

San Francisco
Navigation Center

Year-end Evaluation | June 2016



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Introduction

The San Francisco Navigation Center began operations in March 2015 as a pilot program designed to shelter and find housing for San Francisco's difficult-to-serve homeless population. The Navigation Center is a partnership of the Mayor's Office of Housing Opportunity, Partnerships and Engagement (HOPE), the Human Services Agency (HSA), the Department of Public Health (DPH), lead service provider, Episcopal Community Services (ECS), and nonprofit partner Mission Neighborhood Resource Center (MNRC). The Navigation Center provides room and board to as many as 75 San Franciscans and their pets while case managers connect them to stable income, public benefits and permanent housing.

At the inception of the program, HOPE requested that the Controller's Office conduct an evaluation of the Navigation Center. This evaluation addresses several questions about the effectiveness of the Navigation Center program model in its first year of operation.

Based on this evaluation, it is recommended that the City:

1. Consider developing a more robust client information management system if it intends to use the Navigation Center model over the mid- to long-term
2. Reassess whether support for the Homeward Bound program represents the best use of Navigation Center resources and (if so) consider the implications of such continued use
3. Investigate additional interventions that can be used to reduce unsuccessful client outcomes.

Other considerations the City could make within the broader context of homeless services include the following:

- How much supportive housing is needed to support the Navigation Center?
- How should the Navigation Center fit into the larger system of homelessness services?
- Are other needs not being met or sub-populations not being served by the shelter system?



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Client

Characteristics

Client Characteristics

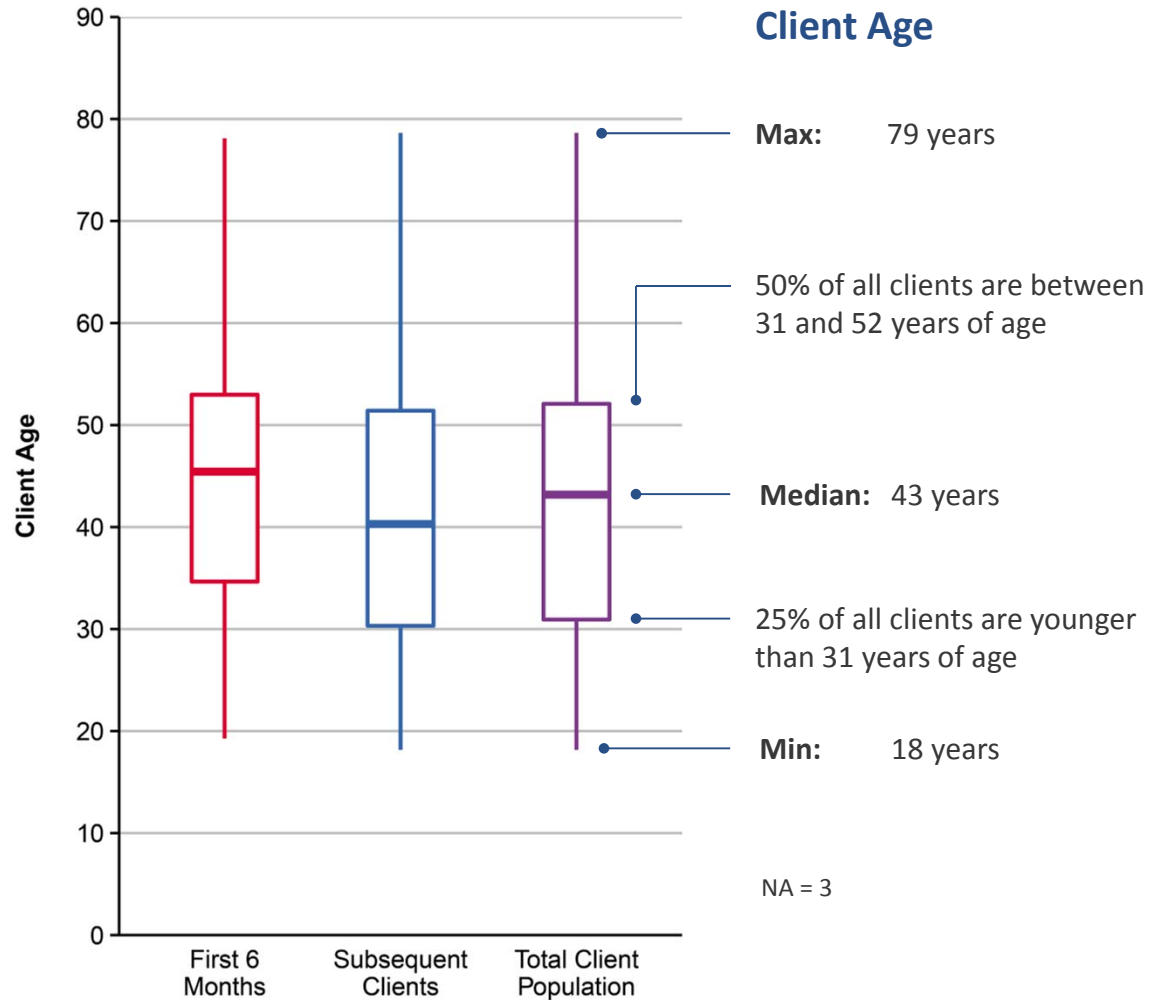
Client Gender

According to the 2015 Point-in-Time Homeless Count and Survey, 61% of homeless San Franciscans are male, 33% are female, and 5% are transgender. The gender identities of Navigation Center clients closely resemble this general pattern.

	Count	Percent
Male	312	66.7
Female	136	29.0
Transgender	14	3.0
Other	1	0.2
Not Avail	5	1.1
Total	468	100

However, while 29% of the general homeless population identifies as LGBTQ, only 9.6% of Navigation Center clients identify that way.

Client Age



The median age of clients who entered the Navigation Center in its first six months of operation (45 years) is slightly higher than that of clients who entered in subsequent months (40 years).



