



On Their Own Two Feet

CalWORKs and PAES participants find success through transitional employment

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It's said that finding a job is easiest when you already have one. So how can job seekers with little or no work history break into the workforce, especially if they've spent time on public aid? In a shaky economy with high unemployment, the task becomes even harder. This issue arises frequently for CalWORKs and PAES participants who are working diligently to get off aid and into employment, but whose work and educational histories pose a barrier.

The Community Jobs Program, which is funded by HSA and administered by Goodwill Industries, was created specifically to address this issue. The program offers transitional employment to CalWORKs and PAES participants who have completed their employment preparation activities but aren't ready to step into the world of mainstream employment.

"It's a really common question they face when they look for work: what are you doing now?" said Hope Kamimoto, the Workforce Development Division Contracts Manager who oversees the Community Jobs Program. "Participants who complete this program have up to six months of employment they can point to, instead of having to say, 'I'm on welfare.'"

Dana Levine, a former CalWORKs participant, is a big fan of the program. After requesting a position where she could learn new skills, she was placed at a media company in their marketing department. Her employer told her that if she did a good job, a permanent position might be in her future. A few months later, she was offered the position of Marketing and Communications Assistant, where she is earning enough to leave aid and move herself and her daughter into an unsubsidized apartment. "If it wasn't for this program, I wouldn't have gotten my awesome job," she said. "I was skeptical at first, because they told us we'd only be making minimum wage, but you've got to start somewhere. It's really hard to get a job when you have a big gap in your



Dana Levine beams at her new job.

As we go to press, the State Legislature still has not passed a budget for next year. At the local level, however, San Francisco recently adopted its new spending plan and HSA programs remained largely intact—even though the Mayor and the Board of Supervisors had to close a \$338 million shortfall. We were required to propose approximately \$20 million in budget

savings, but by leveraging new revenues, creating administrative efficiencies, and identifying areas of underspending, we were able to minimize direct service cuts.

Additionally, under the leadership of Supervisor Jake McGoldrick, the Budget Committee added \$6.6 million back into HSA's budget to restore some cuts and fund new initiatives. The most significant new items are in the Family & Children's Services division. The Committee added \$2.7 million to increase rates for San Francisco's foster families and relative caregivers, since current state-funded rates fall far short of the actual cost of raising a child in California. This infusion of local funds will make it easier to recruit and retain loving families to care for foster children in San Francisco. The second major new initiative provides \$1.5 million to support therapeutic foster homes, which will allow the highest-need foster children to be placed in safe and supportive home settings rather than in institutional care.

It is encouraging to see the City reaffirm its support for programs and services that reach the most vulnerable San Franciscans, even in the face of a severe budget crisis.



Trent Rhorer

When Disaster Strikes

HSA's role in emergency response

Earthquakes are a fact of life in the Bay Area, which makes disaster preparedness essential. And that means not only individuals and families need to be ready in case of emergency—agencies need to have plans in place as well.

The Human Services Agency has a special interest in emergency preparedness because of the nature of its mission. "We are the designated lead agency in San Francisco for providing care and shelter," said Deputy Director Phil Arnold. "That means that if an emergency shelter needs to be opened after a disaster, we are the agency that is supposed to do it. We coordinate with the Red Cross and several other agencies such as the Mayor's Office on Disability, Department of Public Health, and Animal Care and Control, but we're the lead."

Even more importantly, HSA provides services to some of the city's most vulnerable residents, and they may need extra assistance in case of emergency. "We have 1,500 children in foster care who are our responsibility," said Arnold, "and we'll need to make sure that they're okay and safe. We have more than 2,000 formerly homeless people living in SRO hotels, and 1,000 homeless people in shelter every night, and we have to make sure that the buildings they're in are still habitable after an earthquake. And over 19,000 seniors and adults with disabilities, many of whom live in severe poverty, are cared for by In-Home Supportive Services—we'll need to check on those of them who are the most vulnerable."

Ben Amyes is the new Emergency Response Coordinator for HSA, and is supervising the development of emergency response plans that will act as a blueprint in the case of a major disaster. In addition to providing emergency shelter for the displaced and systems for reaching out to vulnerable clients, HSA also will need methods for communicating within the agency and with City Hall when phone lines are down, and evacuation plans and emergency preparations for all 22 buildings for which HSA is responsible.

In addition, HSA staff, like all city employees, are designated as disaster service workers. "Any city worker can expect to be called back to work in case of a disaster," said Amyes. "Someone who is a clerk may be assigned duties such as checking people into shelter, for example. No one will be asked to perform duties they're unable or not trained to do." At HSA, approximately 50 employees already have preassigned duties, and more will be established as the emergency plans are finalized.

