



**Staff Report**

**February 4, 2008**

**Item 11.0 & 15.0**

ACTION:     X    

DISCUSSION: \_\_\_\_\_

**TITLE: RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN 0-5 AND THEIR FAMILIES IN THE HOMELESS SERVICES CONTINUUM**

**BACKGROUND**

In 2004, the County elected to cut funding for emergency homeless shelters, thus spurring an effort by housing advocates and nonprofit homeless service providers to raise funds to keep two emergency homeless family shelters open for a two-year period. The Commission assisted this effort in August 2004 when it approved a challenge grant of up to \$335,000, providing a two-dollar match for every additional dollar raised effective October 2004 to June 2005. Funds for the grant came from the Commission's recently-created Special Reserve Fund, which was intended as temporary funding to support programs affected by County and State budget cuts.

In September 2005, the Commission approved allocating its challenge grant of up to \$335,000 for the emergency homeless family shelters for another two years through fiscal year 2007-08. In the past two fiscal years the contractor, Shelter, Inc has closed one of the two shelters First 5 was supporting and has negotiated with First 5 a lower contract amount without the match requirement. In FY 2007/08 First 5 has allocated \$231,000 in special reserve funds for the shelter.

In the fall of 2006, the Greater Richmond Interfaith Program (GRIP) opened a family shelter in a new building in Richmond combined with GRIP's existing homeless programs. In 2007, with ongoing funding uncertain, GRIP approached First 5 for funding for their family shelter. First 5 staff met with GRIP staff and reported to the Commission their concerns regarding GRIP's administrative capacity to support their growing agency, their lack of an effective plan to sustain funding for the shelter, and their previous history with First 5 as contractor. Staff also expressed concern regarding the lack of any other reliable funding in the County for family homeless programs, and cautioned the Commission about the signals it could send by responding to agency "emergencies" outside of the Commission's strategic scope. The Commission elected to provide \$35,000 in one-time funding from the response fund line of the budget and instructed staff to carry out a community process to examine the needs of young children across the continuum of homeless services and explore ways that First 5 could possibly respond.

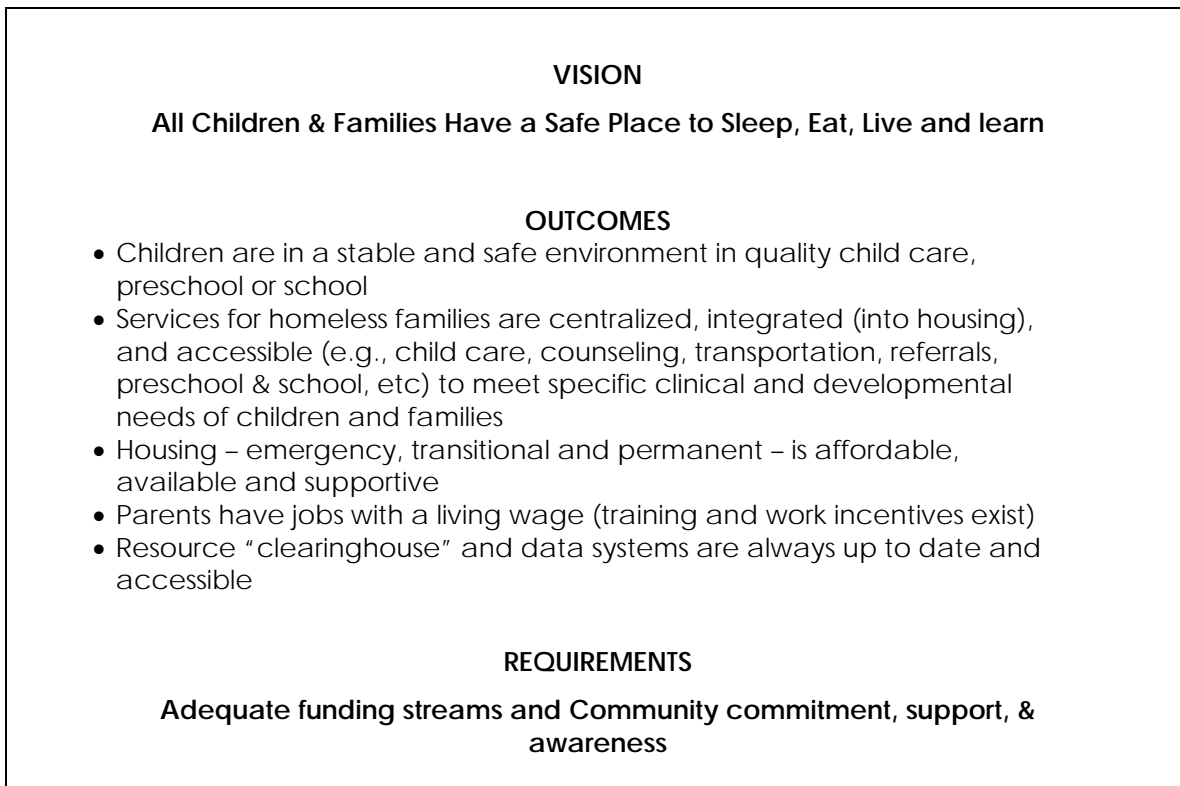
## **CHILDREN IN THE HOMELESS CONTINUUM SUMMIT**

