



## Solutions for Change

### Summary

Solutions for Change provides housing, work-readiness training, case management, and other supportive services for San Diego County parents who are experiencing homelessness and have children younger than age 18. Solutions’ programming consists of a three-phase, 1,000-day program that includes dedicated case managers; on-site mental health services; 12-step support groups; unpaid work experience; and a series of life-skills, parenting, and employment-readiness classes. Each program phase includes a combined focus on employment and personal development. With each phase, participants progress to more advanced life-skills courses and employment or education requirements, as well as to increasingly independent housing—from a communal intake shelter to on-campus transitional housing to off-campus permanent housing. The highly structured program provides participants with daily schedules that map out the steps they must complete to progress through program phases with the goals of obtaining employment, independent housing, and personal transformation.

### Funding source



Solutions’ direct operational funding primarily comes from individual, corporate, and foundation donations. In addition to outside funders, Solutions derives a small portion of its operating budget from its social enterprise venture, Solutions Farm, an organic aquaponics farm staffed by Solutions participants that sells produce through local contracts.

### Intervention description



Solutions for Change provides housing and a highly structured, three-phase program designed to build life skills and work readiness to “solve homelessness” for families in San Diego County. Solutions’ theory of change is built on the belief that “comprehensive personal transformation” is critical to empowering families experiencing homelessness to obtain housing and end their reliance on external supports, and that subsidized housing

### Services provided



Case management; Health services (*Substance use disorder treatment and mental health services*); Soft skills training; Supportive services; Work and work-based learning (*Unpaid work experience; Work experience*); Work readiness activities (*Employment coaching; Job search assistance*).

### Populations served

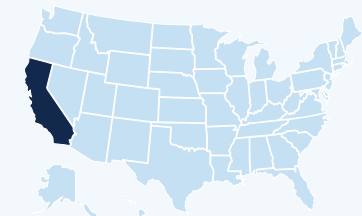


Solutions serves parents or guardians who are experiencing homelessness and have children younger than age 18. To be eligible, participants must be willing to work; be legally authorized to work in the United States; not be actively fleeing domestic violence; and have no serious criminal convictions involving personal or property damage. Participants with substance use disorders must be in recovery, not currently using substances, and able to pass a drug test. Solutions receives referrals from community partners such as probation officers, drug courts, domestic violence shelters, the state child welfare agency, and word-of-mouth.

### Setting



Implemented in multiple settings (urban and rural) Solutions for Change is located in Vista, CA, a medium-sized city north of San Diego, and serves residents from across San Diego County.



### Year first implemented

1999 (ongoing at the time of data collection)

### What are case studies?

Case studies provide practitioners with information about innovative interventions that states, counties, community-based organizations, or other entities are undertaking to improve employment outcomes for TANF participants and other individuals with low incomes, especially public assistance recipients. **Case studies cover interventions not included elsewhere in the Clearinghouse because they have not yet been rigorously evaluated.**

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and optional treatment services alone are insufficient to achieve this goal. Its combined housing, employment, and case management services are designed to help individuals achieve stability, health, and personal empowerment so they can focus on obtaining and retaining employment.

Solutions staff believe the program's accountability mechanisms support participants' successful completion of the program. These mechanisms includes a zero-tolerance drug use policy and regular meetings with a dedicated case manager designed to keep participants accountable to their individually developed goals. Solutions' goals are to increase independent housing, employment, and family stability among participants who complete its program.

Through the program's three program phases, participants adhere to a strict work-readiness routine, including a set wake-up time, required daily hours participating in work or classes, and other rules associated with their behavior and living arrangement. All participants attend a 12-step support group. Participants in recovery from substance use disorders attend recovery support groups. Participants who do not have a history of substance use attend other relevant 12-step groups in the community, such as a group for people whose lives have been affected by someone else's drinking. Participants also attend a broad range of required life-skills classes.

Participants are also required to pay a portion of their rent and save money for when they will be living independently after the program. As participants progress through the program, they live in progressively independent, Solutions-owned housing. They move from

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***Solutions' theory of change is built on the belief that "comprehensive personal transformation" is critical to empowering families experiencing homelessness to obtain housing and end their reliance on external supports, and that subsidized housing and optional treatment services alone are insufficient to achieve this goal. Its combined housing, employment, and case management services are designed to help individuals achieve stability, health, and personal empowerment so they can focus on obtaining and retaining employment.***

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an intake emergency shelter to transitional housing units, and later to off-site, permanent housing units.