A disaster doesn't have to be on the scale of a major earthquake to trigger HSA's emergency plans. Although earthquakes are the first disaster most people imagine occurring in San Francisco, smaller-scale disasters such as fires happen far more frequently. This March, a fast-moving fire spread through two apartment buildings on Valencia Street in San Francisco, leaving 54 people homeless in just a few hours. Along with the Red Cross, Amyes coordinated an emergency shelter, followed by several days of hotel accommodations, and finally, assistance securing affordable replacement housing. Some tenants had been financially secure young adults, while others were seniors on limited incomes, but all were eligible for assistance.

"When you look at disasters historically, the people who struggle the most are those who didn't have many resources to begin with," said Amyes. "That's what we saw in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Taking care of our fellow residents is the right thing to do. It's why we're here."

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Leading Richer Lives

Workers' Children's Fund helps foster youth

The thank-you notes may be the best part about volunteering at the Workers' Children's Fund, a nonprofit agency which makes grants to children who are or have been involved in the foster care system. Thanks to the fund, these children have been able to have some of the experiences and support that other children enjoy as a normal part of growing up.

A young woman named Alice wrote, "I can't believe I finally made it to my senior year in college and I am about to graduate in December...I would like to thank you for all your help. I could not have done this without the extra funding and support, so from the bottom of my heart I thank you." John, who would have had to miss his senior prom without financial assistance, wrote, "We had a wonderful time at the prom, it was a night I'll never forget. Thank you for making it possible for me to go." Ashley and Jazmine wrote their thanks for funding that allowed them to buy uniforms and participate in cheerleading. Shauntrice was able to go on a school trip to Ashland, Oregon.

The Workers' Children's Fund was founded more than 20 years ago by Department of Human Services social workers who wanted to help foster children live richer lives. Since then, staff of the Human Services Agency have been volunteering to raise money to provide karate and music lessons, buy uniforms so children can participate in sports or cheerleading, pay for school trips, college tours, and visits with out-of-state relatives, and any other activity which will benefit them.

"Our goals are to enhance their self-esteem and meet the special needs that otherwise wouldn't be met," said Judy Bley, President of the Board of the Workers' Children's Fund, and a retired HSA staff member. "We want these kids to improve in school and their relationships, and to know that somebody cares about them. Some have never been to the zoo, let alone out of town, so things like camp are really important."

The all-volunteer agency raises funds each year through a variety of activities, including a spring softball tournament, grants, the Combined Charities campaign, an annual wine tasting, and most recently a benefit luncheon with the Culinary Academy. "It's a very grassroots nonprofit," said Alan Botts, Vice President of the Workers' Children's Fund board and a protective services worker for HSA. "You could say it's a classic social worker project. We work with these kids, and it's so hard not to be able to help them get the things they need. They're victims and survivors of bad situations, and it's not their fault. We want to break the cycle of abuse or neglect so they can grow up with a sense of self, a sense of hope, and have successful, fulfilled lives. We think that richer lives create hopefulness and motivation."

Recently the Workers' Children's Fund has added a new initiative focusing on former foster youth over the age of 21, who have few other sources of assistance as they prepare to enter college after getting on their feet. "Right when I got out of high school and the foster care system I began working full time and taking classes at night," said Kathleen Casela, a 25-year-old former foster youth who spoke about her experiences at the recent Culinary Academy luncheon. "It was a struggle to pay the bills and rent without any support from my parents. It was so hard that I finally quit school."



Kathleen Casela is on her way to college.

Casela was successful in her employment, working for six years at a university and then apprenticing at Americorps. But she wanted to finish her education and make up for the time she'd lost struggling to survive on her own. She returned to community college in preparation for transferring to San Francisco State University, and was awarded a grant from the Workers' Children's Fund to cover a portion of her rent and textbooks.

"I was so thankful for the grant," she said. "It was extremely helpful. At my age, I'm not eligible for a lot of the grants for foster youth. I really appreciate the social workers who started this fund. They actually know what it's like for us."

A Place Where No One Is Alone

Agency offers support and more for families who need it most

When parents first learn that their child has a disability or special health care need, they are plunged into a frightening new reality of testing, diagnosis and treatment. They may feel afraid for their child, uncertain where to go for information, and very alone.

The staff of nonprofit Support for Families of Children with Disabilities is all too familiar with this situation. Many of them are parents of children with disabilities or special health care needs, and they too have spent sleepless nights worrying about their children and how to find proper care and services for them.

Support for Families began as a support group formed by two parents in 1982, and has blossomed into an extensive organization providing approximately 600 families each year with information, education and parent-to-parent support. The Human Services Agency underwrites the organization's phone line, support groups and trainings.

"We exist to help families minimize the impact of disabilities and special health care needs," said Executive Director Juno Duenas. "When they're informed and educated about how the system works, and what their child's particular situation is, they're better able to get the services that will help that child become as independent as possible. There are a lot of opportunities for these children, no matter how severely disabled they are. Unfortunately, because systems are so complicated children may lose out on opportunities that would help them become contributing members of society."

