

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Gratitude and Dedication

This research study and its accompanying course were made possible by a generous gift from Mark and Hanna Gleiberman, two civic leaders intent on alleviating suffering, supporting transformative learning experiences for students, and fostering health, opportunity, and compassion for all San Diego neighbors. Thank you for seeing the value in research, and its importance for effecting positive change.

This research is also only possible because of the enthusiasm and collaborative spirit of our community partner, Jewish Family Service of San Diego. Opening one's program up to the scrutiny of evaluation research takes courage, faith, and a genuine desire to make life better for people. Our presence on the parking lots meant added labor, coordination, expense, and the risk that feedback might be critical. Nonetheless, from direct line staff all the way up to the administrative and managerial leadership at JFS, we never encountered resistance or complaint. On the contrary, there was consistent willingness across the organization to facilitate this research, and a clear desire to learn from it. For that partnership, we are grateful. Collaborations between university researchers and local service providers offer a way for us all to understand problems, solutions, and the effectiveness of any strategies we might envision to get there. Such cooperation and shared purpose is fundamental to our collective efforts to solve the seemingly intractable challenge of homelessness in San Diego and the U.S.

We would like to thank the student researchers who were members of our first and second year course series.¹ They played a critical role in this research. Their curiosity, empathy, generous listening, sharp minds, and hard work brought forth rich data and analysis. We could not have accomplished the breadth and depth of this research without them.

Finally, we dedicate this research to the thousands of unhoused San Diegans who have used the JFS Safe Parking Program, and the 128 individuals and families who have shared their stories and insights with us. We have been captivated by your life narratives and humbled by the resilience and kindness you consistently demonstrate, even in the face of great hardship. We are deeply grateful, and hope that our findings will contribute to effective policies and helpful services for everyone across the county. It is our fervent hope that all San Diegans (and all people everywhere) be healthy, safe, secure, and stably housed.

¹ Year 1 cohort: Enrique Arcilla, Sable Beltran, Michelle Castro-Pilar, Bryan Chan, Hannah Davis, Aaron Chen, Nicolas Escoto, Madeline Froemming, Mayra Garcia, Janet Gleason, Jason Hefner, Xinyi Huang, Hannah Kreitman, Myah Lunceford, Daniela Montes-Flores, Alexandra Reep, Celia Sanchez-Zelaya, Needhi Sharma, Dominic Sistena, Natalie Tran, Amy Truong, Cindy Vides; Year 2 cohort: Allyn Reyes, Samaya Elder, Yao Fu, Clarissa Maloney, Leslie Aparicio, Harris Liner, Jorge Lopez, Lina Lew, Ryan Welsh, Shunyi Hu, Michael Castaneda, Kaelyn Emery, Jordan Hinze, Griffen Dempsey, Stephanie Holder, Yichen Wang, Megha Aepala, Valeria Ortega.

Executive Summary

This report summarizes the research findings of a two-year evaluation of the Safe Parking Program (SPP) run by Jewish Family Service of San Diego which operates its program on four separate lots in San Diego County. Our team utilized a mixed-methods study combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Using data from the County of San Diego Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), we analyzed baseline statistics on 1,096 SPP client households. This was combined with oral histories that we conducted with 128 SPP clients, six listening sessions with 55 SPP clients, and four listening sessions with 15 frontline staff.

The broad aim of this research has been to understand how the safe parking program model fits into a larger strategy of solving homelessness in San Diego. Do safe parking programs offer a helpful and effective intervention for helping unhoused people to get safely rehoused and back on their feet? Within this broader query, we have examined sub-questions such as:

- What percentage of SPP clients exit “successfully” to permanent and temporary housing?
- What percentage return to the parking lots?
- Are there particular patterns in the data (e.g., demographic or experiential), that are associated with positive or negative exits?
- Are there other ways that SPPs might benefit people, even those clients who do not have a quick or easy transition to permanent, stable housing?

Another aim of the research has been to understand who the individuals and families are who are enrolled in the safe parking program. What are their stories and what can they tell us about risk factors for falling into homelessness? Further, what can we learn from them about the day-to-day experiences of living unhoused in San Diego, as well as what helps and what hinders people in becoming stably rehoused? In speaking with clients via interviews, and to frontline staff and clients in listening sessions, we delved into what those who are right up close and personal with services, supports, and conditions perceive to be most helpful, and what could be added or changed. In the midst of this research, the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Thus, our data spans the time before and after the shelter-in-place orders in California. This report will share the impacts of the ongoing pandemic on SPP clients.



Key Findings

Client Demographics

Much of what we learned about clients using the JFS Safe Parking Program runs contrary to common negative stereotypes about people experiencing homelessness. The individuals we spoke with represent a tremendously diverse background with respect to education, work and life history, as well as age, race/ethnicity, family status, and individual challenges.

- Most households are made up of adults only, but 20% of participants are members of families with children.
- SPP clients represent a diversity of racial and ethnic backgrounds and are distributed as follows: White (47.6%), Hispanic (19.6%), Black (16.2%), Multiracial (6.4%), Asian (3.1%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (1.7%) and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (1.5%). Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander San Diegans are represented in the SPP at disproportionately higher rates compared to their percentages in the general population, a pattern seen in general homelessness population statistics in San Diego² and across the country.³
- SPP clients range in age from youth to elders with nearly half (44.7%) over the age of 50, 27.6% are 60 or older, and 14.1% of the clients are under the age of 20.
- For the majority of participants (69.6%), the current crisis is their first experience of homelessness over the prior three years. A large number (43.7%) report being unhoused for one month, while about a quarter of the participants (26.6%) experienced longer term (12+ months of) homelessness over the prior three years.
- Contrary to common stereotypes, only a relatively small percentage of SPP clients have a mental health issue (15.3% compared to 26% in the general population⁴) or substance use disorder (1.7% vs roughly 8% in the general population⁵). More than a quarter have a physical disability (slightly higher than 20% in the general population), and 15.1% report having a chronic health issue (significantly lower than the general population⁶).

Household Exits

- Among households that enrolled between February 1, 2019 and November 30, 2020, 18.4% had “positive exits” (meaning they exited to permanent or temporary housing)

² [Statement on Racial Inequality and Action](#), San Diego Regional Task Force on Homelessness.

³ [Homelessness and Racial Disparities](#), National Alliance to End Homelessness, October 2020.

⁴ According to the National Institute of Mental Health Disorders, an estimated 26% of Americans ages 18 and older -- about 1 in 4 adults -- suffers from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year.

⁵ According to the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics.

⁶ According to estimates from the 2018 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), more than half (51.8%) of adults had at least 1 of 10 selected diagnosed chronic conditions (arthritis, cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, coronary heart disease, current asthma, diabetes, hepatitis, hypertension, stroke, and weak or failing kidneys), and 27.2% of US adults had multiple chronic conditions (CDC Research Brief, 2020).

through March 31, 2021. Because there was no exit data for 59.6% of the households who left, the 18.4% positive exit rate is almost certainly an underestimate.

- The factors most strongly associated with positive exits were age (younger heads of household exit sooner and achieve more permanent exits) and total monthly income (heads of household with higher incomes achieve more permanent and temporary exits).

Returns to Safe Parking Program

- Of the 874 households who exited between February 1, 2019 and November 30, 2020, 20% returned to the program once, 4.3% returned twice, and 1.1% returned three or more times through March 31, 2021. The strongest factors associated with returning to the SPP were age of the head of household (being older increasing the likelihood) and having been chronically homeless.

Possible Effects of the COVID Pandemic

- The COVID pandemic took a toll on staff and clients alike, demanding a great deal of additional energy and support on the part of staff, eliminating critical practical and social outlets (gyms, parks, cafes, libraries, etc.) for clients, and adding stress and anxiety to everyone's day.
- The pandemic made it more difficult for some populations to exit to permanent housing, generally older heads of household, those with physical disabilities, and clients with histories of chronic homelessness. It similarly negated advantages that some populations had previously demonstrated in the pre-COVID period in exiting to permanent housing. For example, households with Asian, Black and Hispanic heads had more permanent exits than those with White heads of household in the pre-COVID period, however, this trend only continued with Asian heads of household during the COVID period.



Recommendations Based on Findings

Our recommendations span six categories ranging from those actions which might have a direct positive impact on SPP clients, to those which support staff, to those aimed at addressing the broader challenge of mass homelessness in our region, state, and country. More detail is provided in the body of this report.