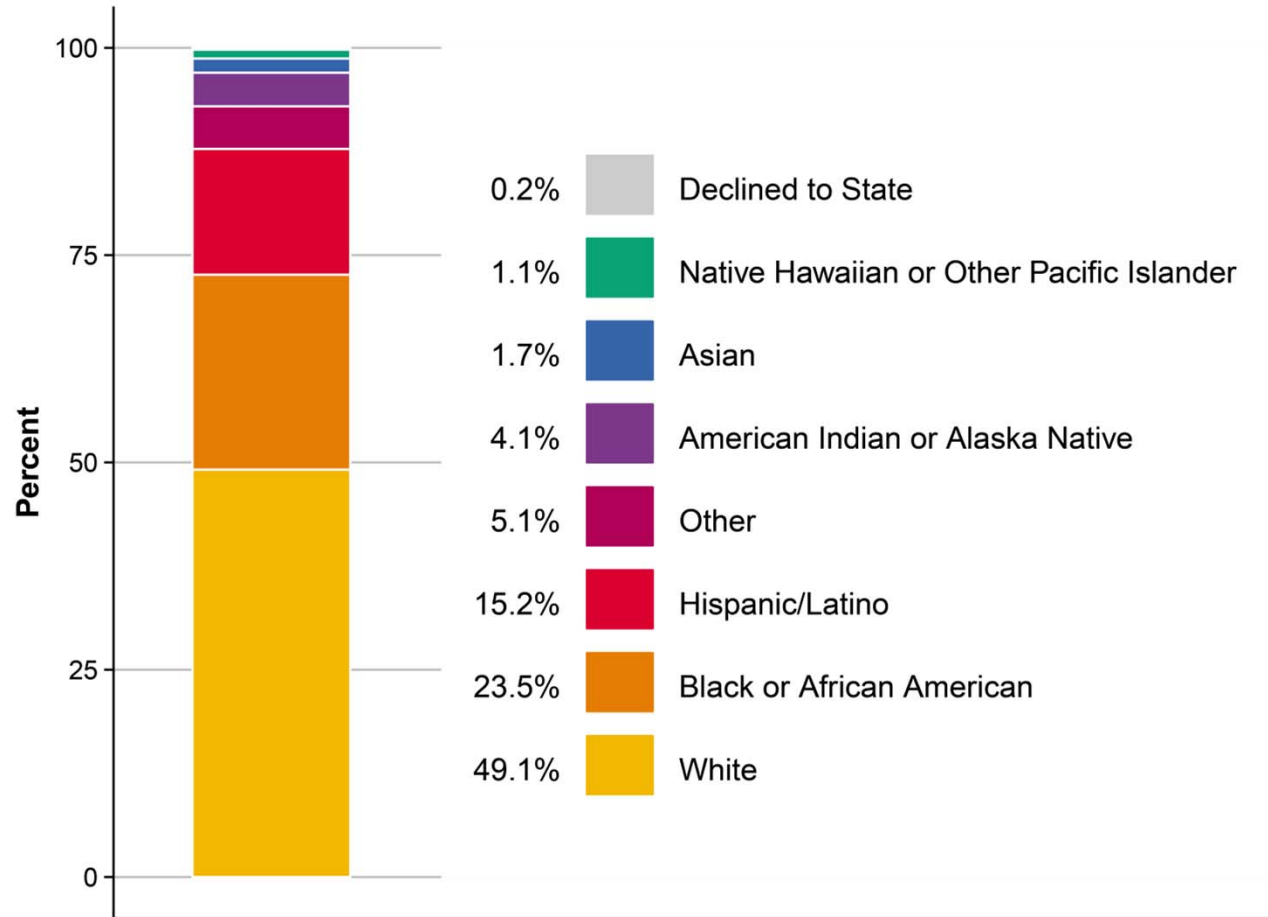
Client Characteristics

Race & Ethnicity

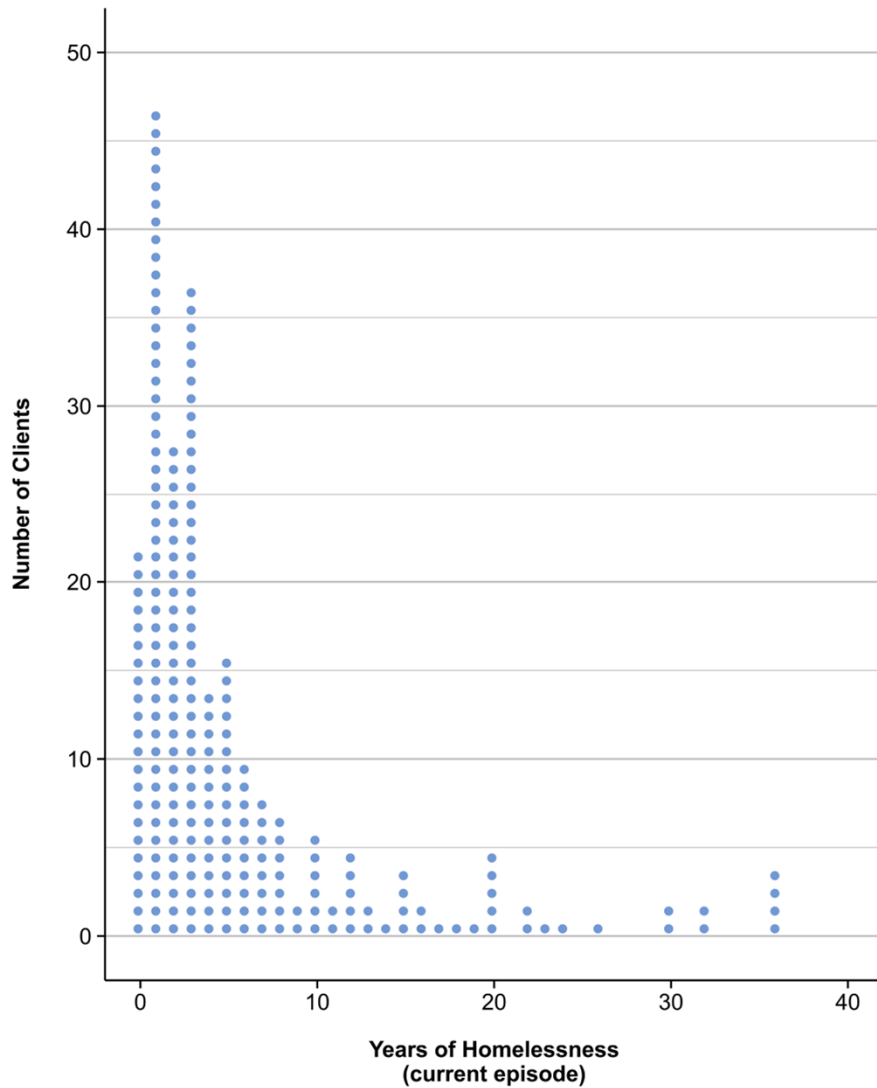
Nearly 50% of the current and former clients served by the Navigation Center are white, and nearly 25% of the clients are black or African American.

This breakdown is generally consistent with the pattern observed at the 6-month point.

Because the Navigation Center does not ask clients about race and ethnicity in the same way that the Point-in-Time Homeless Count does, it is not possible to compare the racial and ethnic profile of Navigation Center clients directly with the general homeless population. If such comparisons are desired in the future, Navigation Center stakeholders could consider asking clients about their race and ethnicity as separate questions as the Homeless Count does.



Client Characteristics



Length of Homelessness (current episode)

The Navigation Center is designed to shelter and house San Francisco’s difficult-to-serve homeless population. Many of these individuals have been homeless for extended periods of time.