Unlike many of the other systems and organizations which serve this population,

Support for Families is completely parent-focused in its structure and services. "A lot of families get bounced around from one system to another," said Duenas, "but here there's no eligibility requirement, no time frame. They can just call us or drop in. If what they need doesn't exist, we'll make networking opportunities to create it."

Parents come to Support for Families for a range of conditions, from asthma to autism, Down Syndrome to cerebral

palsy. Some don't yet have a diagnosis for their child's behavior or medical status. They find a wealth of information and support, no matter what their situation is, and a warm welcome from their first call or visit.

"All of our community resource parents who staff the phone line have children with disabilities or special health care needs," said Nina Boyle, the agency's Family Resource Center Program Manager. "They can help callers in English, Spanish, Cantonese or Mandarin. From the beginning, we try to build relationships with the parents. They may call us with just one question, but we encourage them to tell us their story so we can figure out how to support them. The community resource parent will call them back in a week to see how they're doing. Some families stay in touch with us for many years."

Staff can provide crucial information for parents trying to navigate the world of services outside the agency. But Support for Families also offers an enormous array of in-house services as well. There is a huge list of support groups, including those that focus on a particular age range or disability, or others which are for families whose children are recently diagnosed, or who are transitioning to adulthood. "These parents are fabulous resources for one another as they learn to navigate the system," said Boyle. "We represent a small percentage of the population, so creating opportunities for shared experiences is really important."

Volunteer parent-to-parent mentors provide crucial emotional and technical support. The agency's resource library is



Nina Boyle and the Support for Families resource library.

These parents are fabulous resources for one another.

Nina Boyle, Family Resource Center Program Manager, Support for Families

stocked with books, videos and audio tapes in multiple languages, from reference materials to children's books that depict people with disabilities. The library is available to both families and professionals looking for more information. And Support for Families also hosts monthly workshops on topics including Individualized Education Plans, Social Security Disability Insurance, transitioning into the adult system, and assistive technology. These workshops are hosted in multiple languages for small groups, so everyone's questions can be answered. Much larger periodic workshops open to both families and professionals such as case managers and social workers are held on topics such as emergency preparedness.

And then there's fun. Every quarter the agency hosts a special event so families can just get together and enjoy themselves. "We have a winter ice skating party where we take over the Yerba Buena Gardens ice skating rink," said Boyle. "We had 400 people this past winter, with wheelchairs and walkers and parents who'd never skated all on the ice together."

But perhaps the most crucial service Support for Families offers is the peer-to-peer mentoring program. Parents of children with disabilities and special health care needs volunteer to attend extensive training sessions and serve as mentors. Laurie Strawn, who first came to Support for Families seeking help for her daughter, has been a parent mentor for three years.

"I get calls from parents who want to talk to another parent one-on-one to get support, information, resources and a shoulder to cry on," said Strawn. "Support for Families matches us up with parents whom they think would really be appropriate for us to talk to. It gives me a chance to give back some of the feeling of connection and support which I've been given through this agency. And it's an honor to have someone who is going through the biggest adventure of their life be so forthcoming and open about their experience with me. It's a human con-

I'm so pleased to be able to help them feel like they're not alone."

Laurie Strawn, Volunteer Peer Mentor

nection that is so important, and I'm so pleased to be able to help them feel like they're not alone."

Strawn is a strong believer in the importance of information and resources to help families cope. "I've always been someone who wants to be educated when I'm in a difficult situation," she said. "I go brain forward. It's overwhelming to find out your child has a disability. You already have these enormous emotions of protection and love for your child, and an all-consuming interest, and then when there's an issue that somehow poses a threat to them, you're stunned. I love that in the support groups, you're accepted for however you are. If you're feeling good and optimistic, or you're feeling low and raw, or anything in between, it doesn't matter. No one has the energy to put up any walls. They can just be who they are, and be in love with their child. It's almost spiritual. You'll never meet more amazing human beings than these parents."

Strawn first approached Support for Families when her daughter was diagnosed as having had a prenatal stroke. "We mentioned to the pediatrician at Julia's three-month well-baby visit that she only used her left side," she said. "He wanted us to see a neurologist. Eventually we found out she'd had a serious stroke before she was born."

Julia's stroke means that she's considered to have a mild form of cerebral palsy. Her condition has responded well to various types of physical therapy, especially because her brain injury occurred when



Laurie Strawn and her daughter Julia.

she was very young. Glasses correct her vision, and an orthotic device helps her walk well. Like most little girls her age, Julia is looking forward to going to mainstream kindergarten in the fall. "We're thrilled that she's only mildly affected," said Strawn. "She's a very adorable, verbal five year old, and she can attend school with only some minimal accommodations."

From Strawn's perspective, one of the biggest strengths of Support for Families is the agency's approach. "They have this amazing attitude that I encounter every time I talk with them," she said. "Their attitude is 'absolutely yes, we can help you.' Even if they don't have the exact answer or support group at their fingertips, they're excited that you're calling. Some of the parents who come in have been through real battles for their children, and they're in a very sensitive, difficult space. And here they encounter an organization whose whole bent is 'yes, you have reason for hope here. We're glad you called. We can help.'"