Enhancing direct and indirect client supports

- Support the capacity of clients to increase their income (both employment-based, and benefits-based)
- Identify new strategies to support older heads of household, and learn from those older adults who do achieve positive exit outcomes
- Institute more robust programmatic interventions and follow-up protocols for households that exit to less-stable destinations
- Extend the operational hours at all lots, and provide 24-hour access for at least one lot
- Enhance basic services and amenities at all lots
- Build relationships and partnerships with other service providers, educational institutions, and civic, healthcare, advocacy, and community organizations
- Reach out to local grocery stores, restaurants, and businesses to solicit donations of gift cards, food, or supplies to support clients, both on the lot and as they transition back to housing
- Provide “quality of life” vouchers
- Assure that all aspects of the program are developed with a racial equity and trauma-sensitive lens

Increasing staff training and support

- Provide additional and ongoing training for frontline staff regarding accessing supports for clients
- Arrange opportunities for interaction, information sharing, and mutual support between and among frontline staff
- Convene client-facing staff to create a “checklist” of policies, practices, and procedures to be followed daily, weekly and monthly

Fostering community, peace, wellness, and resource-sharing on the lots

- Foster greater connection and mutual support among clients
- Provide an orientation flyer to clients as they enter the lot
- Expand sources and sites of information and resource-sharing
- Work with clients to identify jobs/roles on the lots to improve quality of life
- Encourage and facilitate links between clients and community members

Further Inquiry: collecting data to better understand and address program and client challenges

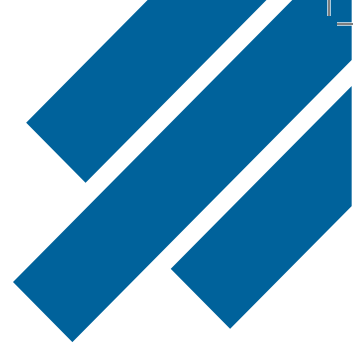
- Investigate and resolve the lackluster outcomes of male-headed families
- Investigate the factors associated with more, and more rapid, positive exits
- Create avenues through which clients can air concerns, provide feedback, and offer suggestions for improving the lots, including those they can institute themselves
- Follow up with clients once they have left the lot and collect data on what helps and what hinders individuals and families in finding and maintaining stable housing

Policy Advocacy

- Advocate for greater access to both permanent supportive housing and subsidized vouchers
- Advocate for HUD to include SPPs in their eligibility criteria for Continuum of Care funding and Emergency Shelter Grants
- Advocate for “long-stayers” and chronically unhoused clients to be prioritized for Project Homekey
- Advocate for more robust data collection and program evaluation of homelessness interventions

Spearheading further inquiry and shared learning regarding the Safe Parking Program model

- JFS should play a leading role in facilitating a community of practice through which to share challenges, insights, and best practices of SPPs
- To the extent possible, continue to collect data, monitor outcomes, listen to clients and staff, and learn from such inquiry and critical programmatic appraisal
- Engage in public education efforts about the SPP and how it fits into a broader set of solution strategies to solve homelessness in San Diego



Scope of the Study

This report is a culmination of knowledge gleaned from two years of a collaborative, mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative) study evaluating the Jewish Family Service of San Diego Safe Parking Program. It has benefitted from the input and insights of faculty and student researchers, administrative leads and direct line staff from JFS, and more than 150 unhoused San Diegans using JFS' SPP lots. The study is ongoing and this report contains our findings to date. Beyond what it can tell us about the effectiveness and usefulness of the SPP model as one element of a broader solutions strategy in our region, it offers a rich body of data that can help us all understand more about the “who, what, where, how and why” of vehicle-based homelessness in San Diego.

We hope that it will help inform thinking, planning, and funding regarding homelessness across our region, as well as offer a direct counter to the negative stereotypes and misconceptions that are rife across our county and country about the individuals and families who are in the grip of a homelessness crisis. Research that can illuminate the root causes of this social and health emergency, as well as the personal tragedies that precipitate individual experiences of homelessness, can help us move away from a narrative of individual blame and shame to one of historical, structural, and cultural root causes. It can help us to clarify the aims of our collective efforts, understand what different interventions can and cannot do, and think about how we all (researchers, policymakers, service providers, civic leaders, funders, advocates, and people experiencing homelessness) can work together to end homelessness in our region.

Throughout our research and continuing still, we have felt the urgency of this issue for people who are living unhoused. We have heard their frustration and despair, witnessed their resilience and grace, and learned from them regarding the day-to-day challenges of homelessness, and what interventions might help. The individuals we have spoken with on the lots over the past two years are the experts, having perspectives from lived experience that cannot be gained from reading articles or reports. We want to highlight and honor their contributions, and thank them again and again for sharing their stories and insights in hopes of easing the way for other San Diegans who face a similar life crisis.

Year 2 of the JFS Safe Parking Program evaluation (which covered activities between October 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021) built upon the research findings and accomplishments of Year 1. The aim was to continue to collect quantitative and qualitative data on SPP clients and staff to deepen our understanding of SPP client demographics and trajectories, impacts of services and supports, and challenges and opportunities with the SPP, along with a specific focus on the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the program. We continued to integrate a pedagogical component to the research and for a second year taught an undergraduate course focused on homelessness in San Diego. The 18

students who completed the course contributed to the data collection and analysis of the SPP, and brought their own humanity to conversations with SPP clients, just as 22 students did in Year 1.

In Year 2 we continued to analyze Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data on the JFS SPP. We also continued to conduct oral history interviews with SPP clients at the three sites included in Year 1 (Aero, Balboa, and Mission Valley) in addition to the new Encinitas lot. New to the research this year was the incorporation of four listening sessions with frontline SPP staff at all four parking lots. We also added listening sessions with SPP clients at all four parking lots. In total, we conducted 57 additional oral history interviews, engaged 55 SPP clients across six different listening sessions, and engaged 15 SPP staff across four listening sessions.





Methodology

1. Quantitative Data Analysis Research Methodology

At JFS, basic data is collected on all SPP clients upon entry to their designated parking lot. For clients who stay longer than one night, more comprehensive data are collected within two to three days. Data collected is entered into the County of San Diego's HMIS system, JFS's ETOi system, or both.⁷

For this research project, we primarily analyzed demographic and outcome data for clients: 1) who enrolled at one or more of the three longest running JFS safe parking lots (i.e., Aero, Balboa, and Mission Valley) between February 1, 2019 and March 31, 2021, and 2) whose information had been entered into HMIS (not all clients who were entered into the ETOi system as having stayed at one of the lots were entered into HMIS, and vice versa). JFS did serve clients who enrolled prior to February 1, 2019. However, it was on February 1, 2019 that JFS took full control of the program, and because we do not have data on all clients who enrolled prior to February 1, 2019, those clients in the HMIS system who enrolled prior to that date represent a biased sample of clients that does not adequately represent the distribution of demographic traits and outcomes of the full SPP population.

Finally, we excluded clients from the North County lot because the lot has not been running long enough to adequately evaluate its performance, especially since it has run almost entirely during the COVID pandemic. A total of 1,585 SPP clients in the HMIS database enrolled at the Balboa, Aero, or Mission Valley lots through March 31, 2021. These clients comprised 1,170 households. Excluding households that enrolled prior to February 1, 2019 reduces the total down to 1,096 households. These households form the basis of much of the demographic and exit outcome analysis contained in this report.

In calculating outcome rates, we used "all SPP households" as the denominator, rather than all SPP households who had exited the program. This is important because having a larger denominator necessarily results in a smaller percentage (or rate) of "positive exits" for our results. Further, the kind of exits that are considered "positive" varies; when JFS and other service providers report data to the Regional Task Force for Homelessness, they follow U.S.

⁷The HMIS system is the countywide repository for data collection on homelessness projects and programs funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD mandates this data collection. The Regional Task Force on Homelessness (RTFH) manages the system for San Diego County. ETOi is the internal data collection software and reporting system used by JFS. HMIS and ETOi collect similar data but there are some variations. Our research team decided to use the HMIS data on JFS SPP clients in order to be able to compare these clients to the County's larger population of homeless individuals served by HUD-funded programs.

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidelines, which consider exit to a homeless shelter to be a positive exit. We did not consider “exit to shelter” a positive exit in our calculations. This has the effect of reducing the rate of positive exits yet further. This context is important because it puts the rate, which could be calculated as higher using different assumptions, in perspective.

2. Qualitative Data Analysis Research Methodology

Rich qualitative data was collected on SPP clients and frontline staff. Undergraduate students from UC San Diego were trained in best practices in oral history interviewing. In Year 2, 18 students conducted 57 oral history interviews with SPP clients at all four JFS SPP lots. These built on 71 oral history interviews conducted by 22 students in Year 1.⁸ The aim of the interviews was to better understand the humanscape and unique personal trajectories of people experiencing unstable housing. Additional SPP client data and insights were collected through a series of listening sessions. The research team conducted listening sessions with SPP clients at all four JFS SPP lots. A total of 55 SPP clients participated across six sessions. The purpose of the listening sessions was to better understand clients’ experiences at SPP lots and learn about their thoughts and experiences pertaining to homelessness.