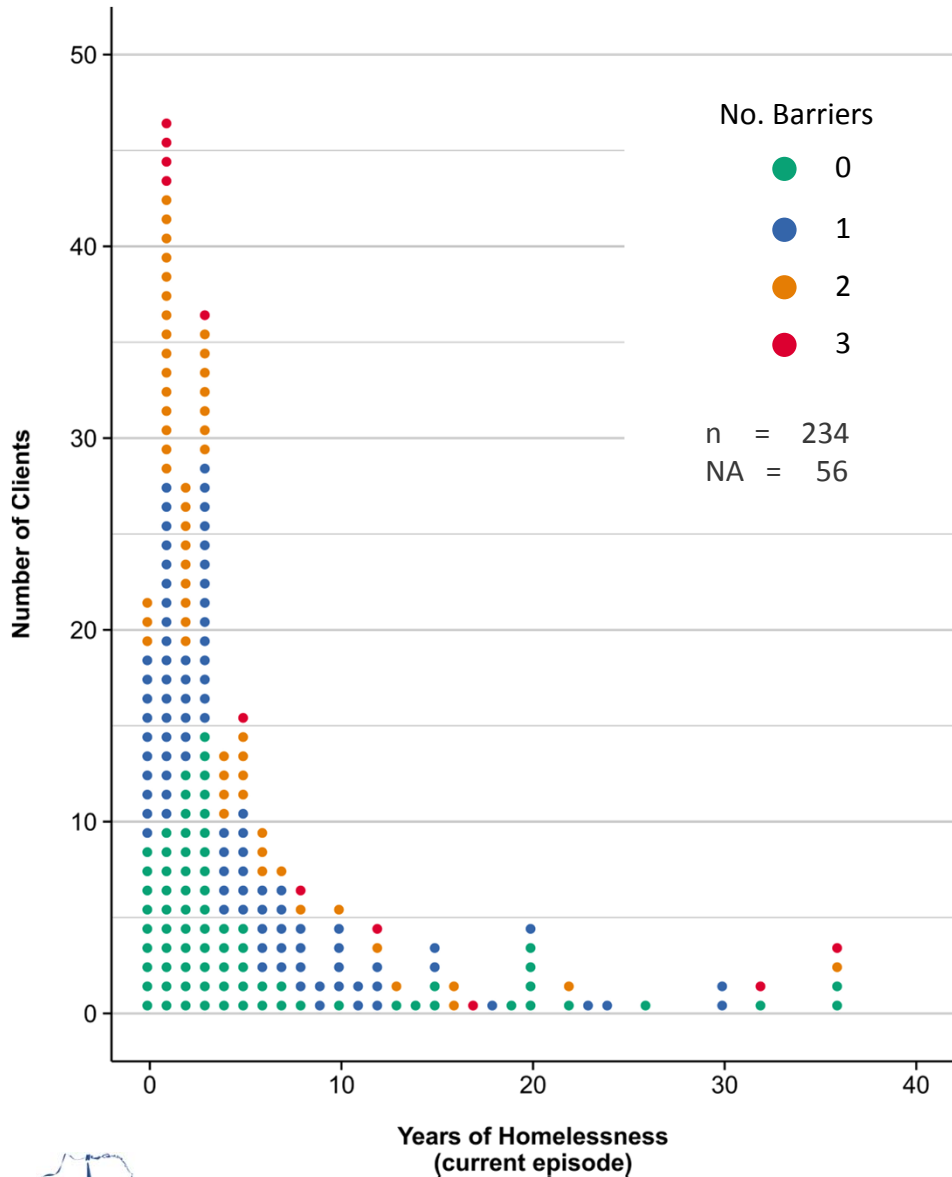
Excluding Homeward Bound clients, the Navigation Center has data on the length of the current episode of homelessness for 234 people. Of these clients:

- 9% have been homeless for less than 1 year
- 61% have been homeless for 1 - 5 years
- 14% have been homeless for 6 - 10 years
- 6% have been homeless for 11 - 15 years
- 10% have been homeless for 16+ years

n = 234
 NA = 56
 avg = 5.8 yrs



Client Characteristics



Length of Homelessness (current episode) & Potential Barriers to Shelter

The Navigation Center is designed to reduce barriers to shelter and housing. Three potential barriers are having pets, partners, or a significant number of possessions.

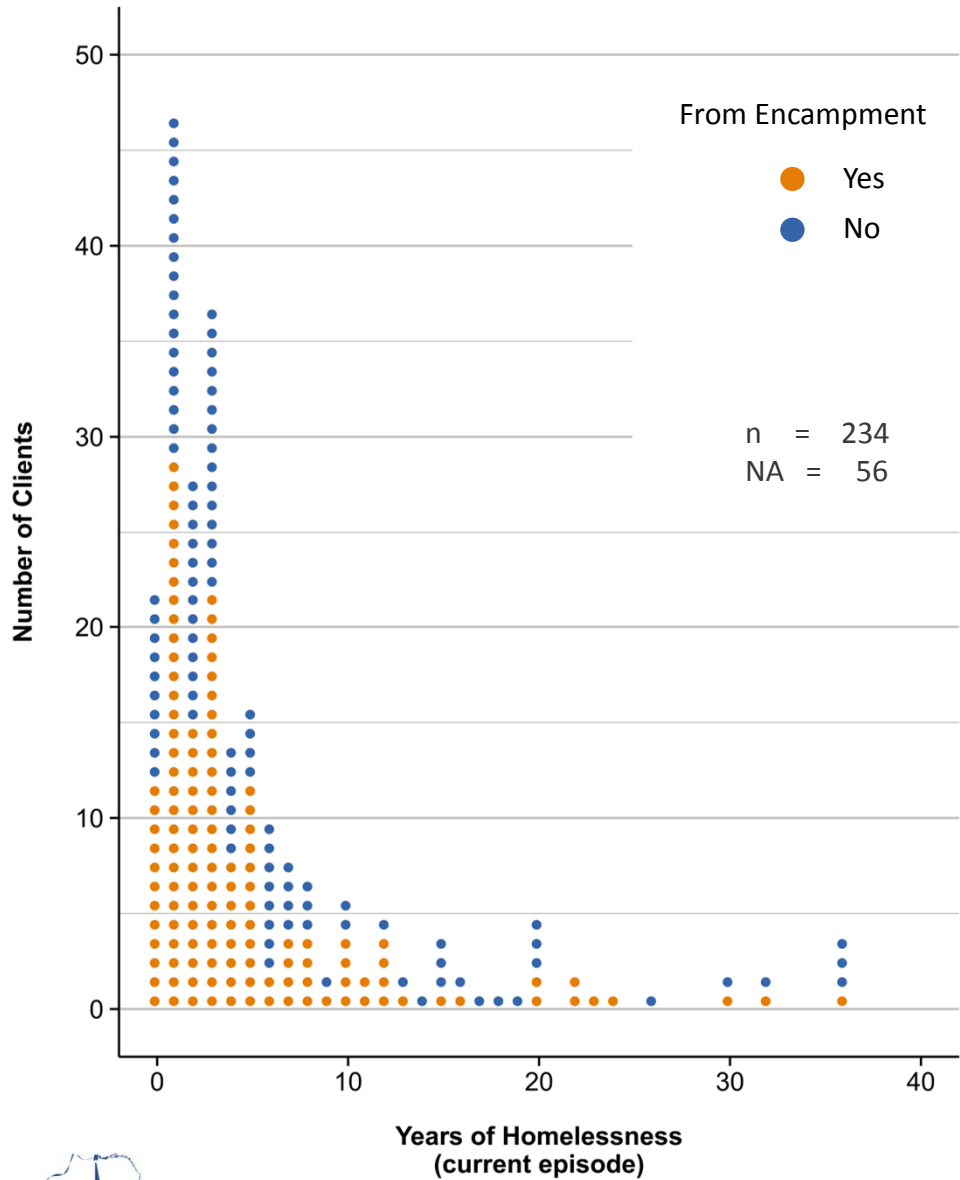
Of the 234 (non-Homeward Bound) clients for which the Navigation Center has length of homelessness data:

- 33% have none of these barriers
- 39% have one of these barriers
- 23% have two of these barriers
- 5% have all three of these barriers
- 22% have none of these barriers and have been homeless for less than 5 years

The fraction of clients who have no identified barriers and who have been homeless for a comparatively short period of time may reflect the lack of clearly defined referral criteria.