Out and About at Last

Program helps centers open doors for LGBT seniors

It's all too easy for seniors to become isolated as friends and family leave the area or pass away. But for gay and lesbian seniors, that isolation can be compounded if they don't feel safe or comfortable revealing their sexual identity.

The impact is made clear in the words of a 75-year-old woman living in senior housing. "I am not out," she said. "The other residents don't know. It's like a whole part of me—being a lesbian—doesn't exist. It's unpleasant. It makes it hard to make close friends. It's lonely."

For younger people, it may seem unimaginable that men and women still live in the closet in San Francisco. But for older residents who have lived their lives in fear of losing their jobs, friends, family and homes if they came out, talking about their sexual identity can seem risky and frightening. As a gay man living in senior housing said of another gay resident, "I wouldn't want them thinking about me the way they think about him. If I were out, there are some who would take a dim view of me."

These seniors reported their experiences to nonprofit Openhouse, a partner of the Department of Aging and Adult

Services. Openhouse provides housing, services and community programs for San Francisco's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) senior population. Through DAAS funding, the agency is reaching out to mainstream senior centers to help them become more welcoming to LGBT seniors.

"We want to integrate LGBT seniors into the long-term care system here in San Francisco," said Marcy Adelman, PhD, a co-founder and trustee of Openhouse. "We want to change the face of aging to be more inclusive of all people so that everyone can age and live well, with vitality and health."

For several years, Openhouse has provided LGBT sensitivity trainings to agencies upon request. "We provide them with an overview of LGBT aging issues," said Nancy Flaxman, who developed the curriculum and now facilitates the Castro Senior Center LGBT outreach. "We explain that many LGBT seniors are still in the closet, which means they're not accessing the services that are available to other seniors. Then we have a panel of LGBT seniors share their personal stories, and we finish with best practices for ways to reach out to LGBT seniors."

Openhouse trainers found that while homophobia still exists, the biggest barrier was simply lack of awareness and education. Most agencies just hadn't thought much about the issue. LGBT seniors were invisible to them.

For the seniors, however, the issue is crucial. "Nowhere are people more isolated than in settings like senior centers or skilled nursing facilities," said Flaxman. "The more frail they are, and the more dependent they are on other people to do things like help them bathe or eat, the more likely they are to be in the closet. They're afraid if they come out, they will be rejected and their care will be compromised. And with good reason—those things still do happen."

The trainings received rave reviews, and Openhouse was often asked back. But trainers like Flaxman were concerned that the practices learned were not becoming institutionalized. Staff turnover meant that the gains made were soon lost, and LGBT seniors were still having difficulty accessing services, or feeling comfortable in their living arrangements. There were small improvements, but not the strides that both Openhouse and the community agencies were hoping for.

That's when Openhouse and DAAS began collaborating on more in-depth education and outreach programs. Staff selected three interested mainstream senior centers—Bernal Heights Neighborhood Center, 30th Street Senior Center, and Castro Senior Center—and took the trainings to a new level.

"The goal of the project is to work with these centers to develop a culture of acceptance to LGBT seniors," said Karen Rosen, a Program Analyst with the DAAS Office on Aging. "These are three very different agencies, and they've picked three very different approaches. It's been very successful. These centers are really stepping up to the plate to make



Nancy Flaxman and Patrick Larkin at the Castro Senior Center.

their services more accessible and really open to the entire community.”

Openhouse trainers Michelle Alcedo and Roxie Kellam look at the needs of each senior center in developing a plan. One center might need forms with more inclusive language, while another needs to include LGBT resources in its pamphlets. Staff often request role-playing opportunities, where they can learn how to approach a senior whom they think might be LGBT and make them welcome without offense.

At the Castro Senior Center, a program of DAAS-funded Golden Gate Senior Services, the emphasis has been on bringing more LGBT seniors to the lunch program as a first step to including them in other services. Despite the center’s location in the heart of the Castro District, very few LGBT seniors were using its services or were open about their identity. Golden Gate Senior Services Executive Director Nick Lederer wanted that to change.

Since the Center has only two staff members, new Program Director Patrick Larkin and Openhouse staff connected directly with volunteers. “We spoke with the few participants who were already out and could be leaders,” said Larkin. “We decided to start a discussion group once per month after the lunch program. We asked each LGBT senior to bring four friends.” About a dozen people attended the first discussion group, which blossomed to 40 LGBT seniors in a few months. Many are becoming a regular part of center activities. The center’s goal is to become the most LGBT-friendly senior center in the city, and it has now taken full responsibility for its own LGBT outreach and programs.

