

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **SHELTER PARTNERSHIP RELEASES NEW STUDY OF FAMILY SHELTERS IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY: SYSTEM ABLE TO MEET ONLY ONE-QUARTER OF THE NEED AS UNION RESCUE MISSION ANNOUNCES NEW TRANSITIONAL FAMILY HOUSING PROGRAM**

(Los Angeles, CA) – May 18, 2006 – Union Rescue Mission and Shelter Partnership, Inc. will release the findings from Shelter Partnership’s new study and Union Rescue Mission will announce its plans to relocate their transitional housing program for women and children from their downtown Los Angeles headquarters to a new facility in the foothills of the Angeles National Forest in Sylmar. Among the elected officials attending are Los Angeles City Councilpersons Jan Perry (9<sup>th</sup> District) and José Huizar (14<sup>th</sup> District), both of whom represent the downtown Los Angeles community.

In the summer of 2005, Shelter Partnership distributed a first-of-its-kind survey to all of the emergency shelters and transitional housing programs serving families in Los Angeles County and received a very high response rate of nearly 80 percent of all of the program beds. These findings describe the factors that lead to family homelessness and the barriers to independent living, trends in family homelessness, and the characteristics of homeless families and their children, as well as make recommendations on how to better address the needs of very impoverished families in our community.

“We found that homeless families have unique needs and a system is struggling to meet those needs with inadequate funding,” expressed Ruth Schwartz, Executive Director of Shelter Partnership.

According to Andy Bales, President, Union Rescue Mission, “If we had all the money in the world we couldn’t have built a place that is better than Hope Gardens. It’s secluded, it’s surrounded by the national forest, there’s green space, oak trees to sit in the shade and relax, and air conditioned apartments. It’s a great place for mothers and children to get a chance to get their lives back on course. At Union Rescue Mission, we are committed to helping them do just that.”

“The alarming fact is that the number of homeless families is growing and we must look at why this is happening and what can be done to assist this vulnerable population,” said Councilwoman Jan Perry. “This study demonstrates the need for more programs that are specifically tailored to meet the unique needs of our homeless families. For this reason, it is of vital importance that we support comprehensive programs like the Union Rescue Mission’s program for women and children in Sylmar. These programs are saving lives, supporting our families, and, ultimately, helping them restart their lives.”

"With more than 1,600 women and children existing in the peril of Skid Row, I applaud the efforts of Shelter Partnership and The Union Rescue Mission for tackling this crucial piece of the homeless issue," said Councilman José Huizar.

The homeless short-term housing system can meet the needs of only one-quarter of the families in need of assistance. At the same time, 40% of the shelters responded that families have been staying in shelters longer because of the high cost of rent compared to public benefits and wages, and because the City's Section 8 Homeless Program had been suspended for two years. Also identified was the fact that 31% of families living in emergency shelters came directly from another shelter. There are many families that could have avoided becoming homeless if they could have received some financial assistance to stay in their homes. One-third of the homeless families have a special need that requires assistance, such as substance abuse, mental illness, or a co-occurring disorder. The study also identified that children's services are sorely lacking and makes recommendation for improvements.

Among the survey's other key findings are:

#### **CLIENT POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS**

##### ***Cause of Homelessness***

- Across all programs, eviction was the most common cause of homelessness, accounting for 32.6% of families' histories, including 39.4% of families in emergency shelters.
- Over one-quarter (27.4%) of families became homeless due to the lack of financial resources.

##### ***Prior Living Situation***

- Families primarily lived in unsubsidized hotels or motels (32.2%) immediately prior to entering emergency shelters.
- Almost one-third (30.8%) of families in emergency shelters cycled into these programs from other shelters.

##### ***Destination***

- Most families leaving emergency shelters moved to transitional (38.7%) or permanent housing (29.5%). One in five families exiting emergency shelters moved to other emergency shelter programs or temporary living arrangements.
- Families moving out of transitional housing programs largely entered permanent housing (61.2%). Almost one in four families leaving transitional housing moved to other short-term housing programs or other temporary housing situations.

##### ***Special Needs***

- Homeless families contended with a variety of special needs. One-third of the heads of households had either a substance use disorder only (17.4%), a mental illness only (5.8%), or a co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorder (10.7%). Additionally, 10.6% lived with a chronic health condition.
- More than one in ten (11.3%) of children in homeless families served by the shelter programs had a developmental disability, and 7.2% had a mental illness.

## **PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS**

### ***Capacity***

- Short-term housing programs serving families in Los Angeles County can accommodate approximately 1,986 families in 5,959 beds on any given night. With a reported 8,238 homeless families in the county, programs can only accommodate 24.1% of the nightly homeless family population.
- Eighty-five percent of the programs surveyed regularly turned away families due to the lack of available beds.
- Due to the fact that public benefit and wage levels are not keeping pace with housing costs, family homelessness is expected to increase.

### ***Entry Requirements***

- Almost 40% of programs reported instituting more restrictive entry requirements over the past three years.
- Two-parent families were not allowed in 41.7% of programs. Boys over a specified age were ineligible in 37.5% of programs; the average maximum age was 11.4 years old.
- Sobriety for a specified period of time was a prerequisite for acceptance in 41.7% of short-term housing programs; the average length of sobriety required was seven months.
- Nearly one-quarter (22.9%) of family shelter programs did not accept clients who were diagnosed with a serious mental illness or were taking psychotropic medications.

### ***Length of Stay***

- Over two-fifths of family shelter operators reported that the length of time clients stayed in their programs had increased over the past three years.

### ***Supportive Services***

- Children's services were not provided either on-site or off-site by 39.6% of programs.

### ***Recommendations***

The following recommendations serve to highlight several of the 24 proposed strategies to expand and improve the delivery of care within short-term housing programs serving families in Los Angeles County.

- Increase the level and quality of mental health services for families in short-term housing programs.
- Increase the level and quality of services focusing specifically on the needs of children in short-term housing programs.
- Implement a pilot study to determine the success of eviction prevention programs for homeless families. Use available data to target assistance to geographic portions of the county where homeless families are in the greatest need for eviction prevention services.
- Once an adequate supply of additional rental subsidies have been implemented, transitional housing programs should be used more effectively. Pursue new transitional housing development primarily to target families with specialized service needs, such as those with severe mental illness or substance use disorders.
- Encourage the development of new permanent housing for homeless families, and provide short-term, shallow rental assistance to families who have the ability to spend a portion of their financial resources on housing costs.