Client Characteristics



Length of Homelessness (current episode) & Encampment Membership

Of the 234 (non-Homeward Bound) clients for which the Navigation Center has length of homelessness data:

- 56% (131 clients) were members of an encampment prior to entering the center,
- 37% (86 clients) were from an encampment and have been homeless for less than 5 years,
- 12% (29 clients) were from an encampment, have been homeless for less than five years, and have none of the three previously identified barriers

While it is possible that clients who have not been homeless for a significant amount of time and who have no specific barriers to shelter have other characteristics that the Navigation Center would like to target, this cannot be determined because the Navigation Center does not have clear, documented referral criteria.

Note: The Navigation Center has not established a uniform definition of an encampment for reporting purposes; encampment membership is self-reported by clients at the time of intake.





Client

Referrals

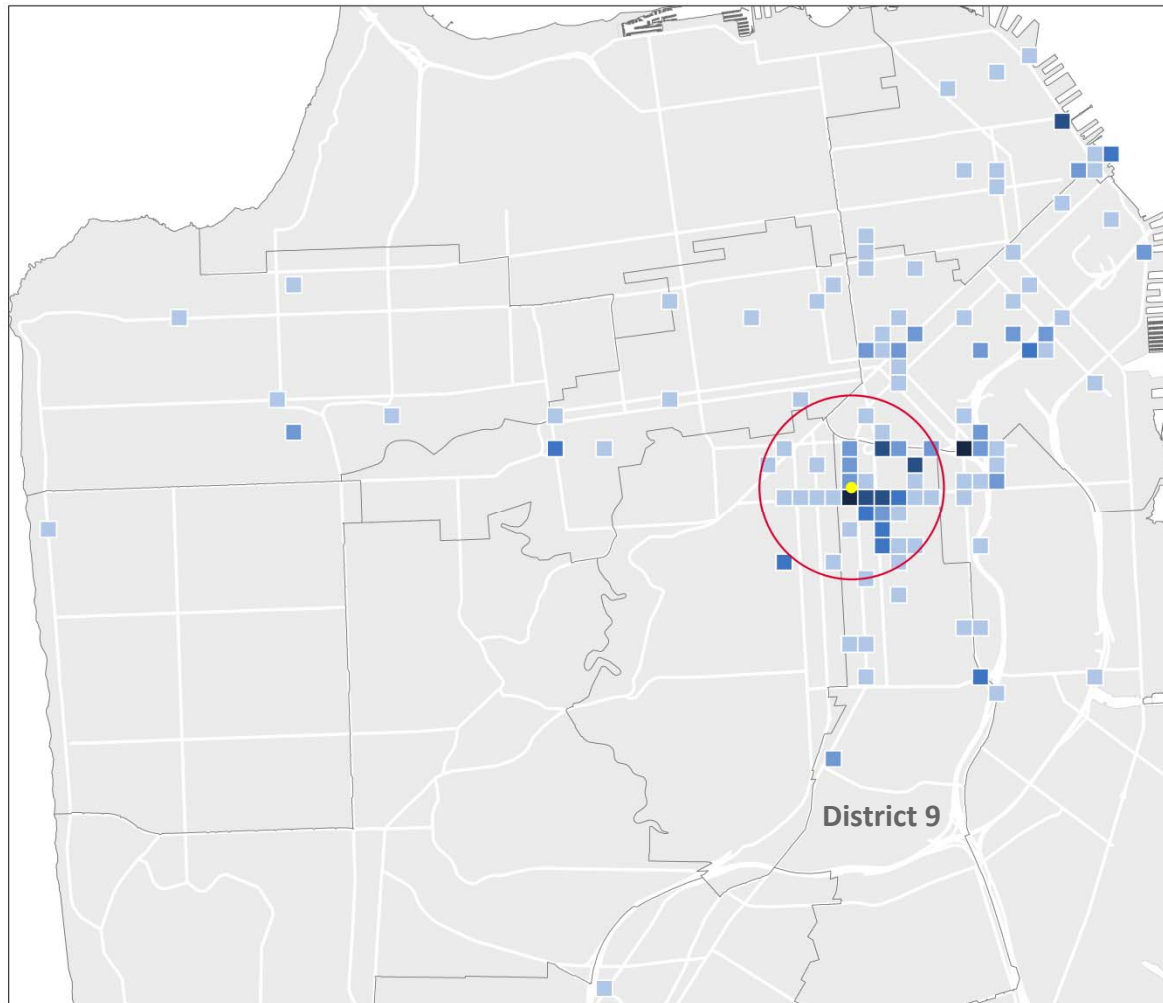
Client Referrals

Client Location Prior to Entering the Navigation Center

This map displays the location where 211 of the Navigation Center's 468 clients slept prior to entering the center. The prior location of the remaining 257 clients is unknown.

Of the clients whose prior locations are known:

- 42.7% (90 clients) resided within supervisorial district 9, where the Navigation Center is located
- 43.1% (91 clients) resided within a 1 square mile area around the Navigation Center



Number of
Individuals

1



2-3



4-5



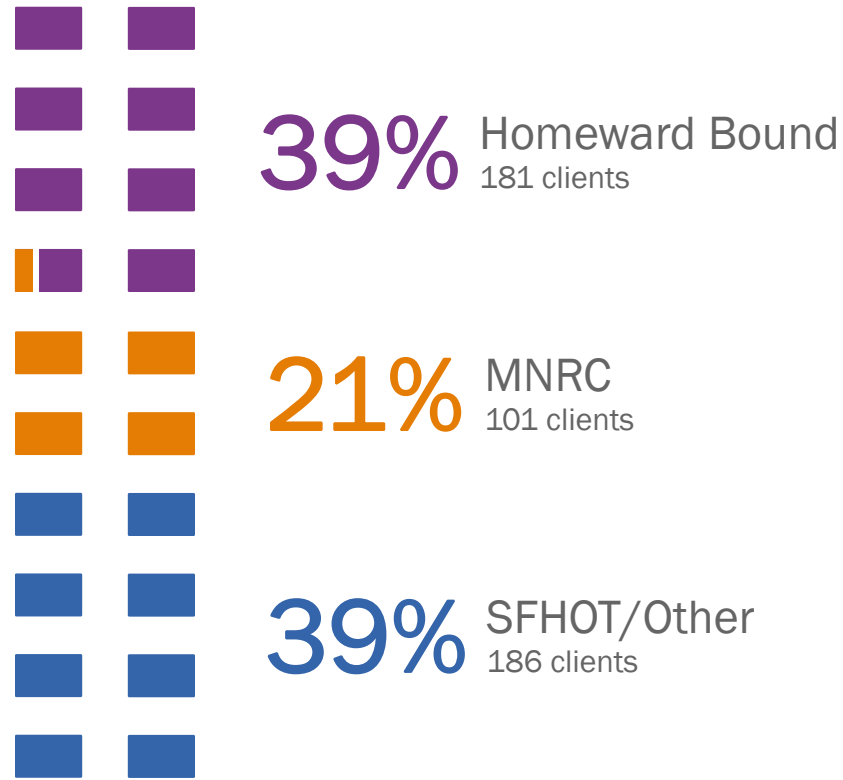
6-7



8-11



Client Referrals



Source of client referrals

Referring Agencies

Clients cannot self-refer to the Navigation Center. All clients must be referred by the San Francisco Homeless Outreach Team (SFHOT), Mission Neighborhood Resource Center (MNRC), or the San Francisco Human Services Agency’s Homeward Bound program.