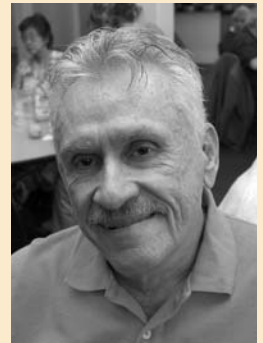
According to Flaxman, the outreach trainings provided by Openhouse are unusual in themselves, but the in-depth programs with senior centers are unique in the country. “My hope is that with this program, LGBT seniors will be able to find community,” she said. “It’s all about reducing isolation, and creating a safe space for them to be who they are.”

The Castro Senior Center

The lunch program at the Castro Senior Center is a bustling mix of straight and LGBT seniors, thanks to the Openhouse outreach program. A few participants spoke to us recently on a day when lunch was followed by a program for LGBT seniors.

Terry Abraham

I used to bring my mother here years ago. I knew a few gay seniors but right here in the middle of the Castro, many of them were very closeted. People should feel free to be open about who they are—it’s healthy mentally and physically. Many people, not just gays and lesbians, need to socialize. It’s easy to stay home and lose contact. This is a nice mixed group—lots of gay and straight people and everyone gets along pretty well. I’ve seen people who were in isolation and it’s a revelation for them to come here.



Felicia Elizondo

I came here to give a presentation about being a transgender woman and they said “why don’t you come for lunch next week?” I had been afraid I wouldn’t be accepted because of how I’ve been treated by gay and lesbian people before, but they’ve been very good to me. I felt welcome as I was walking through the door. Being a transsexual senior, I didn’t have many people I could be open with. My family accepts me, but they don’t call me. Who knew this kind of place existed?

Willard “Skip” Tandberg

For older people, it’s nice to get out socially with people of your own age. Once you get older, you don’t get out as much—some people, like me, you sort of have to talk out of their homes. We have guest speakers every now and then. We learn what services are available, because you get to the point in life where you need them, and it’s hard to find out about them unless you’re in a group like this. We are on fixed incomes, and the way the economy is, it’s getting really, really difficult to make ends meet.



Gordon Smyth

If it wasn’t for this program, I wouldn’t be here. I wouldn’t come to a senior program if I didn’t feel comfortable, and I can say that because I’ve been to others where I felt invisible and not very welcome. I’ve encouraged friends to come too. I think every senior center in the city should be sensitive to all the diversity we have—even a Muslim should feel just as comfortable as an Asian person or a gay person. We add a spark of life to this senior center. It’s very lively on our days.

A Hard Time Letting Go

Task force addresses hoarding and cluttering issues

Nearly everyone has trouble throwing items away at some point in their lives. It might be an old note from a loved one, a broken object they're sure could one day be fixed, a stack of articles for a trip that didn't happen. For most people, these objects don't amount to much—they don't take up a lot of space, and they finally do get thrown out one day without any special effort.

But for some people, throwing out possessions, even broken or useless items, is nearly impossible. Their homes become literally filled floor to ceiling with newspapers, bags, old clothing, and other objects of little worth which they will never use. As more objects accumulate, there is almost no space left for walking down halls, using the kitchen or bathroom, or even sleeping.

These are symptoms of a collection of behaviors known as hoarding and cluttering, which can be a component of obsessive-compulsive disorder, major depression, anxiety, or attention deficit disorder. Hoarding and cluttering also can be caused or aggravated by problems associated with increasing age or physical disabilities. It is estimated that from one to two million people in the United States have these behaviors, which cut across all professional, socioeconomic and educational boundaries.

Hoarding and cluttering not only affects the quality of life of people who suffer from it, but can jeopardize their housing as well. This issue comes up time and again for social workers who see their clients at risk of eviction because their packed

apartments or SRO units are a fire hazard and violate health and safety codes. For this reason, last year the Department of Aging and Adult Services and the Mental Health Association of San Francisco formed the San Francisco Task Force on Compulsive Hoarding.

"We know this is an ongoing problem in the city," said Aregawie Yosef, Co-Chair of the task force and a Carrying Section Manager for the Department of Aging and Adult Services. "People are being evicted because of hoarding and they end up homeless. We wanted to be proactive about this problem, so we launched the task force."

There are 17 members of the task force, including representatives from various city agencies, legal and mental health experts, and individuals who suffer from hoarding and cluttering behaviors. The goals are to assess the current service needs, identify best practices, improve coordination of services by the different agencies involved, prevent eviction, raise awareness, and make recommendations to policymakers.

"Most importantly, we want to see improved coordination of services so everyone's working together on this problem and we're reducing the number of evictions," said Yosef. "We need a multi-pronged approach to this. It is not as easy as just throwing away some possessions. The solution to this is one day at a time. People struggle with this and fall back. It's an ongoing process."