The following is an overview of the services and requirements during each program phase:

- **Phase 1 (about one to three months).** During the first phase, participants live on-site in Solutions' intake shelter or transitional housing; participate in unpaid work experience training to build their work readiness skills; attend 12-step meetings; and attend introductory-level life-skills courses in topics such as leadership, parenting, and financial education. Participants meet with their case managers once or twice per week during this phase. Participants must be present for nightly count at curfew and are subject to weekly and random drug screenings. Unpaid work experience options include janitorial, landscaping, and clerical work on-site at the Solutions offices; fundraising work for Solutions; or work on the Solutions Farm. Participants must complete 360 hours of unpaid work experience and all other program requirements to progress to Phase 2.
- **Phase 2 (about 500 days).** During this phase, participants begin in transitional housing but transition to permanent housing, which can be off-site, though they are still subject to the nightly count and weekly and random drug screenings. They must be engaged full time in work, school, or some combination of both. In addition, they continue participating in meetings with case managers (which are reduced to 2 sessions per month), 12-step meetings, and the next level of life-skills courses. Participants progress to Phase 3 after they have saved \$2,000; maintained full-time engagement in work, school, or a combination of both for six months; and completed all other Phase 2 program requirements.
- **Phase 3 (about 500 days).** During Phase 3, participants living in permanent housing continue working or attending school and participating in case management sessions and 12-step meetings. They are no longer required to be present for nightly count, and they are no longer required to submit to weekly drug screenings (although random drug screenings continue into Phase 3). Participants graduate from the program when they have been in the program for at least 700 days; maintained full time work, school, or a combination of both

for at least 9 months; and completed all other program requirements in Phases 1 and 2. After graduation, participants typically pay market-rate rent in Solutions housing or find independent housing.

Other wraparound services throughout all three phases include on-site clinical mental health services; optional faith-based activities (for example, Bible study); and off-site referrals for health, mental health, and recovery support services.

Solutions staff provide the vast majority of services in-house, though outside instructors occasionally facilitate classes such as financial literacy or job search. Case managers employed by Solutions deliver case management services and serve as participants' primary point of contact at Solutions. They manage participants' progress throughout the Solutions program model.

According to participants and staff, the most common challenge associated with implementation has been the restriction of personal freedom for participants in a highly structured program model. Although interviewed participants shared that they appreciated the firm daily routine and program requirements in retrospect, participants and staff noted that some of the restrictions can be especially challenging for participants in the early phases of the program. For example, Solutions requires all participants in the first two phases to report for "count" at their 10:00 p.m. curfew, which frustrated some participants.

## Research on intervention to date



***This intervention has not been rigorously evaluated for effectiveness.*** Solutions has an active interest in participating in a rigorous

## More information



More information on this intervention is available at <https://solutionsforchange.org/>.

Gaffney, A., and A. Glosser (2021). *Case study of a program serving families experiencing homelessness: Solutions for Change*, Washington, DC: Mathematica. Available

evaluation of its services. At this point, however, the program has only conducted descriptive analyses of its administrative data.

The intervention was selected as one of nine innovative interventions supporting the employment of people with low income. These interventions are described in a series of in-depth, descriptive case studies as part of the [State Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Case Studies](#) project, funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation. The case study for that project documented information on the interventions Solutions for Change offers, including populations served; funding; measurements of participant progress; and promising practices, challenges, and lessons learned. This information was obtained through a site visit, including interviews with participants, staff, and leadership and observations of program activities; document reviews; and a follow-up telephone call about how the program responded to the COVID-19 public health emergency (Gaffney and Glosser 2021).

## Case study information sources

The primary source of information for this case study was the State Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Case Studies report described earlier, which collected information via a site visit in January 2020 and a telephone call in July 2020. The Pathways Clearinghouse shared a near-finalized draft of the case study with Solutions for Change and incorporated revisions for accuracy and completeness. For more information about the methods for selecting and developing the case studies, please see the Protocol for Pathways Clearinghouse Case Studies on the [Pathways Clearinghouse project page](#).

at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/case-study-program-serving-families-experiencing-homelessness-solutions-change>.

## September 2021

**OPRE report:** 2023-083

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**Suggested citation:** Gaffney, Angela (2021). *Solutions for Change*, OPRE Report #2023-083, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This brief was funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, under contract number HHSP2332015000351/HHSP23337034T.

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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