During the initial six months of operation, more than half of the clients were referred by SFHOT. Now after a year of operation, the referrals are somewhat more evenly distributed although referrals from MNRC are down slightly.

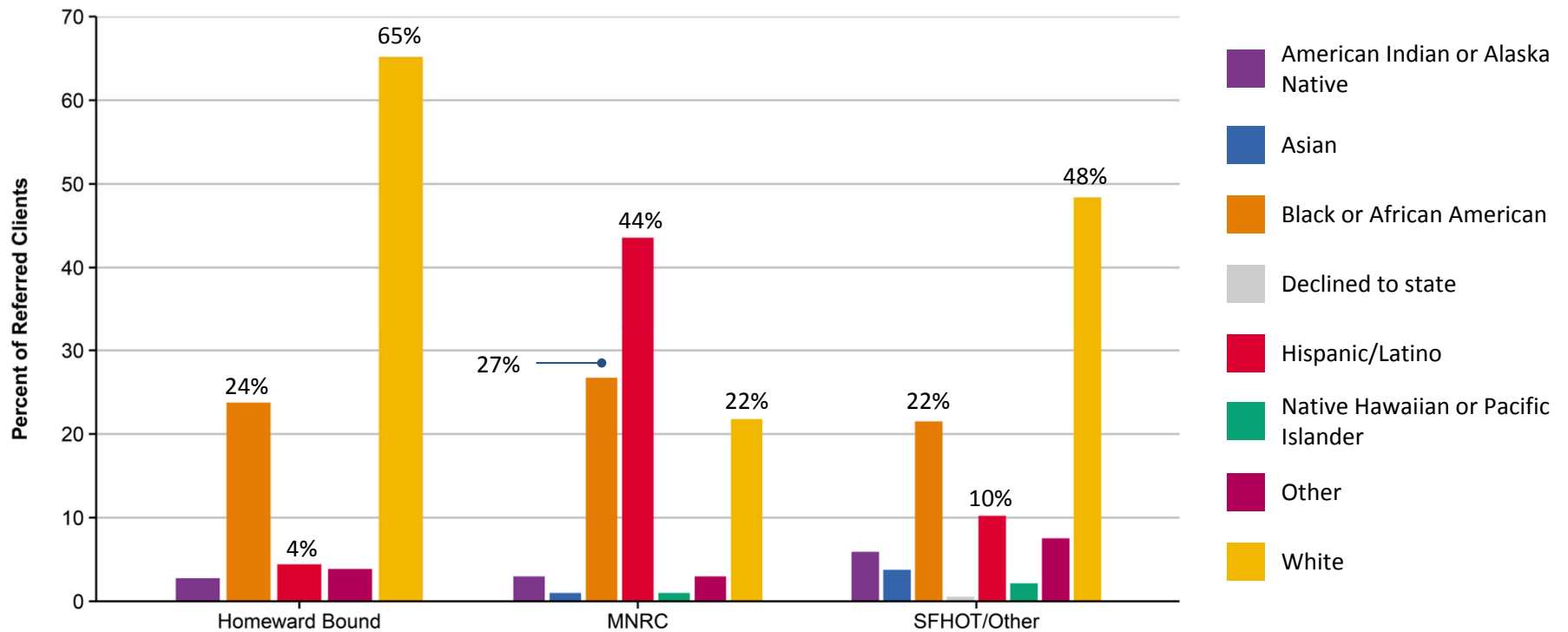
	First 6 Months	All Clients	Difference
Homeward Bound	19%	39%	+20%
MNRC	26%	21%	-5%
SFHOT/Other	54%	39%	-15%



Client Referrals

Client Race & Ethnicity by Referring Agency

- 65% of the clients referred by the Homeward Bound program are white compared to 22% for MNRC and 48% for SFHOT
- Black or African American clients were referred to the Navigation Center in similar proportions by the three agencies (24%, 27%, and 22%, respectively)
- MNRC referred a significantly higher proportion of Hispanic/Latino clients (44%) than either Homeward Bound (4%) or SFHOT (10%)





Client

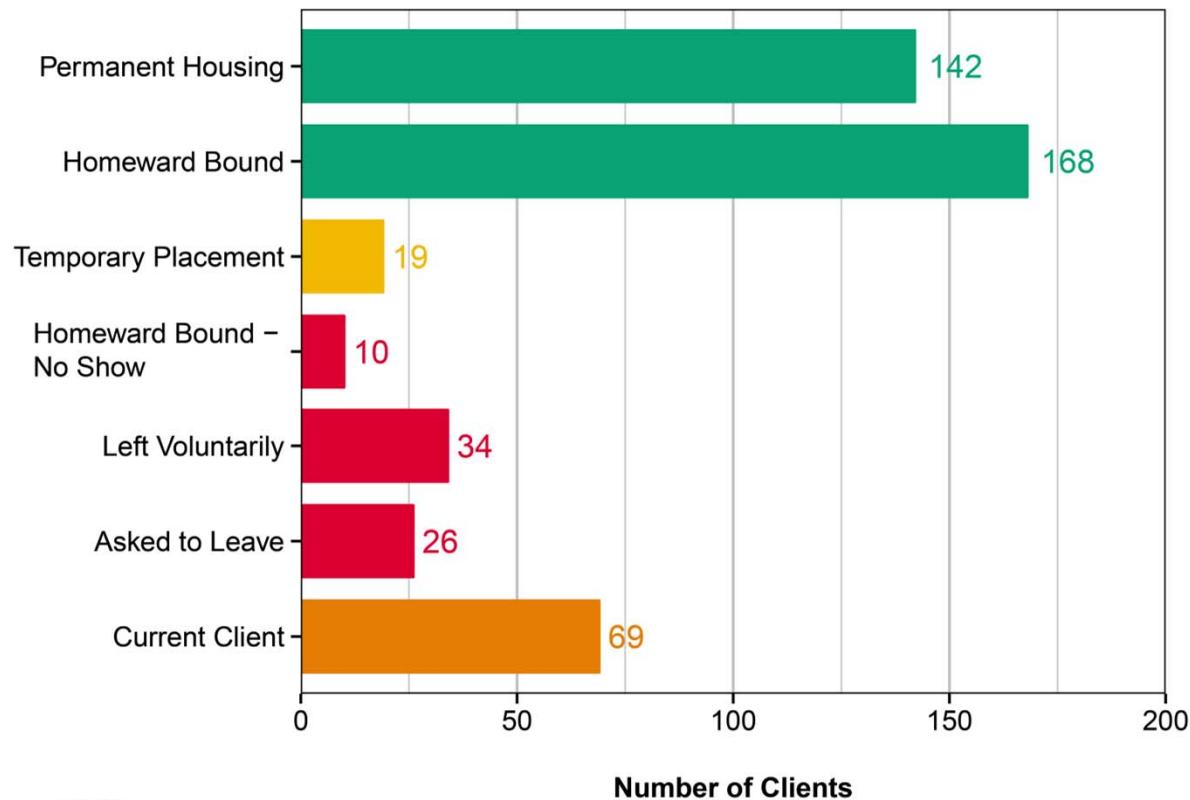
Outcomes

Client Outcomes

Exits from the Navigation Center

As of May 4, 2016, 399 clients exited from the Navigation Center. Permanent housing and Homeward Bound together make up 78% of all exits. Eighteen percent of clients had unsuccessful exits.

