




MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members
FROM: Stephanie Hayden, Director 
DATE: September 23, 2020
SUBJECT: Updates on Austin Resource Center for the Homeless

In response to Resolution no. 20171012-015, Austin Public Health (APH) contracted with the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) in collaboration with OrgCode to evaluate and provide recommendations for Austin's emergency shelter system. This contract included examining the Austin Resource Center for Homelessness (ARCH) operations. The City currently contracts with Front Steps for management of the ARCH.

As part of this process, NAEH and OrgCode analyzed existing shelter services and available homelessness data. They convened stakeholder meetings with the following goals:

- Develop a process for redesigning the ARCH, clarifying its role in the homeless response system
- Developing and aligning best practices for the entire emergency shelter system
- Developing coordinated entry into emergency shelters
- Shift to housing-focused shelter model

The attached is a status update on the implementation of recommendations, as well as a snapshot of contract performance.

Should you have any questions, or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at Stephanie.Hayden@austintexas.gov or 512-972-5010.

CC Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Nuria Rivera-Vandermyde, Deputy City Manager
Chris Shorter, Assistant City Manager
Rodney Gonzales, Assistant City Manager



ARCH Evaluation and Assessment:

Training

NAEH/APH recommended Front Steps provide initial and ongoing training to all ARCH staff to transition from an Emergency Basic Needs Shelter, to a Housing Focused Shelter. Topics to include Housing First, Trauma-Informed Care, and Motivational Interviewing.

- **Status:** Front Steps has done in-person training with all staff at the ARCH, with an emphasis on transforming to a Housing Focused Shelter. The training has been both in-person and lead by Front Steps Leadership, as well as done via Zoom by NAEH and OrgCode Staff.
- **Recommendation:** Training should be ongoing with a set schedule and cadence which could be included in contracts to ensure consistency in practice and adherence to goals/metrics

Rules/Accessibility

NAEH/APH recommended as part of the transition to a Housing Focused Shelter that shelter rules be non-punitive and allow for “in and out” ability for the clients who utilize the overnight shelter for sleeping.

- **Status:** Front Steps has amended many of its rules and remain a low barrier shelter. To be more accessible to people experiencing homelessness, the ARCH created a program to allow individuals to keep their animals onsite. Front Steps was in the process of creating an environment of full in and out access for the clients. With the onset of COVID-19, some of this work stopped to ensure the health and safety of clients and staff.
- **Recommendations:** The practice of requiring individuals to leave the shelter for various reasons was discouraged by NAEH and OrgCode. Once normal ARCH operations begin, Front Steps allows “in and out” access to the shelter.

100% Enrollment in Housing Focused Case Management:

NAEH/APH recommended that 100% of the clients staying at the overnight shelter, be enrolled in case management and housing services.

- **Status:** The performance report attached shows that current case management levels are less than 100%, with some explanation of that discrepancy.
- **Recommendation:** The ARCH continues toward 100% of their overnight shelter clients enrolled in housing-focused case management

Redesigning Shelter Capacity

NAEH/APH recommended ARCH reduce shelter capacity to ensure an enhanced emphasis on housing focused practices.

- **Status:** ARCH reduced its capacity from sleeping 190 individuals down to 130 individuals per night before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The ARCH currently sleeps approximately 40-60 individuals per Center for Disease Control (CDC) and APH guidelines to prevent the spread of the virus.
- **Recommendation:** APH recommends that the ARCH maintains a shelter capacity that allows for ensuring housing-focused practices for all individuals enrolled in their shelter program

Implementing Diversion Services Prior to Entering Shelter

NAEH/APH highlighted the importance of implementing a diversion program at the ARCH. Diversion is crucial to reducing the overall homeless population by diverting individuals from entering homelessness through problem-solving or providing financial assistance.

- **Status:** Front Steps staff received diversion training by NAEH and OrgCode funded by APH. Front Steps staff began having problem-solving conversations with all ARCH clients (including potential clients), including asking, “what is your housing plan?” This question serves as a prompt for housing-focused conversations. Although Front Steps has made some strides towards diversion, they have not implemented a diversion program at this time.
- **Recommendation:** APH recommends continued training of Front Steps staff in diversion practices, and that Front Steps implements a diversion program designed to reduce the inflow of individuals into the homeless response system

COVID Related Adjustments to Services

COVID-19 has impacted access to services for people experiencing homelessness across the community. Due to the pandemic, the Front Steps has had to adjust the number of people allowed to shelter overnight as well as limit access to the Day Resource Center to clients only.