Marlo Tellschow, a member of the task force, is aware firsthand of how difficult it is to struggle with hoarding and cluttering behaviors. "I was diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder in 1995," she said. "Until then, I thought I was the only one. I was in the workforce for 40 years and have a master's degree, but I had problems with hoarding and cluttering issues. In my working and academic life I was always known for my organizational skills, but it was as though another person lived in my apartment. That was very puzzling to me for a long time. I finally began to understand it when I started going to a support group for hoarders and clutterers."

Tellschow was so embarrassed about the state of her apartment that she didn't want her landlord or friends to see it. When a chunk of plaster from her ceiling fell down, she had to spend several days frantically cleaning the room just so she could let the landlord in to make repairs. Even throwing out empty envelopes was difficult because she feared she might have missed something inside. She felt very ashamed and isolated.

Through the support group, which is offered by the Mental Health Association, Tellschow heard stories that echoed her own.



Aregawie Yosef is a Co-Chair of the task force.



Marlo Tellschow is a member of the task force.

“Somehow a lot of us have gotten the idea in our heads that we are the repository of all knowledge,” said Tellschow jokingly. “We save magazine and newspaper articles because someone might need the information in them, rather than acknowledging that we could go to the library or online to look up the information. Other people save things because they think they’ll be worth something, even though they won’t, or feel guilty throwing them out because they used to belong to someone they loved. And a lot of people feel bad throwing out things because it’s wasteful and harmful to the environment.”

The various impacts of hoarding and cluttering become clear in the group. Some people have become estranged from their loved ones, who are frustrated over their behavior. Others have spent far more money than they can afford to keep items in multiple storage units. Some can’t use their kitchens or bathrooms. And some have received eviction notices.

Hoarding and cluttering can be particularly challenging for social services staff. Tonya Stoddard, ACSW is a Senior Program Director for Conard House, a San Francisco nonprofit agency which provides supportive housing and mental health services. Because she provides case management to tenants, she comes across hoarding and cluttering issues frequently. “Hoarding and cluttering is a really tough issue because there are two components: the mental health issues and the physical clutter,” Stoddard said. “The newer strategies focus on combining therapy with someone who can help organize and reduce the clutter. This isn’t behavior that ever really goes away. You can do things to mitigate it, but it’s a long-term issue. It takes an immense amount of time to do it effectively, and there isn’t funding available for that. We often have to work from crisis to crisis instead.”

At Conard House, staff have seen close up the results of

hoarding and cluttering. Stoddard described stacks of belongings rising to the ceiling, with just small paths left to get from room to room. Sometimes beds are covered and unusable, so tenants have slept standing; one woman slept in the hallway outside her apartment door. Bathtubs and kitchens are full of belongings and unusable. “The situation can become so bad that there’s no way for people to eat, sleep, use the toilet or clean themselves,” she said. “One of the hardest thing is that often people know they have a problem that’s interfering with their daily lives but they’re still not able to let go of things. They have a very high level of shame about what’s going on, and become very isolated. They think this doesn’t happen to anyone else.”

Like Tellschow, Stoddard has heard many reasons why people don’t want to throw things away. Many are attached to items that have meaning for other people in their family, especially if they are estranged. Some seem to find a certain level of comfort in saving things like coupons or papers, even if the coupons have long-since expired and the papers are worthless. And others collect things like clothes, books and magazines that they intend to sell but never do.

Stoddard worked with one client who had kept all her possessions in storage while she was homeless. Within a year of moving into her apartment, she had filled it with boxes and bags of clothes, books and canned food. “At our one-year inspection, we found items piled to within a foot of the ceiling,” said Stoddard. “There were all these fire hazards and emergency exit issues we had to deal with. She was immediately cited and I explained that she would have to fix this or she would be evicted. It gave us an opportunity to talk about what was going on. She was so ashamed, and it had never occurred to her that anybody else had this issue.”

The threat of eviction combined with support from Stoddard, a case manager and a psychiatrist helped the resident make changes. “She was very rule oriented,” said Stoddard, “so we gave her clear guidelines about how much space there needed to be to walk, and she was able to comply with those. I helped her consolidate her possessions into fewer boxes and bags, but even that was difficult. At one point I had a handful of plastic bags I was going to throw away, and she said ‘Wait, I think there’s a receipt in one of them from 10 years ago.’ She was right. It’s so difficult because our goal is always to get as much as possible out of someone’s apartment, but their goal is to keep as much stuff in as they can. You might spend an hour of talking and negotiating to get rid of one box.”

Her experiences in working with people who have hoarding and cluttering behaviors have touched Stoddard. “The psychic pain they’re in just breaks my heart,” she said. “The hoarding and cluttering are always a symptom of something much larger going on, some sort of fracture in the psyche. What I hope most of all is that we can help people who have this very debilitating, painful illness, and do it so they can maintain their dignity.”

A Call for Help

The Friendship Line is there for lonely seniors

The phone rings at the same time every day, when a volunteer from the Friendship Line calls Lydia to make certain that she's all right and to chat for a few minutes. Because Lydia is a very frail, homebound senior, that call is like a lifeline connecting her to the outside world, and to people who care.