During its first six months of operation, 38 people utilized the Navigation Center to participate in the Homeward Bound program. In the following eight months, the number of Homeward Bound clients supported by the Navigation Center (130) more than tripled. Thus, it appears that the Navigation Center has been increasingly used as a brief stop-over for Homeward Bound clients.¹



Note: The Navigation Center reserves five beds for the Homeward Bound program. These clients typically stay 1-2 days at the Navigation Center and do not receive the same intensive case management services as other clients.



Client Outcomes

Client Exits (excluding Homeward Bound) by Race & Ethnicity

The cross-tabulation shown here displays the number and percentage of white and nonwhite clients by the type of exit, excluding exits via Homeward Bound.

Based on this data, there are apparent differences in outcomes among white and nonwhite clients. For example, while 5.2% of white clients were asked to leave the Navigation Center, nearly 17% of nonwhite clients were asked to leave. At the same time, nearly 23% of white clients left voluntarily while around 10% of nonwhite clients left on their own. Finally, nonwhite clients were more likely to receive permanent housing than white clients by about 6 percentage points. Statistical tests suggest that the relationships observed in this table are likely not attributable to chance.

It should also be noted that clients who are asked to leave may return after a specified period of time. The Navigation Center is beginning to see some returning clients who may have greater success on their second stay.

Outcome	Race		
	White	Nonwhite	
Left NC – Asked to Leave	5.2% 5	16.9% 21	26
Left NC – Voluntary	22.7% 22	9.7% 12	34
Temporary Placement	11.3% 11	6.5% 8	19
Permanent Housing	60.8% 59	66.9% 83	142
	100% 97	100% 124	221

$$\chi^2 = 14.2, \text{ p-value} = 0.0026$$

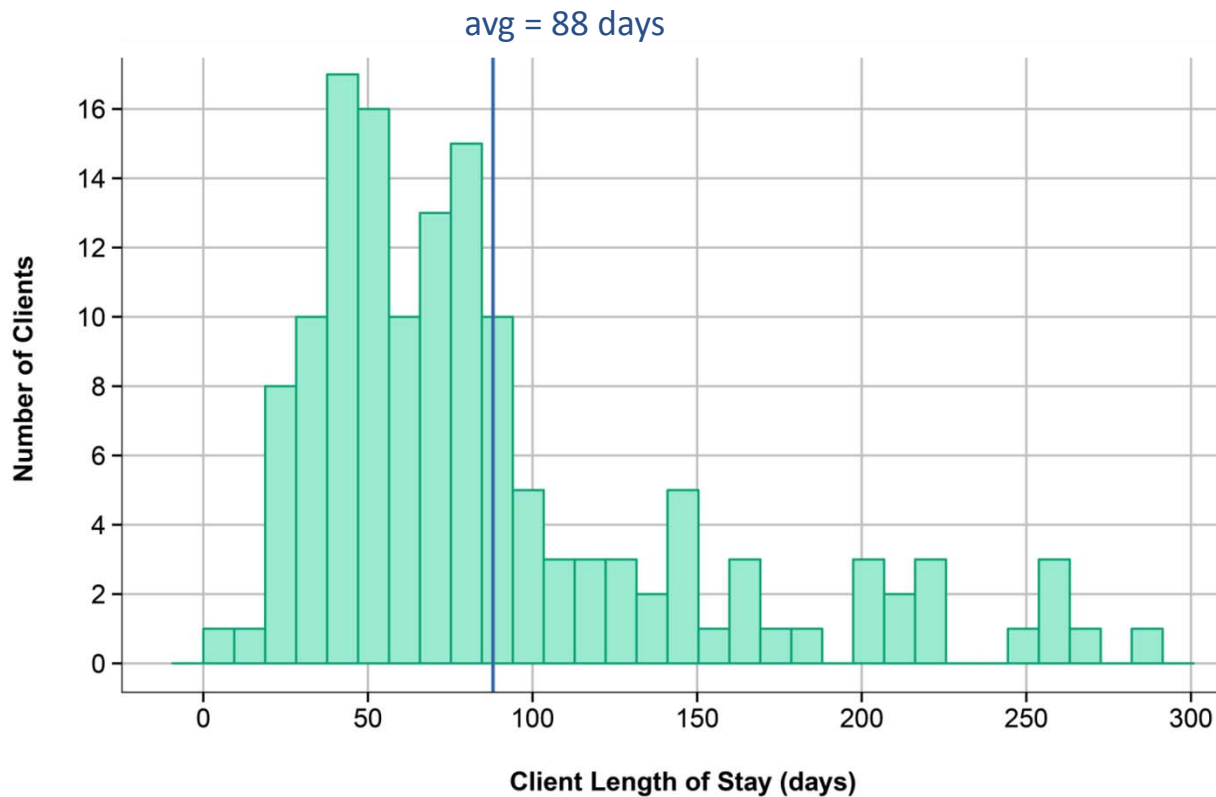


Client Outcomes

Length of Stay for Exits to Permanent Housing (excluding Homeward Bound)

At the 6-month mark, the average length of stay for clients who exited the Navigation Center into permanent housing was 57 days. For clients who exited through 5/4/16, the average is approximately 88 days.

The distribution below is considerably skewed, with several clients who stayed in excess of 200 days and few clients whose stays approached 300 days.