Between November 9th and December 7th, 2020, the research team conducted listening sessions with staff at each of the four JFS SPP lots with the aim of tapping the wisdom and insights of frontline staff. We queried them about staff rewards, needs and concerns, barriers clients face in becoming permanently rehoused, changes they’ve seen over the past year of the COVID pandemic, and their perceptions of program effectiveness. Fifteen staff members participated in the conversations, sharing their observations, suggestions, and rich body of knowledge about clients, what helps, and what hinders people in becoming stably rehoused.⁹

Over two weeks in September 2021, the research team returned to each of the four SPP lots to share findings, hear from clients still on the lots about anything we might have missed, and listen to feedback from newer clients regarding both the SPP program supports and their general thoughts about vehicle-based homelessness. These sessions took place roughly six months after the last of the spring listening sessions of Year 2. Of the 60-70 people in attendance across the four lots, roughly one third of the faces were familiar to us. The insights clients shared, including additional recommendations, have been integrated into this summary report.

⁸ Please refer to our Year 1 Research Summary for a full analysis of findings from our first year.

⁹ See report, *JFS Frontline Staff Listening Sessions: Synthesis of Findings* for a detailed summary.



The Broader Context of Safe Parking Programs in the U.S.

One of the research aims of the JFS SPP evaluation was to determine the extent to which the JFS SPP could serve as a model for other SPPs in the U.S. Our research team, in collaboration with a research team based out of Los Angeles,¹⁰ simultaneously catalogued and summarized the landscape of SPPs across the U.S. The following was identified:

- Safe Parking Programs are relatively new with the first one established in Santa Barbara in 2004.
- 43 communities in the U.S. have a Safe Parking Program and the overwhelming majority (93%) are on the West Coast.
- Program models vary considerably. The Center for Homeless Inquiries differentiates between the umbrella model and independent operators. Umbrella programs typically contain several lots managed by one organization that likely receives public funding. Some type of case management is typically provided. The number of total parking spaces ranges from 21 - 101. In contrast, independent operators manage a single lot and offer spaces for 6- 60 vehicles. Case management typically is not provided and operating budgets are substantially smaller than those for umbrella programs.
- Availability of services varies significantly. All SPPs identified provide access to toilets and approximately 60% provide one or more of the following: showers, meals, wi-fi, and/or electronic charging stations. Close to 50% of SPPs provide financial support for vehicle repairs, auto insurance, and registration. Approximately 50% of SPPs provide housing placement assistance. Less common is financial support for housing related expenses such as moving and security deposits. Some programs provide services such as childcare and counseling.
- Lot hours also vary. More than 50% of the identified SPPs are open 24 hours a day whereas other programs require clients to leave by a specific time in the morning and then reopen in the evening.
- Advertising and recruitment for SPPs is typically done utilizing multiple forms of outreach including 2-1-1 centers, referrals, word of mouth, and law enforcement.
- The target population for SPPs varies. Close to 50% of the SPPs prioritize specific demographic groups such as families and veterans. Some umbrella SPPs target certain lots for specific subsets of the population. Some SPPs will only accept local residents.
- Safety and security protocols may include checking sex offender registries and/or conducting criminal background searches. SPPs typically provide new clients with information about their rules and regulations.

¹⁰ Center for Homeless Inquiries (2021). *Safe Parking: Insights from a Review of National Programs*. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e40681539b77957555f10e0/t/609ef366f1f5035bc056db19/1621029735677/Safe+Parking+Briefer+Final.pdf>.

- SPP challenges include inflexible hours of operations, requirements for proof of identity (driver's license), funding (SPPs are not eligible for HUD Continuum of Care funding or Emergency Shelter Grants), community resistance, and challenges with rehousing clients.
- Program outcomes vary considerably and agreed upon benchmarks for success have yet to be determined. The Center for Homeless Inquiries found that most SPPs track clients' exits into temporary or permanent housing and the percentage of positive exits ranges from 13% to 60% based on self-report. Furthermore, the Center for Homeless Inquiries was unable to identify patterns based on program features such as type of lot, hours of operation, and/or types of services provided.
- Many SPPs prioritize building a sense of community among their clients and creating an environment that contributes to clients' sense of safety.

Based on the review of the national landscape of SPPs, it is evident that Jewish Family Service of San Diego has one of the largest and most comprehensive SPPs in the U.S. As such, JFS is in a position to serve as a leader in this environment. It should take the initiative to share its experiences (successes as well as challenges) with policymakers, elected officials, and other SPP providers. With the recent expiration of the (second) eviction moratorium in October 2021, there is a high likelihood that demand for SPPs will surge. JFS is in a position to share best practices.





Quantitative Findings

JFS SPP Client Demographics (February 1, 2019 - March 31, 2021)

- The vast majority of SPP households (91.7%) do not have children. However, 20% of all (individual) clients are members of households with children.
- SPP clients represent a diversity of racial and ethnic backgrounds and are distributed as follows: White (47.6%), Hispanic (19.6%), Black (16.2%), Multiracial (6.4%), Asian (3.1%), American Indian/Alaskan Native (1.7%) and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (1.5%). Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander San Diegans are represented in the SPP at disproportionately higher rates compared to their percentages in the general population, a pattern seen in general homelessness population statistics in San Diego¹¹ and across the country.¹²
- Compared to the racial and ethnic composition of the County of San Diego overall, a higher proportion of SPP clients are Black, Mixed Race, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander with proportionately fewer Asians and Hispanics enrolled in the program.
- SPP clients range in age from youth to elders with nearly half (44.7%) being over the age of 50, over a quarter (27.6%) 50 and over, and 14.1% under the age of 20.
- SPP heads of household have had a range of experiences with homelessness: 26.6% had been homeless for 12 or more months in the three years prior to enrollment, whereas 43.7% had only been homeless for one month. For a majority, their current experience of homelessness at the time of enrollment was the only time they had been homeless in the prior three years (69.6%), whereas 11.2% had been homeless three times or more. Additionally, 16% of heads of household were determined to be “chronically homeless.”¹³
- SPP heads of household live with a variety of health concerns: 26.7% have a physical disability, 15.3% have a mental health issue, and 15.1% have a chronic health issue. Compared to the broader population of unhoused people in the U.S., these percentages are lower. For example, nearly 43% of people in the U.S. living in shelters have a disability, and the percentage of unhoused people nationwide with “any mental illness” is estimated to be approximately 45%.

¹¹ [Statement on Racial Inequality and Action](#), San Diego Regional Task Force on Homelessness.

¹² [Homelessness and Racial Disparities](#), National Alliance to End Homelessness, October 2020.

¹³ An individual is defined by HUD as “Chronically Homeless” if they have a disability and have lived in a shelter, safe haven, or place not meant for human habitation for 12 continuous months or for four separate occasions in the last three years (must total 12 months). HUD Exchange (2015) *Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH): Defining Chronically Homeless Final Rule*.

Household Exits from the JFS Safe Parking Program

Since it can take time for a household to exit after they have enrolled in the SPP, we analyzed exit data for those households who enrolled through November 30, 2020, which gives households at least four months (and up to 26 months, depending on when they enrolled during this period) to exit. Among households that enrolled between February 1, 2019 and November 30, 2020 and then exited by March 31, 2021, we found the following:

- 13.7% exited to permanent housing
- 4.7% exited to temporary housing situations
- 4.7% of households had not exited the program
- 6.5% exited into unhoused situations
- 8.7% exited to the emergency shelter system
- The destinations of 59.6% of households were not known

The strongest factor in disparate exits to permanent housing is age of head of household, while the second strongest factor is total monthly income. However, even taken together, these two “explanatory factors” still account only minimally for disparate outcomes across clients. Thus, more data is needed to understand what factors foster (and which hinder) successful client outcomes. This will be the aim of our research in Year 3.

It is important to note that programs for the unhoused generally have a moderately high number of households whose exit destinations are unknown, which complicates the analysis. For example, according to data from the Regional Task Force on Homelessness, during the second quarter of 2020 (April 1 - June 30), 15.18% of all exits from emergency shelters, 15.97% of all exits from permanent supportive housing programs, and 14.20% of all exits from transitional housing programs across San Diego were to unknown destinations.¹⁴ Thus, it is a challenge everywhere. However, the rate is considerably higher for SPP clients for reasons that are not immediately clear. One hypothesis is that it may have something to do with the SPP clients’ greater mobility due to automobile ownership. In Year 1, the percentage of unknown exits was exceptionally high (approaching 70%). Once we shared this information with JFS, they made a concerted effort to improve data collection in this area. As a result of these efforts, among households that enrolled during the fourth quarter of 2020, the percentage of unknown exits dropped to 28.6%. Even with this improvement, however, the problem of unknown exits hampers our ability to assess true outcomes for exiting clients.

¹⁴ [Regional Task Force on Homelessness - Dashboard](#) (Entries and Exits, Q2, 2020).

Additional analysis of data on household exits from the JFS SPP revealed the following:

Head of household income is associated with exit outcomes

- Total monthly income (combining both earned, employment-based, and benefits-based income) predicts increased permanent or temporary exits relative to homeless or emergency shelter exits. The mean total income of those who exit to permanent destinations is \$1,477 and to temporary destinations is \$1,3646, whereas the mean total income of those who exit to homeless destinations is \$1,243 and to emergency shelters is \$1,166. In other words, even increments on the scale of only \$100/month are associated with more positive outcomes.
- Monthly earned income predicts increased permanent exits relative to temporary, homeless, and emergency shelter exits. The mean earned income of those who exit to permanent destinations is \$661, whereas the mean earned income of those who exit to temporary destinations is \$452, to homeless destinations is \$508, and to emergency shelters is \$417.