- **Status:** Currently, there are approximately 40-60 individuals who sleep at the ARCH, and there is no access for day resource for the general homeless community.
- **Recommendation:** Since the census at the ARCH remains low, we will continue to only use the Day Resource Center for showers, laundry and restroom access for the ARCH clients only

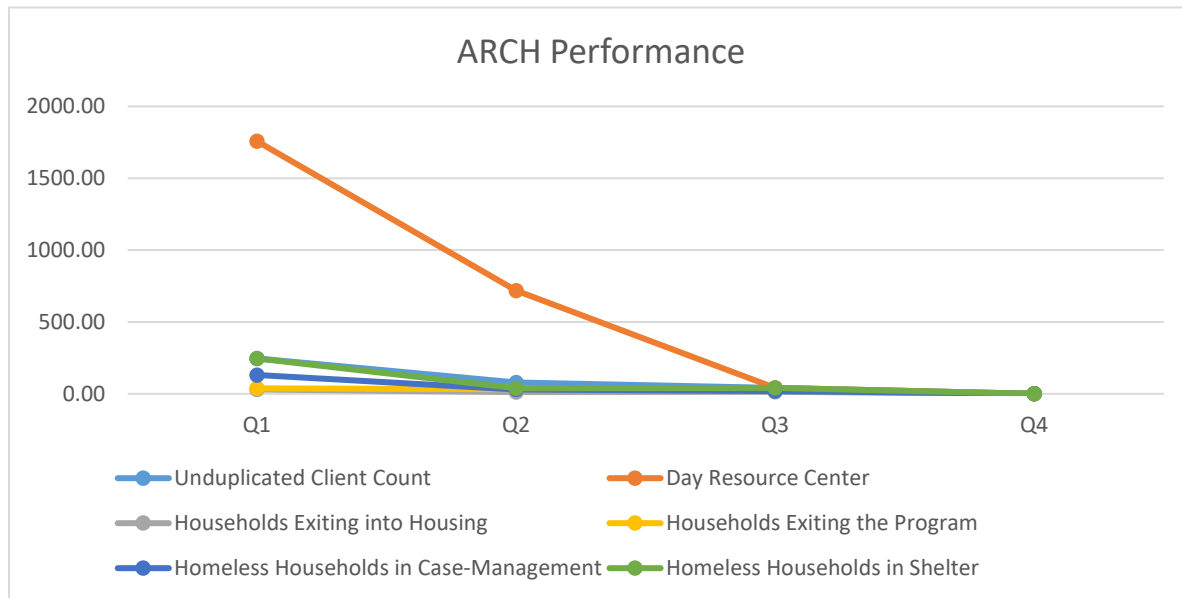
Housing Top 25 Long Stayers

To assist ARCH with moving toward being a housing-focused shelter, NAEH/APH recommended focused efforts on housing the top 25 people who have stayed at the ARCH the longest.

- **Status:** Front Steps housed 18 of the 25 long stayers with the last individual obtaining housing on April 25, 2020. This equates to a 72% housed rate for these individuals.
- **Recommendation:** APH recommends Front Steps continue to track length of stay as a metric to ascertain if they are achieving the goal of being housing-focused with an emphasis on rapid exit into housing.

ARCH PERFORMANCE

FRONT STEPS 2019-2020



Front Steps stated that they had struggled with locating low barrier housing options, which led to their Q1 output number being below the quarterly goal. Their supplemental Output, which was a measure of the number of unduplicated clients served in the Day Resource Center, was well above expectations because the center had remained open whereas the original plan was to limit its use for case-managed residents. The agency's goal for the second Outcome measure, the number of clients in shelter receiving case-management services, was supposed to be at 100%. However, they stated the addition of Guided Path and the APD Shelter List kept the case-management rate well below goal.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD	Goal for Q1 - Q3
Unduplicated Client Count	246	80	42		368	900
Day Resource Center	1757	719	40		2516	975
Percent of Case-Managed Households Transitioning to Housing	78.95%	36.36%	68.18%		61.29%	65.00%
Percent of Households in Case-Management	53.25%	78.95%	42.86%		54.91%	100%

At the start of the 2nd Quarter, the shelter began to be heavily impacted by COVID, causing a reduction in the number of people that could enter the shelter and case-management numbers. The number of clients entering the Day Resource Center stayed above goal due to case-managed clients accessing the building in greater than usual numbers due to the cold weather. The Q3 numbers were well below goals due to quarantine procedures put in place, and the limited unduplicated clients coming in kept the raw numbers low.