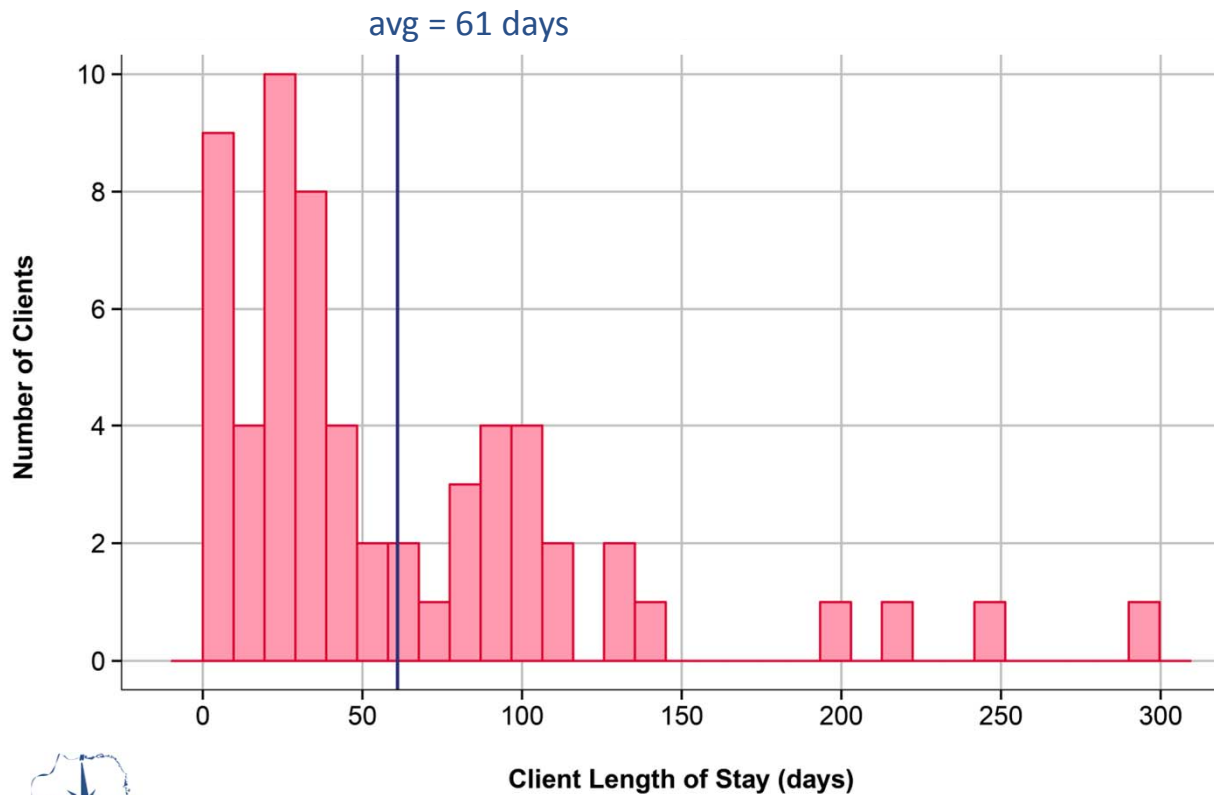


Client Outcomes

Length of Stay for Unstable Exits (excluding unsuccessful Homeward Bound exits)

The average length of stay for clients who exited the Navigation Center unsuccessfully is 61 days.

There are a number of cases in which clients left voluntarily or were asked to leave after extended periods of time and in a few cases, this occurred after the clients had been at the Navigation Center for more than 200 days. While any unsuccessful stay is unfortunate, these extreme cases are particularly unfortunate since they represent a significant investment on the part of the client, Navigation Center staff, and the City.

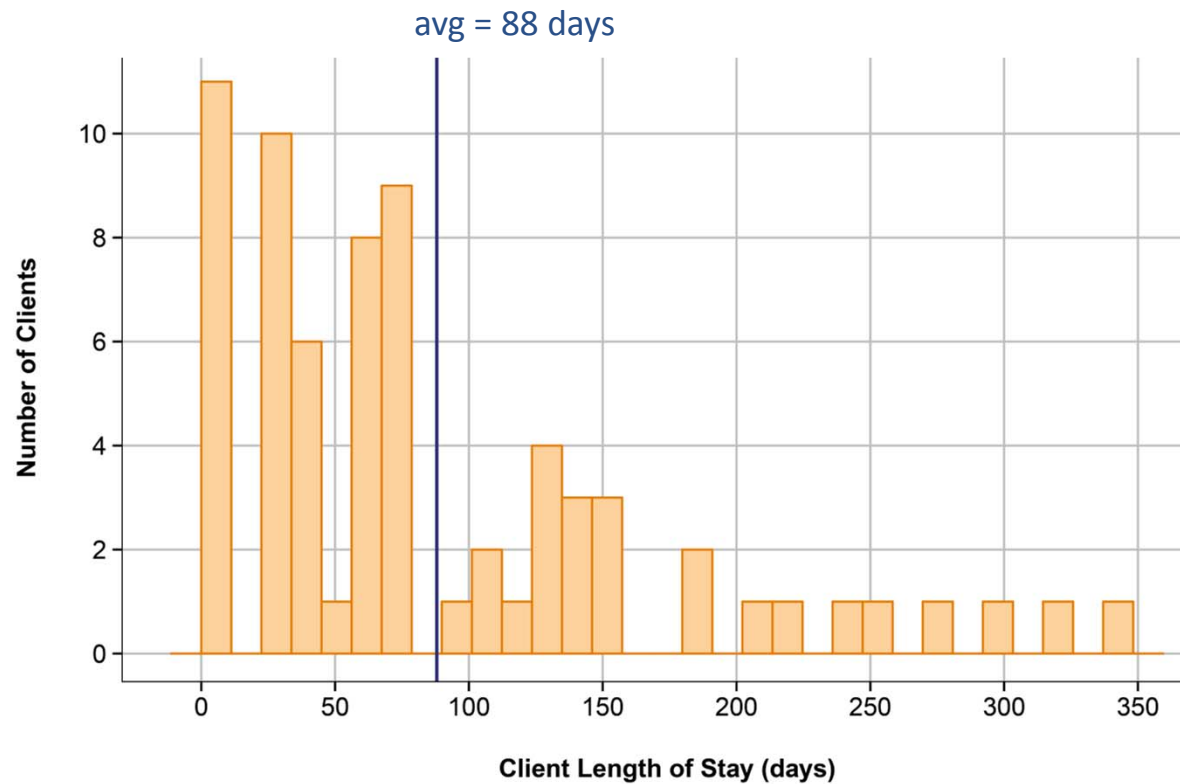


Client Outcomes

Length of Stay for Current Clients

The average length of stay for current Navigation Center clients is 88 days (up from 76 days at the 6-month point).

As with the other length of stay charts, the data below is significantly skewed and there are a number of current clients who have been at the Navigation Center for more than 200 days and a few who have been there for more than 300 days.



Client Outcomes

Benefits Retention - Housing

While long-term housing stability is largely out of the control of Navigation Center staff, the Navigation Center plays a role in stabilizing clients, acclimating long-term homeless individuals to the City system, making preliminary linkages to support services, and preparing clients for their moves into permanent housing. For these reasons, the Controller’s Office examined housing retention for Navigation Center clients by inquiring with housing providers whether or not clients who were placed into permanent supportive housing were still housed as of June 2016.

84% Percentage of Navigation Center clients who were placed into permanent housing during the first six months of operation and who are still housed
(56 out of 67 clients are still housed)¹

While these results are encouraging, it is uncertain as to whether clients who enter permanent housing through the Navigation Center have significantly higher retention rates than people who enter housing through other avenues. A more in-depth study of client outcomes could yield more definitive data about the impact that the Navigation Center has on housing stability.

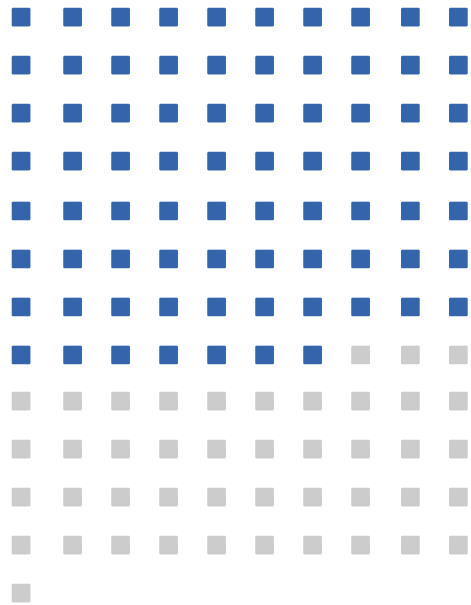


Note: A total of 69 people exited into permanent housing during the first six months of Navigation Center operations. Two clients are excluded from this analysis – one who is deceased and another whose housing status could not be verified.

Client Outcomes

Benefits Retention Percentage of clients who were approved for CAAP, CalFresh, or Medi-Cal while at the Navigation Center and who still had those benefits as of 4/1/2016.