In response to the Commission's request for input as to how to address the needs of homeless children in Contra Costa, First 5, First 5 convened the "Children in the Homeless Continuum" summit on January 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>. With the facilitator, David Barkan, a planning committee composed of Commissioners and staff with representatives of local agencies addressing homelessness met several times between October and January to determine the participants, process and scope of the Summit. The day-and-a-half event included the participation of XX individuals representing homeless agencies, family and child-centered direct service providers, policymakers, the faith community, funders, law enforcement, and formerly homeless families currently transitioning to permanent housing. Participants work in many configurations, sometimes in groups with similar stakeholders and sometimes in mixed groups.

The goals of the summit were to:

- develop a shared understanding of homelessness in Contra Costa County, with an emphasis on families with children age 0 to 5 years,
- identify short and long term strategies and engage in creative thinking about new solutions, and
- prioritize promising strategies, gauge level of stakeholder commitment, and identify next steps toward collaboratively implementing the most promising strategies.

After the first day, participants summarized their vision and desired outcomes for Contra Costa's Homeless children and families, which was translated into this graphic:



On the second day, participants defined numerous short and long term strategies to reach the outcomes and requirements. To be effective, staff and stakeholders will need to reduce them to a small number of meaningful activities that are most likely to be successful.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Summit yielded much valuable information about families in the homeless continuum. In particular, the point was made several times that none of the refined program work identified above will be possible without continued funding for emergency and transitional housing programs. Even as the county continues work on its plan to end homelessness in ten years, the need for such shelter programs will exist into the near future.

The Summit also demonstrated the potential of improved collaboration among homeless service providers and the benefit this would have on families with young children. First 5 strategies, such as the First 5 Centers and School Readiness Program, were identified as existing programs that could provide services to homeless children.

Lastly, the number of suggested strategies that dealt with coordination and integration of services indicates there may be an opportunity to continue the work of the Summit, refine the identified strategies, and bring the agencies serving homeless families together more frequently to better coordinate services.

## **Recommendation**

**Staff recommends that the Commission:**

- 1. Allocate \$1,005,000 in unexpended Special Reserve funds over the next three years (fiscal years 2008-09 through 2010-11; \$335,000 per year) to support families with children 0-5 in family shelters in Contra Costa**
- 2. Direct staff to review existing Commission strategies for opportunities to coordinate services with programs serving families in the continuum of homeless services**
- 3. Direct staff to convene a task force of participants from the summit to continue refining short and long term strategies to support homeless families with young children**