



YOUTH SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Five-Year Strategic Plan, 2012 – 2017
September 2012

A Legacy of Success. For nearly 30 years, Larkin Street Youth Services has built a robust continuum of care to help homeless youth get off the streets. As a longstanding pioneer in the field, our achievements are significant; there is no other agency in San Francisco—and few nationwide—to offer a similar breadth of services with comparable results. Innovation has always been a hallmark of our work, and the intensive, year-long planning process behind our new five-year strategic plan has revealed that we are now poised to build on our success, deepen our impact, and set a new standard in the field.

A Case for Change. We have a strong foundation in place, and a responsibility to meet emerging needs as the world that homeless youth are entering continues to change. The disparity between education and earning potential is growing, and there are now fewer living-wage jobs for those without a college degree than at any other point since our founding. Moreover, standards for the GED test are scheduled to go up in 2014. Lacking both readiness and opportunity, homeless youth require more intensive support to navigate the job market.

While Larkin Street has focused on building a strong and comprehensive continuum of services for homeless youth, we are constrained by the limited housing we can offer. Even though we operate more than 80% of all housing beds allocated to youth citywide, we can house only a small fraction of the estimated 5,700 youth in need. We are proud that three out of four youth who complete a Larkin Street housing program exit to a stable living situation, but we know that dramatically expanding housing in San Francisco is not financially feasible. Therefore, we must carefully consider our greatest potential for impact.

The intensive process behind our new strategic plan confirmed our longstanding belief that we must deepen rather than widen our reach. We must change how we deliver education and employment services, how we match services to youth needs, and how we measure youth progress. Our goal is not to reach more youth; in fact, we will likely serve fewer youth overall. We must drive youth outcomes higher rather than bring more youth through our doors. Our aim is to move youth through our continuum as effectively and expeditiously as possible, inspiring the deepest and most lasting change.

A New Standard. We will raise the bar by redefining success from securing independent housing to achieving a permanent pathway out of poverty. We will hold youth to a higher standard, directing our most intensive efforts and resources to the youth who exhibit the greatest readiness for change. Therefore, we have established bold goals for the youth in our services:

- Living-wage employment
- Two years of postsecondary education
- Safe and stable housing
- Physical and emotional wellbeing

A Refined Model. To support more ambitious outcomes, Larkin Street must make sweeping and nuanced changes to our programs, our people, and our policy work.

- **Our programs:** We will use evidence-based theory and practice to align our services and inspire the deepest and most lasting change in youth. We will strengthen our clinical and mental health support and redouble our focus on education and employment. We will offer a rigorous and innovative program that prepares youth for postsecondary success and meaningful, living-wage work. We will offer a first-of-its-kind model that fully engages homeless youth in an integrated education and employment program geared toward long-term career pathways.
- **Our people:** Our staff will increase rigor, focus, and accountability across the agency. They will be trained in clinical and management best practices and cutting-edge technology, and they will have the support they need to achieve the highest possible standard.
- **Our policy work:** Larkin Street’s impact will extend far beyond the lives of the youth we serve directly. Our indirect impact will grow through focused and coordinated policy, advocacy, and knowledge leadership activities to change the external environment and ensure all disconnected youth have access to the services they need.

A Sustainable Future. Our new five-year strategic plan is ambitious and it will require extensive work. The pace and scope of the plan’s implementation is entirely dependent on the success of our fundraising efforts, and we are confident that our funders will invest generously in Larkin Street’s future and the future of the young people we serve. The impacts of the new strategic plan will include:

- Deeper youth engagement in the change process
- Increased program retention
- Higher GED pass rate
- Higher rate of postsecondary completion
- More job placements in living-wage careers
- Key policy wins
- Efficient and effective use of technology and social media
- A skilled, motivated, and inspired staff

We will offer a proven and replicable model for service and advocacy with national impact. We will permanently change the course of homeless youths’ lives, putting them on track to reach their full potential.