Head of household age is associated with exit outcomes

- Increased age for a head of household predicts decreased permanent exits and increased temporary exits, particularly for households with heads who are more than 69 years old. Households exit to permanent destinations at rates of 16.1% when heads are under 30 years, 13.8% when heads are 30-69 years, and 7.8% when heads are over 69 years. Households exit to temporary destinations with rates of 0.8% when heads are under 30 years, 4.8% when heads are 30-69 years, and 11.8% when heads are over 69 years.
- Increased age also predicts increased homeless and emergency shelter exits and no exits. Households with heads over 59 years old exit to homeless situations at a rate of 9.5% compared to 5.3% for other households. For emergency shelter exits, we see elevated rates extend to households with heads over 49 years (11.7%) relative to other households (4.9%). Finally, looking at households that do not exit, we found rates of 2.5% when heads are under 30 years, 3.6% when heads are 30-59 years, and 8.0% when heads are over 59 years.
- The association with decreased permanent exits relative to negative and no exits is partially but not wholly driven by increased rates of physical disability and lower monthly income.

Head of household gender and household type are associated with exit outcomes (though it is not statistically significant due to low household numbers)

- Female-headed families achieve the strongest positive results, with a 20% permanent exit rate and a rate of 10.9% to homeless, emergency shelter, or no exits. Two-parent, female-headed families have a particularly strong permanent exit rate of 28.6%. Male-headed families, on the other hand, only exit to permanent destinations 13.6% of the time and have homeless, emergency shelter, or no exits 27.3% of the time. These male-headed families experience the highest level of temporary exits (9.1%) and emergency shelter exits (22.7%).

- Single females and female-headed households also perform better than single males and male-headed households (but not as well as female-headed households), exiting to permanent destinations 17.4% of the time and to homeless, emergency shelter, or no exits 19.8% of the time compared to 10.7% permanent exits and 20.9% homeless, emergency shelter, or no exits for single males and male-headed couples. These latter households have the highest no exit rates (6.6%), whereas all families exited during this time frame.

Household experience with homelessness is associated with exit outcomes

- Higher amounts of time homeless during the three years prior to enrollment predicts fewer permanent exits and more no exits. Households who had been homeless for six or more months exited to permanent destinations 9.2% of the time and did not exit 7.9% of the time, whereas households who had been homeless for one to five months exited to permanent destinations 17.5% of the time and did not exit 3.2% of the time.
- These associations are partially but not wholly driven by lower monthly income.

Head of household race and ethnicity are associated with exit outcomes

- Households with Asian, Black and Hispanic heads were more likely than those with White heads of household to exit to permanent destinations relative to their negative and no exits.
 - Households with Asian heads had the highest rate of permanent exits at 24.1% while 20.7% exited to homelessness or emergency shelters, or did not exit;
 - Black heads of household had permanent exits at a rate of 16.4%, while only 11.9% exited to homelessness or emergency shelters, or did not exit;
 - Hispanic heads of household had permanent exits at a rate of 15%, while only 16.2% exited to homelessness or emergency shelters, or did not exit;
 - White heads of household had permanent exits at a rate of 12.3%, while 22.9% exited to homelessness or emergency shelters, or did not exit.
- These associations are largely driven by differential ages (older for White heads) and rates of physical disability (higher for White heads) among these populations. For households with Black and Hispanic heads, higher levels of monthly income also contribute to their improved exit outcomes.

Length of Stay in the JFS Safe Parking Program

Households that remain the longest in the program generally fall into two categories: those that have not exited (369.7 days on average) and those that exit to emergency shelters (169.8 days on average). Households that ultimately exit to permanent destinations remain in the program longer (95 days on average) than households that exit to unknown destinations (64.8 days on average) or back into homeless destinations (shelters or the streets, 81.2 days on average) but less than those that exit to temporary destinations (111.8 days on average). At every step along the age spectrum, older heads of household take longer to exit than younger heads of household, ranging from an average of 40.6 days for those under 30 years old to an average of 137.3 days for those over 69 years old. Single adults who exit also remain in the program longer (79.6 days on average) than adults with children who exit (47 days on average).

Additional analysis of JFS SPP longstayers, the 10% (117 households) that have stayed in the program the longest, revealed the following when compared to all households in the program:

- Top 10% of longstayers were in the program more than 300 days (whether they had exited or still remained in the program through March 31, 2021).
- Top 10% of longstayers are older: 84.6% are 50 years and over, whereas 56.2% are 50 years and over among all households; clients who are 70 years and over have extended stays on the lots at more than double the average rate for all heads of household (11.1% of 70+ years old clients vs 4.9% of all households).
- Top 10% of longstayers have been homeless for longer: 31.4% of the longstayer households had been homeless more than 12 months in the three years prior to enrollment, compared to 20.8% of all households.
- Top 10% of longstayers have less income: their average is \$1,145, whereas the average among all households is \$1,354.
- Top 10% of longstayers have more single-person households: 89.7% are individuals, compared to 84.1% among all households.
- Top 10% of longstayers are more likely to be male: 64.1% are male, compared to 56.9% among all households.
- Top 10% of longstayers are more likely to be single males that are 50 years and over: 47.9% compared to 29.8% among all households.
- Top 10% of longstayers are more likely to be individual males who are 50 years and over and who were also homeless more than 12 months in the three years prior to enrollment: 13.7% compared to 7% among all households.

Household Returns for the JFS Safe Parking Program

Of the 874 households who exited between February 1, 2019 and November 30, 2020, 175 returned to the program once (20%), 38 returned twice (4.3%), 8 returned three times (0.9%), and 2 returned four times (0.2%) through March 31, 2021. The strongest factors in these outcomes are having been chronically homeless and age of the head of household, though even taken together these two factors do not go very far in explaining who returns to the program after exiting. More research is needed to understand the factors that contribute to disparate rates of return to SPP lots.

Additional analysis of data on household exits from the JFS SPP revealed the following:

Head of household returns to SPP vary by exit types

- Rates of return depend on the type of exit. Whereas heads who exited to unsubsidized rentals had 12.1% rates of return, those who exited to subsidized rentals had much lower return rates of 5.9%. Those who exited to permanent housing with family had return rates of 13.2%; those who exited to homeless situations had rates more than three times greater (46.6%), and those who exited to permanent housing with friends also had high return rates (44.4%). These were even higher than exits to emergency shelters (rates of 25.6%), and temporary housing with friends or family (rates of 23.1%).

Head of household chronic homelessness is associated with higher rates of return to SPP lots

- Chronic homelessness predicts increased rates of first (and second) return: heads of household who have experienced chronic homelessness return at a rate of 31.3% while heads of household who have not experienced chronic homelessness return at a rate of 17.9%.

Head of household age is associated with rates of return to SPP lots

- Older age predicts increased rates of first (and second) return: heads of household over 69 years return at a rate of 30% while heads of household under age 30 return at a rate of 11.4%.

Household type is associated with rates of return to lots

- Couples and families return to the lots at much lower rates: single-adult households have higher rates of first (and second) return, with a rate of 21.6% for single adults and 19.2% for single-parent families, whereas couples have a 10.9% rate and two-parent families have a 3.7% rate.

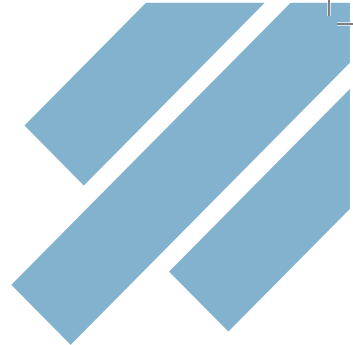
Head of household income is associated with rates of return

- Higher total monthly income predicts decreased rates of return: the mean total income for those who do not return to the lots is \$1,367, higher than those who do return to the SPP lots (\$1,206).

Head of household race is associated with rates of return to SPP lots

- Households with Black heads were less likely and households with Native American/Alaskan heads were more likely than those with White heads to return once to the lots. Households with Black heads returned 13.4% of the time, households with Native American/Alaskan heads returned 46.2% of the time, whereas households with White heads returned 21.1% of the time.
- When looking at the comparative rates of return between households with Black and White heads, age of the head of household partially drives their differences. Further research would be worthwhile to tease out other contributing factors, both to the greater success of Black heads of households in permanent exits and fewer returns, and to the disproportionately higher rates of houselessness for Black heads of household in the first place.





The Possible Effects of the COVID Pandemic

To get a sense of how the COVID pandemic may have affected the results of the SPP, we compared similar time periods before (March 19, 2019 through March 31, 2020) and during the pandemic (March 19, 2020 through March 31, 2021). We started on March 19 in each time period because that is when the California lockdown was announced. While we tracked exits through March 31 of each time period, we only looked at households enrolled through November 30 of the given year in order to allow at least four months for households to exit. We found that the pandemic made it more difficult for some populations to exit to permanent housing and that it similarly negated advantages that some populations demonstrated in the pre-COVID period in exiting to permanent housing.