Funded in part by the Department of Aging and Adult Services, the Friendship Line is a 35-year-old program of the nonprofit Institute on Aging. With a small staff and a dedicated team of volunteers, the line provides crucial human contact to a variety of seniors, ranging from those who may otherwise go days without speaking to anyone to those who just need a little extra attention. Volunteers, and the staff members who serve as backups on the phones, are trained on topics such as communication, active listening, suicide and crisis intervention, mental illness, and grief and loss.

In addition to providing 24-hour senior suicide prevention services through a nationally available hotline number, the Friendship Line takes non-emergency calls during the day from local seniors who just need someone to talk to. Some are simply lonely and isolated, while others have mental illness ranging from mild to severe. Volunteers also make regularly scheduled calls out to approximately 100 senior clients of the Institute on Aging who need a check-in on their status, a reminder to take medication, or just a few minutes of emotional support. Some seniors have a very basic fear that something will happen to them and no one will know because they have so few visitors.

In these situations, the Friendship Line maintains a database of people to contact in case of emergency, whether that means a relative or a neighbor who has a key to the senior's home.

"Basically, our goal is to help them live independently for as long as possible," said Susan Lindeman, Program Coordinator. "A lot of people couldn't live on their own without medication reminders and safety checks. We call them and do a little bit of health monitoring. It's like calling your own grandmother and asking her how she's doing. If we hear anything that concerns us about their health, if they're out of medication, or if there is a suggestion of some sort of abuse, we can get in touch with their social worker or with Adult Protective Services."

"Every individual comes with a whole different situation," said volunteer Cynthia Hutchison, who has been helping staff the Friendship Line for a year. "Some people are really anxious, while others are feeling alone and are depressed. There's a lot of loneliness. I speak often with one man who has schizophrenia, and it calms his mind to have this connection."

Volunteers form bonds with their frequent callers. "If you talk to someone regularly for a year, you get to know them," said Hutchison. "It's a daily check-in to say we're here, and we care. I've seen people through transitions from independent living to assisted living. We're just there to be an empathetic, understanding ear—we don't have to be perfect or have all the answers. Just being here for them is a real help, and they really appreciate it."

Jim Hjort began volunteering for the Friendship Line about six months ago, seeking a humanitarian balance to his life in the business world. Like all the volunteers, Hjort handles both incoming calls and scheduled out-calls. "We are a crisis line," he said, "so the incoming calls are often from people who have more acute mental health or behavioral issues. The seniors we make calls to are generally just lonely. They're often physically unable to leave their homes, and their social circle has diminished as spouses, family and friends have passed away. Those calls are more relaxed, and we're able to build relationships with them."

Regardless of the reason why each person is calling, Hjort said, "whether it be a suicidal crisis or loneliness or just wanting someone to talk to, the reason is less important than the need itself. They need someone to talk to, and I don't assign any greater or lesser value to any type of caller. If I can even for one day brighten the outlook of these callers, then I feel I've made a positive difference in their lives."



Volunteers Jim Hjort and Cynthia Hutchison.

Interested in volunteering with the Friendship Line?

Call Susan Lindeman at (415) 750-4180 x233.

employment history and you haven't finished high school or earned your GED. This is a way to get real job experience and it was a great opportunity for me. When my employer handed me the contract with the figure for my salary on it, I was blown away. To go from minimum wage to being middle class is really nice. It took a lot of hard work, but it was worth it. I just wasn't going to raise my daughter in the housing projects."

Levine isn't alone in her experience. Approximately 30 CalWORKS and PAES participants enter the Community Jobs Program each month and receive a combination of training, support and subsidized employment. The employment, which can take place at any of dozens of host site nonprofit agencies in the Bay Area, may be in areas such as food preparation, child care, certified nurse's aids or medical office clerks, warehouse work, retail, clerical and administrative, janitorial, and elderly care. Participants work 25 hours per week at their host sites, with the remainder of their 32-hour week spent in professional development classes where they work on résumés, interviewing and computer skills, or searching for a permanent job. They are paid minimum wage for their work.

"The participants get so much out of it," said Anna Kelleher, Senior Program Manager for the Community Jobs Program. "Not only do they get on-the-job training, but part of our process is that they attend interviews at at least two host sites, and they get to choose which one interests them most. This is a big step for people who don't have confidence in themselves. While they're employed, our career advisors continue to offer them support, whether that means coaching them on time management, checking in on them at their jobs, or attending their employment evaluations. And we search for unsubsidized employment for them."

Career advisors also help participants cope with some of the issues that have led to their unemployment in the first place. Many participants come from neighborhoods that are steeped in violence, and have lost multiple family members. Others are struggling with mental illness, substance abuse, domestic violence, housing or parenting issues. The career advisors have become expert at making referrals to the appropriate agencies so that participants can receive therapy or other forms of support to heal the wounds and move on with their lives.

