

Frequently Asked Questions

What is BACS, and what does it do?

Bay Area Community Services (BACS) is a local non-profit providing community mental health and housing services. We started in 1953, when a council of local churches came together to address decreasing public funding for social services. BACS started providing direct housing services after seeing clients with mental health issues have their symptoms made worse by housing insecurity.

BACS' administrative overhead rate is only 10%, meaning that 90% of our budget goes directly to program expenses, direct staff costs, and investing in housing & infrastructure improvements.

What is the STAIR Center? How does it work?

The STAIR Center is a housing navigation center program located in Berkeley, California. Housing navigation is a strategy under the umbrella of transitional housing programs. There are many different models of housing navigation throughout the United States. Our navigation programs help navigate people to their own housing.

We work with the government and other non-profits to help people transition from encampments or street living into the STAIR Center – and then while they are there, we help them find options to move in to housing. The STAIR Center is “low barrier”, designed to reach as many people as possible. Shelters and transitional living programs often still have curfews, require sobriety, do not allow individuals to come in as they are – which can prevent people from accessing them. We help individuals establish benefits, find employment, develop necessary life skills as needed, and more.

We work with landlords who will rent to individuals that may have poor credit, do not have availability to cash representing 3x the amount of income landlords generally require from a tenants may have evictions on their record or no rental history, and match those with individual needs, preferences, and ability to support the housing long-term.

How many people is the STAIR Center helping?

The STAIR program opened in June of 2018, and since then 154 people have participated in the program (including street outreach and the transitional housing center). Of those, **131** have achieved a permanent housing option – that's an **85%** success rate.

The STAIR Center is unique in that it offers a residential program for people to come inside while helping people find housing to go to once they leave. By contrast, most shelters and transitional housing programs do not focus on helping individuals find permanent housing just by virtue of the program design and/or limited resources. In benchmarking local programs in and around Berkeley, more than 65% of people leaving a homeless shelter exit to a non-permanent housing location.

What do these outcomes mean?

This is what is important, across the United States, in how housing and homelessness programs are measured and tracked:

- 1) When someone leaves a transitional housing program, did they exit to a 'permanent housing' destination? The Housing Urban Development (HUD) definition and standard of 'permanent housing' means that the person has legal rights to be there, and it is not temporary, like a shelter or hospital.
- 2) After someone is housed, do they return to homelessness (a.k.a. the "recidivism rate")?

So how do we measure up?

- 1) The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness sets a national standard goal of 65% of people exiting to permanent housing, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development reports the actual [national average](#) at only 41.8% for 2018, the latest year for which data is available. Since 2013, BACS has consistently helped **80%** or more of our clients achieve permanent housing. For STAIR Center, it is **85%** for 2019.
- 2) The Department of Housing and Urban Development has [measured that the 2018 national average](#) was 19.4% of people returning to homelessness in 0-24 months. In a two-year study of 2018-2019, BACS saw **16.15%** of our permanently housed clients return to homelessness. Most individuals who leave the BACS Housing Navigation model in to permanent housing will not recidivate to a homeless program.

Does BACS house people in shared rooms or shared housing?

Yes, approximately 80% of individuals exit to shared housing. Because the Bay Area is one of the most expensive housing markets in the country, shared housing is the only affordable answer for individuals that are living on a fixed income of between \$336-1,000 per month, which is the bulk of the people we serve. It can be the first step, and many individuals we work with say they will not live in shared housing forever, and are awaiting a permanently subsidized housing voucher. Most people that seek our support say they would rather be inside than not. Some individuals tell us they will not live in shared housing.

Does BACS house people in cars or in units that are uninhabitable?

No, cars are not a stable, safe, long-term housing option. All of our housing placements are in units that are rented on the private landlord market and have been reviewed by our team and verified to be legally owned by the landlord. Occasionally, after placement, clients choose to move to different situations, as is their legal right, and some do revert to homelessness (16.15% according to our study). BACS does everything it can to help homeless individuals stay in indoor housing and avoid homelessness. BACS may continue to try to help an individual that goes through a BACS program to help with finding other housing where we can.

Why can't BACS get people into their own bedrooms, apartments, or houses?

Aside from being one of the most expensive housing markets in the country, the price for Bay Area rentals is skyrocketing. As an example: three years ago, a SINGLE bedroom in Oakland rented for \$600-700. Today, landlords that own single family homes have added extra beds to rooms and units to maximize their rentability. Now they are charging by the head, which means they may have two beds or sometimes even three or four, and they are now charging between \$750-850 PER BED in a shared room.

BACS also owns and rents its own single family homes to formerly homeless individuals, called Supported Independent Living. BACS bought 7 houses in 7 months recently – that is 49 units of permanent affordable

housing, where we generally charge \$600/month in rent. And in BACS houses, NO ONE shares a bedroom – each person has their own bedroom, own lock and key. This is the inventory we control and that is a standard of quality and dignity that BACS offers to our tenants. Unfortunately, we do not control the private landlord rental market.

We work with units that are available now, for clients who are extremely low income – 99% of STAIR clients live below the poverty line, with a fixed income below \$1,000 per month.

The people we help are not getting their rent paid by the government, or by BACS, for the rest of their lives. Only 6% of individuals at BACS Housing Navigation Centers will receive a lifetime subsidy like Section 8/Permanent Supportive Housing subsidy. BACS has to work with the individual's income restrictions, and we have to find housing options that they can afford in the long-term, with or without a subsidy. The waitlist for an affordable housing unit in Berkeley is **5-10 years**. Today, the only option for MOST of our clients is Shared Housing.

Can BACS share information about individual clients with the public?

BACS is committed to transparency in our data, our practices, and foremost, the people we serve. Protecting client confidentiality and private information is crucial to the work that we do, and we cannot share individual client information with the public.