Differences between the pre-COVID and COVID time periods:

- Association linking heads of household physical disability to fewer permanent exits was stronger in the COVID period.¹⁵
- Association linking chronic homelessness (and number of months homeless in the prior three years) to fewer permanent exits was only found in the COVID period.
- The effects described in the two points above are largely behind two additional associations that were found in the COVID period:
 - an association linking older heads of household to fewer permanent exits that was stronger in the COVID period¹⁶
 - an association linking the head of household's earned income to more permanent exits that was only found in the COVID period
- Association linking veteran heads of household to more permanent exits was only found in the pre-COVID period.
- Association linking female heads of household to more permanent exits was only found in the COVID period.
- Whereas households with Asian, Black and Hispanic heads had more permanent exits than those with White heads in the pre-COVID period, only households with Asian heads of household did so during the COVID period.

¹⁵ It was not statistically significant for the pre-COVID period though it pointed in the same direction.

¹⁶ It was not statistically significant for the pre-COVID period though it pointed in the same direction.



Qualitative Findings

Proximate and Upstream Contributors to Homelessness

Analysis of the HMIS data provided critical baseline statistics. We supplemented this data with SPP client and staff interviews and listening sessions in order to better understand the individual stories behind them. The reasons for falling into homelessness are as varied as the individuals who shared them; we have been privy to countless stories of crisis and loss, many poignant, others gut-wrenching. Narrative diversity notwithstanding, the immediate causes of homelessness do follow particular patterns. The most frequent proximate causes of homelessness/houselessness include:

- Loss of a job
- Medical crisis
- Loss of a partner or spouse to death or divorce
- Domestic violence
- Illness and death of a parent, child, or other significant person in someone's life
- Loss of a naturally-occurring affordable housing (NOAH) unit, e.g., due to death of the owner and selling of the property by heirs

Note that while the vast majority of unhoused people in San Diego (and in the SPP) are from San Diego, for that subset who come from other cities, the story is typically one of shattered expectations, e.g., a promised job that did not materialize, a relationship that did not work out, etc.

The throughline is that in every case, an individual or family sustains some kind of significant blow(s) and they lack a sufficient buffer (of wealth, or social/familial support, or both) to cushion that impact. The common baseline, just as it is the case for the majority of people across the country who become unhoused, is that at the time of their housing crisis, 1) they are experiencing deep economic insecurity, and 2) the familial or community supports they may have are insufficient to keep them housed. It must be said that, with respect to support from individuals' immediate circle of family and friends, the inability to offer funds or housing is not because family members or friends do not want to lend assistance. In some cases, friends and family want to help, and might even be able to help, but at significant personal cost because their own resources are severely limited as well. Many SPP clients, perceiving this and not wanting to burden family and friends, choose not to share their circumstances.

It is critical to note just how widespread economic precarity is across San Diego, as well as across our state and nation. In one oft-cited survey,¹⁷ 69% of Americans reported that they did not have \$1000 in personal savings to cover an unexpected expense; 45% could not even come up with \$400. Millions of Americans are one medical crisis, paycheck, or personal shock away from losing their housing. The reason that our students come to the conclusion again and again that SPP clients are "just like us" and

¹⁷Vultaggio, Maria. *Most Americans Lack Savings*. Statista. December 18, 2019.

that becoming unhoused “can happen to anybody” is that the clients really are very much like them and people they know: family members, neighbors, friends. Contrary to the presumptions students often carry into their interviews, they find that many of the clients have jobs or recent work histories. Some have college degrees; others have been entrepreneurs. All have relationships, people, and/or pets that make their lives meaningful. Before they became derailed, they were on life trajectories that are familiar to the students. They lived in houses or apartments. Many worked for decades before being laid off. They are ordinary - no less kind or capable or accomplished compared to other people we know.

One important contributing factor to homelessness that we see, both “upstream” and “downstream,” is trauma. A disproportionately high proportion of clients, in both Year 1 and 2 of our oral history interviews, revealed childhood backgrounds and life trajectories populated with experiences of abuse, neglect, and/or significant privation. The research on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is clear: higher numbers of ACEs put individuals at increasingly higher risk of negative health and social outcomes as adults, including homelessness, addiction, depression, and physical health problems.¹⁸ Having a trauma-informed and sensitive staff and being prepared to connect clients with relevant counseling and support resources are important ways to attend to these clients’ needs.

Barriers to Becoming Stably Rehoused

We explored the question, “What are the barriers to becoming stably rehoused?” with both SPP clients and direct line staff as each group offers critical perspectives on the challenges people are facing. From the clients’ vantage point, structural barriers are the most formidable. While many recognized that individual challenges such as disabling physical and mental health conditions, as well as addiction, were at play for some people, the answers that came up again and again were “unaffordable rent,” “impossible to find housing I can afford,” and “I don’t earn enough money to cover rent in San Diego.” In California, 21% of renter households (more than 1.2 million households) are extremely low income (ELI), earning \$27,330 or less.¹⁹ We have a severe shortage of housing that is affordable to this group: across the state, we lack almost one million homes that are affordable to extremely low income (ELI) households.²⁰ In 2019 (pre-COVID), according to the California Poverty Measure (CPM), 16.4% of Californians (6.3 million) lacked enough resources to meet basic needs. In San Diego, that percentage was even higher: 17.8% of our neighbors live at or below the Federal Poverty Line.

For people on the lots, monthly income, whether earned or fixed, is simply inadequate to cover market rent. The average income for SPP households is barely over the Federal Poverty Line for individuals, and in many cases, this income has to serve for two or more people making up a household. The average rent for an apartment in San Diego is \$2,344,²¹ roughly \$1000 higher than the average household income for SPP clients. Something has to change for that individual or household to regain stable

¹⁸Stressful and traumatic events during childhood have a strong relationship to both negative health outcomes and lifetime homelessness. Hernandez, L. and Wiewel, B. (2020) [Trauma and Resiliency Informed Care and Homelessness](#). Sol Price Center for Social Innovation; [Adverse Childhood Experiences \(ACEs\)](#), CDC Vital Signs, November 2019.

¹⁹National Low Income Housing Coalition, “Housing Needs By State: California” (accessed November 8, 2021).

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Rentcafe.com Rental Market Trends for San Diego (accessed August 31, 2021).

housing: either an increase in income (a higher paying job, more work hours, better social safety net supports), a decrease in cost of housing, or both. The challenge is even greater for many older adults (who make up a significant proportion of SPP clients), particularly those with disabling conditions, who live on a severely limited and fixed income.

Nationwide, only one out of four individuals who qualifies for subsidized housing receives it.²² In California, the situation is even worse. SPP clients spoke of being on the waiting list for a Section 8 voucher anywhere from 10-15 years. SPP staff identify many of the same barriers that clients do, as they are on the front lines of helping households figure out their budgets and find apartments they can afford. Staff are also cognizant of the many stresses (economic, physical, psychological, social) that clients face and the ways these factors complicate their lives and make regaining economic and housing stability challenging. These range from fall-out from economic shocks (inability to pay medical bills, losing jobs, partners, parents, and/or children), to reverberations of trauma, abuse and other childhood adverse experiences earlier in life. Such experiences can cause people to feel even more overwhelmed and less able to deal with the practical demands of both surviving (figuring out where to rest, where to charge phones, where to eat, how to spend the day or keep kids entertained, how to hide “being homeless” from others) and building a life again (editing and sending out resumes and job applications, applying for SNAP and other possible benefits, apartment hunting, doctors and other appointments for self and family, making sure kids do their homework assignments, etc.).

For most clients, living out of their vehicles is the only reasonable option for the moment. The alternatives: shelter or rough sleeping on the streets are considered to be even less desirable. Shelters have numerous rules and stipulations. To many, they feel overcrowded and unsafe. People often prefer the freedom of having the private space their vehicle offers, no matter how cramped and uncomfortable it may be. People with pets feel they have no other option, since pets cannot be brought into shelters. Families or couples wanting to remain together have vanishingly few shelter options available, so they choose to remain together in their vehicles.

Direct line staff do report that some clients are unrealistic about where they are willing to live. People tend to want to live in areas they know and have lived before, but when they lose their housing (often naturally occurring affordable housing, or NOAHs), as is the case with many of the older clients, or their circumstances change significantly (job loss, medical bankruptcy, loss of partner and dual earner), they can no longer afford to live where they want to live. This is a painful shift for clients and it can take time to adjust to the new reality.

²²Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “3 in 4 Low-Income Renters Needing Rental Assistance Do Not Receive It” (last updated July, 2021).

Impacts of the JFS Safe Parking Program on Clients

It is difficult to capture all that is happening within the Safe Parking Program. It is a robust program, providing the most comprehensive array of supports we've seen at any safe parking lot. As discussed below, our research identified formal and informal impacts.