"I encourage our participants that life is what you make of it," said Diane Jesus, Lead Career Advisor with the Community Jobs Program. "For some people who have been on aid a long time, it's a scary thought to move into being self-sufficient and paying increased rent. But they're also tired of being in the system, and this is a way they can turn their lives around and be role models for their children. And when they sign the contract with their host site for that job, I tell them that the doors are wide open for them now. Opportunities are opening up."

Ideally, participants will use their time in subsidized employ-

I'm really happy here because everybody knows the steps it took me to get where I am, and they respect me for it and treat me like a human being.

Everett Perkins, Community Jobs Program participant



ment to hone their skills and work on problem areas. "Many of them have confidence issues," said Jesus. "We praise them for how well they're doing, and support them through their issues. If they're having problems with tardiness, for example, we explain that other employers are not going to accept that, and they need to turn it around. If they're having problems managing their children and getting out of the house in the morning, we'll give them tips and ideas on how to solve that. Whatever the issue is, we try to help them."

Everett Perkins, a PAES participant, had a long work history that included five years with the Coast Guard, but was having trouble finding permanent employment. "I wasn't getting anywhere on my own," he said. "I didn't want to just get a GA check anymore. That's not enough for a person with a family who is trying to do something with his life. I wanted to show my kids better than that."

Perkins participated in the Community Jobs Program trainings, improving his computer skills and résumé. "I learned that the job market changes constantly, just like the computer industry itself does," he said. "I chose a position with Goodwill Industries providing technical support to the computer refurbishing program, where I was rebuilding computers. And then they offered me a full-time permanent job. I'm really happy here because everybody knows the steps it took me to get where I am, and they respect me for it and treat me like a human being. And now I can be an inspiration to people in my neighborhood."

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Child's Play

Needs assessment evaluates state of city's child care

Affordable child care

is crucial to working families, especially those who are trying to move from poverty to self-sufficiency. A recent assessment of San Francisco's child care indicates that the city has made some great strides in increasing the availability of affordable, quality child care, but that there is still more work to be done.

The 2007 San Francisco Child Care Needs Assessment, which was prepared by the Child Care Planning Advisory Council, found that only 10 percent of San Francisco's population is age 12 or under. This percentage is lower than other major urban areas, likely because of the high cost of housing. Nearly 37,000 of these children, or 42 percent, live in families whose income is low enough that they are eligible for child care subsidies. And although the availability of licensed child care has grown since the 2002 assessment by more than 1,200 slots, it is still insufficient to meet demand.

"In order for low-income parents to be able to go to work or school and improve

their situations, they need child care," said Michele Rutherford, Manager of Child Care Policy and Planning for HSA. "The economics of child care make it unaffordable for many families, but the math really doesn't work for families with low incomes—they can't make enough to pay the salaries of child care workers."

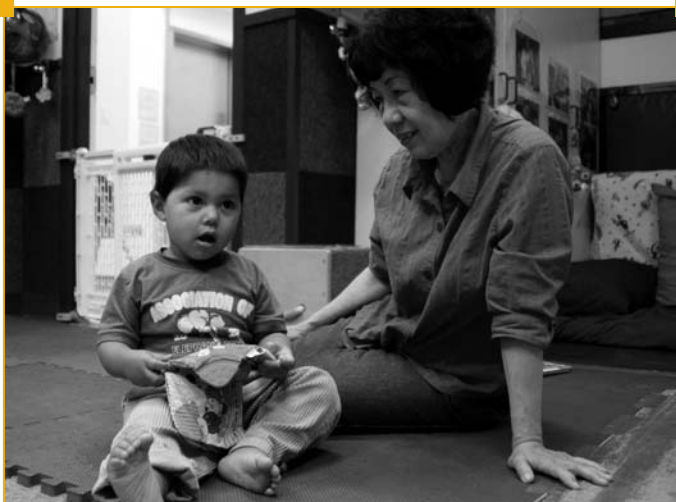
Child care is of particular interest to HSA because the agency works with parents who are participating in welfare-to-work plans, and who must engage in federally mandated work or school activities while receiving cash aid. These

families are eligible for subsidies which reduce or eliminate the cost of child care. HSA also provides child care to homeless families through a program called ACCESS, and to families referred through Family and Children's Services, as well as to other low-income families with infants and toddlers.

The agency is involved in improving the amount and quality of available child care in San Francisco as well. HSA helps fund the development of new child care facilities through the Low Income Investment Fund, supports several initiatives aimed at improving child

care quality, and boosts child care staff salaries through the WAGES+ program.

"One thing that came out of the needs assessment was that families want child care close to home," said Rutherford, "so our next step will be to increase child care in the undersupplied neighborhoods where the most families live. We're trying to make sure that parents have real options. That means being able to choose high-quality child care where they need it."



High-quality, affordable child care is crucial to San Francisco's families.