

Fact Sheet on Shelter Reservation System in San Francisco

A “Before and After” July 1st 2009 Snapshot and the Impact of System Changes

The shelter reservation system is confusing, complicated, and constantly changing. Homeless people wait for hours to get a bed, only to be turned away, while the City reports vacant beds each night. The computer system used to make reservations for emergency shelter beds is frequently breaking down, dropping reservations, showing no vacancies, when in fact there are, or alternatively overbooking shelters.

- **Shortage of Shelter Beds.** There are 1,080 shelter beds for single adults in San Francisco. The January 2009 the San Francisco homeless count found 6,514 homeless people. This is considered an undercount, as families and youth are underrepresented. *(2009 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey)*. Since 2004, over 264 shelter beds have been lost to San Franciscans *(SMC)*
- **San Franciscans are becoming homeless.** 45% of survey respondents were experiencing homelessness for the first time. The over whelming majority became homeless as San Franciscans (78%) and only 2.9% reported coming here for services. *(2009 San Francisco Homeless Count and Survey)*
- **Homeless People Report Negative and Difficult Process.** More participants reported having a negative experience (45 %) over positive experiences (44%) accessing shelter. *(COH report The Runaround, June 2009)*. 53% of interviewed shelter seekers described the access process as “difficult”. *(COH interviews with 166 shelter seekers, August 2009)*
- **Shelter Seekers Turned Away.** San Francisco public shelter seeking respondents were turned away a median of three times from shelter.
- **Waits at Resource Centers Getting Shorter, Still Too Long.** Previous to city responding to Coalition and community concerns by adding over 100-bed access to resource centers, it took shelter seekers an average of 182.5 hours or 7 days struggling with the shelter system before being able to successfully secure a shelter bed. After July 1st, shelter seekers were waiting an average of 79 hours (a median wait of 8 hours). *(COH report “The Runaround, June 2009; COH interviews with 166 shelter seekers, August 2009)*.
- **Shelter Seekers Experiencing More Runaround.** Previous to July 1st, 30% of respondents received shelter for only one night, while 34% received just a 7-night reservation. 22% of respondents were luckier, having received a six-month stay, and 13% received a three-month reservation. July 1st, length of stays were changed to 1 night and 7 days only, with possibility of extension. Post July 1st, **42% received a shelter for only one night, and 46% received a 7 night stay. Only 3% received more then a 90 day stay** *(COH report “The Runaround, June 2009; COH interviews with 166 shelter seekers, August 2009)*.
- **Problems with Computer System Persist.** In interviews COH conducted with 166 shelter seekers over the summer, 39%, or 57 respondents, reported having their reservations dropped when they arrived at the shelter. This is after waiting innumerable hours trying to secure a bed, and then traveling to the shelter.