Formal Sources of Support

As discussed previously, the bare minimum among the SPPs we have surveyed across the West Coast and Colorado includes space at a private or public lot with some level of security and toilet facilities (usually a porta-potty). The JFS program varies somewhat from lot to lot with the greatest number of resources available at the Balboa lot, simply because this is the organization's main campus and it has both Wi-Fi and showers. Clients at other lots do have access to these showers but for them it requires additional driving, and clients are loath to waste gas money on what they consider to be unnecessary trips. All JFS SPP clients have access to the following: toileting, handwashing, and shower facilities (located at two of the lots), staff support from 6-9 p.m., a case manager to whom they are assigned, referrals to other programs and resources as needed, hot meals 3 nights/week²³ and other (packaged) meals and snacks the other nights, access to a microwave, hotpot, books and a seating area, financial literacy and budgeting support, a housing navigator, and financial support for various needs that may arise on a case-by-case basis (e.g., gas cards, paying for a critical car repair, first month rent plus security deposit for a client who has saved enough money and is ready to be rehoused, etc.).

Social and Emotional Supports

While it was easy to identify formal sources of support, it was difficult to capture the more intangible human element: the social and emotional experience and support that arise out of the relationships between both staff with clients, and clients with one another. These include a sense of community, of non-judgement, of reprieve from the averted eyes or the stigmatizing gaze of the public, both of which rob clients of the sense of dignity, shared humanity, and belonging we all need and deserve. These are nearly impossible to measure quantitatively but they are captured clearly in the words of clients in our listening sessions. When asked, "What has been helpful to you?" about the SPP, a frequent response was "safety." Although many people (especially women, who had been sleeping in their cars on the streets and had been attacked or threatened) were referring to actual physical safety, most were also (or solely) referring to emotional and psychological safety. The lots are a place where they can let their guard down, relax, and engage in conversations with other clients simply as two people interacting (rather than as two unhoused people conversing). They do not (cannot) forget that they are unhoused, but in these interactions on the lot, this fact about them becomes merely an aspect of their whole self rather than the only thing that defines them.

²³ Providing a warm meal to all clients at four lots is a monumental effort involving the solicitation and coordination of a fleet of volunteers. During the Shelter In Place order across California, JFS staff managed to organize the provision of meals nearly every night, but this pace proved impossible to maintain over time. Volunteers across San Diego continue to step up to provide meals, but they are doing so with less frequency. This means that some weeks, JFS is unable to meet its "three hot meals a week" goal.

Many clients also spoke with gratitude toward both staff and other clients for the care they extended and for “treating (them) like fellow human beings.” The power and uplift of this experience cannot be overstated. It is relevant to questions about outcomes and impacts. Vehicle-based houselessness is growing rapidly and SPPs are a relatively new intervention. Assessing their effectiveness based on narrow outcome data (the percentage of people who are confirmed to have transitioned to “positive” exits, however that is defined, within a 4-6 month period) does not capture all that we suspect may be going on. As discussed previously, a very high percentage of clients leave the program as “unknown exits.” We cannot know, unfortunately, whether they end up with some sort of positive resolution (they move in with family, or friends, or find a rental they can afford), or a negative outcome (still sleeping in their car, or worse, on the streets). We also cannot know if the safety, supports, and resources made available to them while they stayed at the SPP had an effect on their outcome. The best we can do is to surmise, based on formal and informal interviews, listening sessions, and conversations with both clients and front-line staff. Based on this feedback, and in spite of many unknowns, we are comfortable asserting that the JFS SPP clearly helps people (as we outline further below), and that it is a worthwhile intervention to have available to unhoused San Diegans right now.

Mutual Aid

What we have observed, and heard directly from clients, is that people look out for and help one another on the lots, with many positive outcomes. This mutual aid creates an informal network of advice, and emotional and practical support that benefits and helps foster resilience for all. The relationships of reciprocal support which develop on the lots have a positive effect on all participants: recipients of aid or care gain practical and emotional support; those offering that care or support are able to fulfill a valued social role as a helper, which is a welcome contrast to ways they often come to feel (internalized stigma and judgement can transform into excoriating self-talk). Helping others enables people to be lifted, even if only temporarily, out of a focus on their own basic-needs crisis, and oriented towards fulfilling higher-order needs of mastery, connection, and meaning/purpose.

A subset of clients aired complaints about the limitations of showers and shower time, about having to leave the lots so early, and occasionally about not feeling like they were being treated with compassion and respect. Living unhoused is very hard. What may seem like a small inconvenience or indignity to someone who is comfortably housed is experienced very differently by individuals who feel rubbed raw by the circumstances of their lives. It is important to be cognizant of this, and to pay special attention to our tone and choice of words. Small kindnesses make a difference. Notwithstanding the small number of disgruntled individuals on the lots, it remains the case that the vast majority of clients appreciate what the JFS SPP offers: a pause point, a reprieve amidst the grind, an opportunity to feel like an ordinary human being and community member again.

For roughly a fifth of the SPP households with greater earned income, the combination of programmatic, financial, social, and emotional supports offered by the SPP is just the launching board needed for becoming stably re-housed. For others, especially the growing number of older adults who are falling into homelessness and who live on fixed incomes, or for individuals who have disabilities and

a very limited capacity to earn a living income, the SPP serves as a harm reduction intervention, making what would otherwise feel like an intolerable, lonely, hopeless, anxiety-filled circumstance a little more tolerable. A significant subset of (usually older) clients are “long stayers” for the very reason that affording any kind of market rate rent in San Diego on a fixed (low) income is impossible. Lacking families who might be able to take them in or lend them financial support, they wait for Section 8 vouchers or senior subsidized units to become available, a wait that can take years.

Whether clients are among the fortunate percentage who are able to achieve a “positive exit,” or they have some other outcome, the Safe Parking Program provides immediate safety, security, care of basic needs, dignity, community, hope, and possibility which can only have a positive impact on both physical and psychological health. In that sense, we understand the SPP as a harm reduction model as much as an intervention aimed at getting clients stably housed as quickly as possible.

No single intervention can solve the complex “wicked problem” of homelessness; we need a multilayered, multi-pronged, upstream and downstream strategy to achieve that. Still, we are convinced, based on our data, that SPPs generally, and the JFS SPP model in particular, offer an important tool in our collective toolbox. Our research in Year 3 will give us a picture of longer-term impacts of participation in the JFS SPP as well as general insights about what helps and what hinders people in finding and maintaining stable housing.





Educational Outcomes of Accompanying UC San Diego Course

Similar to Year 1, during this second academic year, we taught the two-quarter course series that we designed to accompany and support the research. Because we taught the course series during COVID, we feared that the remote format would detract from the impact of the experience. Although we were unable to create on-the-ground, in-person experiences for the students during the first quarter as we had done the prior year, with everyone fully vaccinated and safety measures in place, we were ultimately able to bring most of the students to each of the four lots during the spring quarter of 2021 to participate in the listening sessions, as well as conduct oral history interviews. Those students who were not living in San Diego during this quarter “Zoomed in” with student partners who were physically present. The arrangement was not without its challenges (Wi-Fi connectivity foremost), but we made it work and the results were very positive. Not only were we able to collect rich listening session data and personal narratives, but the impact on clients and students alike was positive and lasting.

To say that the students were affected by their conversations with SPP clients would be an understatement. Human stories are powerful; they give us new lenses on the world and on our lives. What the students suffered from most was feeling that they were not able to personally do anything to help the people with whom they were engaging. We suggested that their mere attention, curiosity, respect and generous listening likely had a positive impact on their interlocutors. In fact, we heard this from a number of the interviewees. But the influence went both ways; as can be seen in the student quotes below, speaking with clients on the lots was tremendously impactful for students, positively affecting both their understanding of the issue, and their perceptions of unhoused individuals. One student even wrote a heartfelt letter to one of her interviewees, letting him know how much his words had affected her, and how grateful she felt that he had trusted her with his story.

In terms of measures, across the board, and according to multiple assessment tools (pre & post-course surveys, students’ self-assessment of learning, review of assignments, quality of research data contributed by students), 100% of the students in this year’s course had significant gains in multiple areas, including:

- Knowledge about the roots, history, demographics, humanscape and servicescape of homelessness;
- The experience of homelessness/houselessness and its impacts on physical, social, and psychological health and wellbeing; and
- Policy responses and programmatic interventions to houselessness.

Measure by measure data can be made available upon request.

Included are a sampling of student quotes from their final class survey.

This course series has completely changed my outlook on homelessness, and the people that it encompasses. I came into this two-quarter course with my own subconscious attitudes and preconceived notions regarding unhoused individuals and now I can say with great confidence that my perception has changed for the better. I'm grateful for everything that I learned in the past year and hope to take this important knowledge with me throughout my career and undergraduate learning, as well as share this wealth of knowledge with my own social circle and family. We can all benefit from empathy and learning about others' experiences, especially experiences that are surrounded by stigma.

– UC San Diego Student



Urban Challenges: Homelessness in San Diego (UC San Diego Cohort 1, March 2020)

STUDENT QUOTATIONS

The field research and the lectures combined really helped me dismantle the fear and discomfort (and in turn, shame) that I felt towards homeless people in years past. Because of this course, I have actually talked to several unhoused individuals that I've met out in the world and was even able to help a young woman and her dog get food and water :) It's really changed my outlook on life too; I understand my own privilege better, and how precarious so many families' financial situation is.

(This class) has taught me a lot about unhoused individuals. I actually found the topic of my honors thesis project because of this class, and I would like to help implement some of the houselessness solutions within Southern California in the future.

This class revolutionized my thinking about the issue of homelessness in our country.

It has given me a greater knowledge, appreciation, and understanding of homeless people and their lives. The JFS site visits were by far the most impactful element of the course, and I won't forget the people I met on those lots for a long time, and I hope to pass on their experiences and stories to others.

This course has really educated me about homelessness and housing. I really did not know anything about this topic before, but now I not only feel very knowledgeable, I am also able to put human faces to those who are homeless.

(The impact of this class has been) massive. I've learned things about myself that I didn't know I felt, I've learned how wrong I've been and I've learned how to change my own mind and understand that even as a "woke" progressive, we really don't have a big enough grasp as a society on these issues as we need to.

The impact on me is being able to see the reality of how homeless individuals live. We got a sneak peek into their lives and what hardships they go through. We got to hear a bit of their stories and it is shocking to hear why they are homeless or it is eye opening to hear that the event that caused these individuals to be placed in this situation can happen to any of us. It makes you rethink your situation and, in a sense, humbles you. It teaches you to appreciate things more and have more compassion for everyone in our society even the individuals who have their social identity robbed due to homelessness.

There have been many impacts, but the biggest has definitely been the experience of individually connecting with people experiencing houselessness. Sitting together, discussing life face-to-face (albeit covered by masks) with other humans has been tremendous, especially after being so connection-starved over the past year. The opportunity to go out into the world and do real fieldwork has given a completely new dimension to my education as an urbanist. I am less afraid to talk to people and grasp their sense of the problems faced in the communities we all inhabit together.



Recommendations

Our recommendations span six categories ranging from those actions which might have direct positive impacts on SPP clients and SPP staff, to those which focus on broader policy issues.

A. Enhancing direct and indirect client supports

- Support the capacity of clients to increase their income (both employment-based and benefits-based): Higher income is associated with increased exits to both permanent and temporary housing. However, of the 602 exited heads of household who had total monthly income data for both their enrollment and exit, only two had demonstrated an income improvement. While there could be heads of household who have not exited who have increased their incomes or exited heads of household who increased their incomes but simply did not report their exit incomes, it is still clear that there is much room for improvement when it comes to helping clients increase their monthly incomes in order to improve their exit outcomes. Finding ways to partner with workforce development agencies and other employment training supports would be a valuable aid to clients particularly at this moment in time when many industries are having a hard time recruiting employees. Many clients noted that simple logistical supports (Wi-Fi access, a laptop loaner program, access to a printer, advice on resumes) could help them gain employment. Additionally, helping clients to apply for SNAP, WIC, SSDI, VA, and other benefits may expand clients' capacities to cover a wider range of permanent, stable housing options.
- Identify new strategies to support older heads of household, and learn from those older adults who do achieve positive exit outcomes: While lower monthly income and physical disability do explain part of the poorer exit outcomes exhibited by older heads of household, they do not provide a complete explanation for these outcomes. For older heads of household who do not have a disability and could work, it might be useful to develop partnerships with organizations who specialize in workforce services for older residents (e.g., AARP Foundation). For some older clients, working is not a viable option. Learning from past older clients who have been successful across a range of incomes could inform additional strategies that might increase success for the older population. For some older clients, income supports will be critical - very few clients 70 years and older exited to rentals without subsidies. For those who do have the income or supports to exit, we might find that social networks can provide the motivation and support necessary for successfully exiting. If that were the case, a secular approach modeled after a program like Bridge of Hope²⁴ would

²⁴Bridge of Hope is a faith-based model based in Pennsylvania that draws in community members to be of support (as "caring neighbors") to individuals and families becoming re-housed after experiencing homelessness.

be worthy of piloting. Social networks might be particularly important given that older clients return to SPP lots at higher rates. Building partnerships with other nonprofits who work with older adults (e.g., Serving Seniors and St. Paul's PACE) may open up additional avenues for housing, connection, advocacy, and support.

Looking across other localities might surface other programmatic or policy approaches that improve outcomes for this population. The same approach to learning should be implemented to better assist clients who have spent a longer time being homeless (and have worse exit outcomes) and clients who are determined to be chronically homeless (and have higher rates of return to lots).

- *Institute more robust programmatic interventions and follow-up protocols for households that exit to less stable destinations:* Households exiting to subsidized and unsubsidized rentals or permanent housing with family have much better outcomes than those who exit to less stable destinations. Finding ways to support the latter, through follow-up calls, connections to other support, advocacy, or service organizations, or other means will help reduce the rate of returns to the SPPs and better guide households to more sustainable housing situations.
- *Extend the operational hours at all lots, and offer 24-hour access for at least one lot:* Listening session feedback from SPP clients overwhelmingly indicated support for increased access to the lots during the day. Allowing clients to stay until 8 or 9am in the morning would reduce stress significantly for some, as they would have time to gather their thoughts, plan their day, and pack up their things in a calmer fashion. They could “have a cup of coffee and feel like a human again before being shooed off for the day.” Opening the lots at an earlier time (4pm or 5pm) would enable clients to get settled earlier and would offer more time for people to meet with their case managers. Finally, having at least one lot open 24 hours would take away the stress, mental effort, and “gas cost” of having to find a place to stay for the day, for those who are not employed.
- *Enhance basic services and amenities at all lots:* SPP clients indicated a strong desire for enhanced access to shower facilities, Wi-Fi, meals (as many evenings a week as possible), more trash bins, storage, mailboxes, microwave access, laptop loaners program, access to car battery chargers, and electronic charging stations (ECS). Wi-Fi and ECS in particular are critical to being able to search for jobs and rental opportunities, stay connected with loved ones, and remain hopeful. Shower facilities are a sore spot for many people as they are a basic need, but also experienced as a link to normalcy and a sense of dignity.²⁵ That showers are only available 1-2 times/week per individual, and that the time offered (15 minutes) is

²⁵Dignity was an issue that came up both explicitly and implicitly in both group and individual conversations with clients. Human beings are social animals; we derive our sense of worth from the world around us: from how people treat us, from the subtle and not so subtle messages we receive in public and private.

so limited is a source of great frustration on top of an already-present mountain of stress. The cleanliness and functioning of the porta-potties and restrooms was another point of aggravation that came up repeatedly, especially since these are a core need, and often the only places where people can get even a modicum of privacy after a day of feeling watched, scrutinized, and judged. For some, the bathroom or porta-potty is the only place to change into and out of work clothes.

Clients do not expect JFS staff to constantly clean these spaces; rather, they would like to figure out a strategy, as a community, to keep the bathrooms clean and hygienic for all. A few small intervention strategies would be to hold a community conversation about working together to keep the bathrooms clean, having signage on the bathroom doors reminding everyone to clean up after themselves as if it were their own home, and tools available to help keep them to that communal promise (disinfectant, wet wipes, paper towels, etc.). Another suggestion would be to set up a small space with a curtain and a mirror so that clients needing to dress for work didn't have to do so in the bathroom or porta-potty.

To the extent that JFS can (continue to) create conditions that foster safety and security, attend to people's basic physical needs, and enable them to maintain human connection, hope, and dignity in the face of blows to their sense of self-efficacy and autonomy, it will remain a critical support to the increasing number of San Diegans in this liminal space of living out of their vehicles.

- *Build relationships and partnerships with other service providers, educational institutions, and civic, healthcare, advocacy, and community organizations:* Tapping into the extensive array of skills, resources, and opportunities across the community and making the SPP lots a place-based conduit for these can ease clients' stress and create pathways to educational and employment opportunities, with positive effects for both the JFS SPP and community-based partners. This might include bringing local community college auto mechanic training program students on site to help clients with small repairs, or even a small lecture series on car maintenance or identifying mechanical problems to help clients to be more knowledgeable regarding their vehicles. Other suggestions include partnering with local law schools to bring legal clinics to the lots, County Public Health or community health clinics to offer health fairs, workforce development agencies to bring resume and interview workshops, etc. With regard to connecting clients to outside resources, trusted relationships help to facilitate "warm hand-offs" to physical and mental healthcare, employment supports, legal aid, Veterans Administration, YMCA, senior services, after school programs for children, etc.
- *Reach out to local grocery stores, restaurants, and businesses to donate gift cards, food, or supplies to support clients, both on the lot and as they transition back to housing:* Some clients pointed out that local businesses (e.g., Pep Boys, AutoZone, Home Depot, Target, Vons, Ralphs, Walmart, Subway, Starbucks, etc.) might be willing to donate a small amount

of merchandise or store credit (gift cards) to support a community-based, nonprofit program like the JFS SPP. Such donations could lighten the load of clients, since most have exceedingly tight budgets.

- Provide Quality of Life Vouchers: Pursue external funding to provide clients with vouchers/financial assistance for the following types of quality of life supports: gym memberships (LA Fitness, Planet Fitness, YMCA), AAA memberships, storage unit vouchers, PO boxes, vouchers to local laundromats, gas cards, etc.

B. Increasing staff training and support

- Provide additional and ongoing training for frontline staff: Expanding staff members' skill sets and broadening their understanding of both homelessness and about how JFS SPP fits into the larger ecosystem of services/solutions will give them additional tools and knowledge to support clients.
- Arrange additional training and opportunities for interaction, information sharing, and mutual support among frontline staff: Supporting people in a housing crisis is emotionally exhausting work; finding ways for staff to debrief, share thoughts, and support one another will likely help them and translate to even stronger supports for clients. The staff listening sessions proved to be a worthwhile experience for all those staff who participated, as they were able to hear and learn from colleagues, share their insights, and make suggestions for how to improve things on the lots. They are a valuable resource to tap, and their wellbeing and support have a tremendous influence on the experience of clients on the lots. Building in a paid hour each week for staff to exchange strategies and lessons learned, collaborate in problem solving, and simply affirm one another's efforts would likely be of great benefit.
- Convene client-facing staff to create a "checklist" of policies, practices, and procedures to be followed daily, weekly and monthly and to organize a set of resources that can expand everyone's capacity to help clients: Frontline staff are capable and knowledgeable but they come with different bodies of expertise and experience. Holding a meeting to create, and later refine, a shared list of rules and procedures for all lots will help to clarify expectations for all, while offering an opportunity for feedback and discussion. An SPP checklist could include morning and evening procedures, troubleshooting suggestions, and answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) by clients. A formal, organized set of resources can ensure that all staff members have access to the knowledge needed to meet the diverse set of needs that clients present.

C. *Fostering community, peace, wellness, and resource-sharing on the lots*

- *Foster greater connection and mutual support among clients:* Being unhoused has negative social and psychological effects, and both are related to physical and mental health. Clients can be important emotional and practical supports to one another, which may improve outcomes. Some clients are more social and are inclined to reach out, have casual conversations, and provide support. Others may need a little support in cultivating connections. Interactions can be fostered by creating physical spaces where people can gather (e.g., seating in common areas), and programming (support groups, meditation groups, cafe and conversation hours, monthly movie or music nights, etc.), and opportunities to contribute (cleaning up, helping to write and distribute a short weekly newsletter, being an orientation support person for people just coming into the lot, etc.).
- *Provide an orientation flyer to clients as they enter the lot:* Some clients shared that it would have helped to have a single-page flyer handed to them upon entry that had a map of the lot with the location of the bathrooms, common area, and staff area, as well as basic rules (where to park, where not to park, hours of operation, etc.), information (showers availability and sign-up procedures, schedule of meetings with case managers, etc.), and expectations to help orient them when they were overwhelmed and confused.
- *Expand sources and sites of information and resource-sharing:* Some clients are internet-savvy and others much prefer old fashioned paper resources. In all cases, we heard a call for more information about where they might find services and resources (access to mental and physical healthcare, scheduled meals, food banks and donation centers, senior supports, advocacy organizations, supports for families). They also wanted a space to be able to share resources with one another. A combination of a large bulletin board that all could contribute to, a pamphlet with a list of resources and community organizations, and a website filled with resources and links would be very welcome.
- *Work with clients to identify jobs/roles on the lot to improve quality of life:* Many clients feel bored, useless, and frustrated as they try to negotiate their housing crisis. At the same time, they see challenges on the lot and ways they could contribute to make things better (safer, cleaner, more tolerable, more conducive to people connecting and having a sense of hope). Creating an avenue for people to contribute to the smoother running of the lots would foster a sense of purpose and usefulness for individuals, as well as (potentially) a sense of community at the lots. If any additional resources happen to be available, they could be used to cover a small stipend or other compensation (e.g., gas cards) for the clients in these roles, although this would likely still be of benefit without compensation.
- *Encourage and facilitate links between clients and community members:* Having supports and social connections in place when ready to leave the SPP lot will increase likelihood of

staying stably housed. There are some pilot programs that can be emulated which identify volunteers in the community (specifically in or near the neighborhoods where clients will be moving) and connect people being rehoused with them. The volunteers make a commitment to support a particular family with practical needs (getting children registered in the local school, learning where local parks, grocery stores, and public transportation are located, support with challenges like car repairs, etc.), as well as be a social connector with others in the neighborhood. Relationships, even if they are formally arranged initially, can have a powerfully positive influence on people's ability to remain stably housed.

D. Further inquiry: collecting data to better understand and address program and client challenges

- *Investigate and resolve the lackluster outcomes of male-headed families:* Male-headed families have fewer permanent exits than female-headed families and more negative exits, particularly to emergency shelters despite having comparable income levels. Learning the causes of these disparate outcomes, and paying attention to the strategies, attitudes, and circumstances of female-headed families may improve understanding and the capacity to support male-headed families, enabling all to reach their fullest potential.
- *Investigate the factors associated with more, and more rapid, positive exits:* Understanding the characteristics and conditions that support success is as important as understanding the factors associated with slower exits, no exits, and returns to the lot. Once these factors are understood, JFS (and partnering organizations) can innovate and evaluate various (educational, environmental, service and/or policy) interventions to try to foster them across the client population.
- *Create some avenue through which clients can air concerns, provide feedback, and offer suggestions for improving the lot, including those they can institute themselves:* Having some sense that our voices are heard and our concerns matter is important to all human beings, but particularly so when we feel largely invisible and voiceless in so many areas of our everyday life. Feedback can be framed as an opportunity to offer constructive feedback about something that isn't working or could be improved, and to offer a possible solution. For example, a Constructive Feedback Box could be set up in the common area at each lot and paper and pens be made available. Any submissions would need to follow a format, e.g., name, observation (whether positive, negative, or mixed), what is being suggested to do about it, and who could implement the solution, i.e., staff, the individual offering the suggestion, other clients on the lot, or entities outside of the lot.
- *Follow up with clients once they have left the lot:* To the extent possible, recognizing staffing constraints, conduct follow-up calls with former SPP clients over the course of 6-12 months

in order to better understand longer term outcomes, challenges, and factors which foster success. Lessons learned can inform services and scaffolding for subsequent clients coming to the SPP.

E. Policy advocacy

- *Advocate for greater access to both permanent supportive housing and subsidized vouchers:* For many clients, particularly those with a low, fixed income, becoming stably rehoused is virtually impossible without subsidized housing or rental support.
- *Advocate for HUD to include SPPs in their eligibility criteria for Continuum of Care funding and Emergency Shelter Grants:* Given the positive impact of SPPs and the growing role they play in the ecosystem of responses to homelessness, efforts should be made to lobby local, state and national officials to enable SPPs to apply for these critical sources of funding from HUD. The City of San Diego could volunteer to pilot such an effort.
- *Advocate for “long-stayers” and chronically unhoused clients to be prioritized for Project Homekey:* Permanent housing should be prioritized for the hardest to house subpopulations.
- *Advocate for more robust data collection and program evaluation of homelessness interventions:* Understanding a problem is critical to solving it. We cannot know what programs and interventions should be upscaled until we evaluate them for effectiveness. We cannot improve the services we do provide unless we understand the effects they have on clients. Building regular data collection and program evaluation into funding contracts will benefit us all as we collectively tackle the challenge of homelessness across our region.

F. Spearheading further inquiry and shared learning regarding the Safe Parking Program model

- *JFS should play a leading role in facilitating a community of practice and sharing best practices of SPPs:* Jewish Family Service of San Diego has one of the largest and most comprehensive SPPs in the U.S. With the recent expiration of the eviction moratorium, there is a high likelihood that demand for SPPs will surge. JFS is in a position to share best practices. One suggestion (already underway) is to spearhead and convene a Community of Practice for mutual learning, service improvement, and collective policy advocacy.
- *To the extent possible, continue to collect data, monitor outcomes, listen to clients and staff, and learn from such inquiry and critical programmatic appraisal:* JFS is a model learning

organization, having shown itself to be an eager partner in the evaluation of its own program. Recognizing that regular data collection and analysis is difficult without external funding and support, we nonetheless encourage JFS and other safe parking programs to build in evaluative mechanisms in hopes of continuing this commitment to providing the most appropriate, effective, and helpful services to its clients.

- *Engage in public education efforts about the Safe Parking Program and how it fits into a broader set of solution strategies to solve homelessness in San Diego:* Public attitudes can make or break effective strategies, and the support of policymakers is also critical. JFS can harness stories and data arising out of this research to educate both policymakers and the public about the causes of homelessness, the diversity and humanity of the SPP clients, and solutions to homelessness which include safe parking programs as a tool in the larger toolbox of interventions.

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