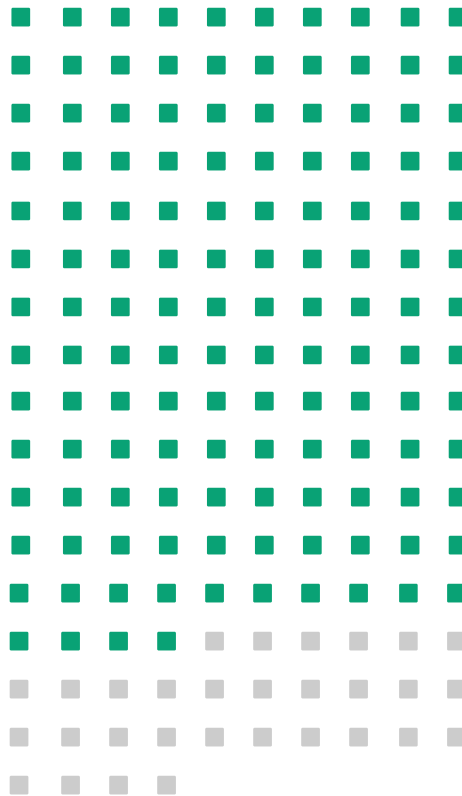
64% 77 out of 121 clients



CAAP

(County Adult Assistance Programs)

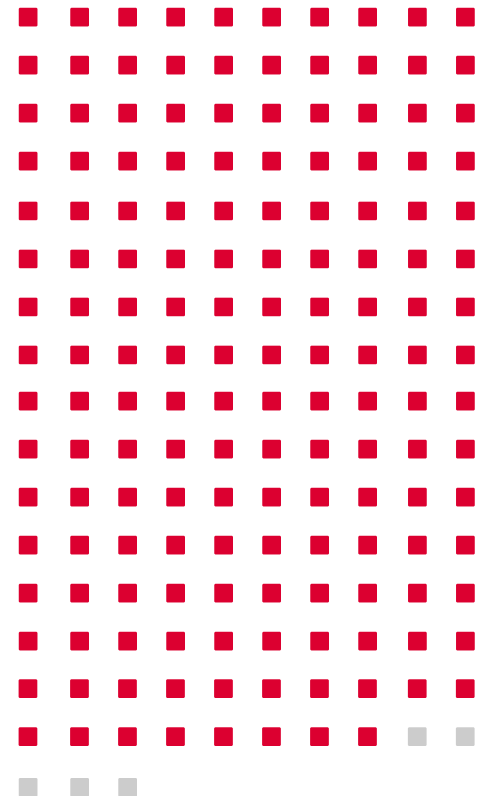
82% 134 out of 164 clients



CalFresh

(Food assistance)

97% 158 out of 163 clients



Medi-Cal

(Health Care Coverage)

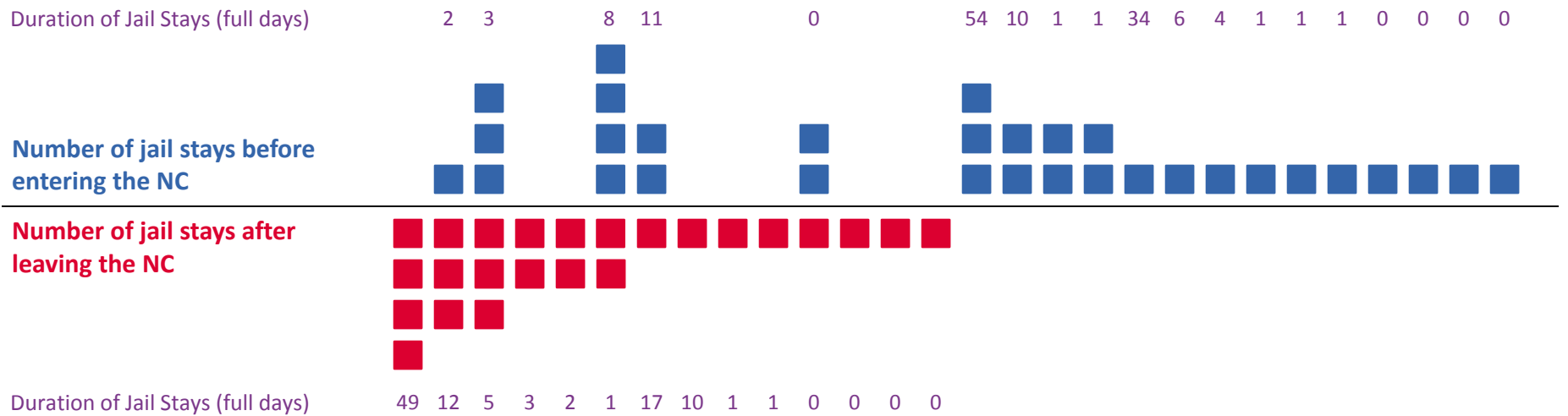


Note: These rates likely differ from the rates in our 6-month report due to minor differences in methodology and prior data quality issues.

Client Outcomes

Jail Stays

Each column in the chart below represents a client who exited into permanent housing during the first six months of Navigation Center operations and who was booked into county jail in the 8 months before the Navigation Center opened (8/2014 – 3/2015) or within 8 months after the entire group of clients left (10/2015 – 5/2016). For example, the first client in the chart was not booked at all between August 2014 and March 2015, and was booked 4 times (totaling 49 days) between October 2015 and May 2016.



- **69** clients exited into permanent housing in the first six months of Navigation Center operations
 - **20% (14 clients)** were booked into jail after leaving the Navigation Center (during the 8-month evaluation period)
- Of the **28 clients** who were booked into jail during the evaluation period:
 - **61% (17 clients)** had fewer jail stays after leaving the Navigation Center than before entering
 - **54% (15 clients)** spent less total time in jail after leaving the Navigation Center than before entering

While a large percentage of clients had fewer stays or spent less time in jail after leaving the Navigation Center, the results are mixed and further study may be warranted to determine what causes some clients to experience less desirable outcomes.





Conclusions & Recommendations

Conclusions & Recommendations

Status of Recommendations from our 6-month Evaluation Report

1. Create clear policies and procedures for referral decisions

Referrals to the Navigation Center come from a variety of sources and our 6-month evaluation report found that stakeholders have sometimes differing opinions about the appropriate target population for the Navigation Center. Because the Navigation Center serves as a direct and prioritized pathway to housing, a well defined target population and clearly articulated referral criteria are necessary in order to ensure that the City's limited supportive housing units are distributed equitably to all of those in need. In addition, alignment between the Navigation Center's goals and its target population is necessary for effective service delivery. To address these issues, we previously recommended that City stakeholders agree upon clear criteria to determine who should be referred to the Navigation Center. The current lack of referral criteria is further evident in the charts on [pages 8 and 9](#) of this report, which show that a sizeable fraction of current and former clients have no identifiable barriers to shelter and have been homeless for a comparatively short period of time.

Current Status

HOPE and HSA are working with other stakeholders to propose new referral criteria. Among the draft criteria is a requirement that a person's current episode of homelessness be five or more years.

2. Establish performance measures related to housing outcomes and appropriate service population

To better understand and manage the performance of the Navigation Center model over the long term, we previously recommended that the City establish performance metrics, set targets, and then regularly assess whether the model meets those targets.

Current Status

The Controller's Office maintains and regularly distributes a dashboard that tracks a variety of metrics such as the number of clients served, client exits (e.g., number of exits to permanent housing, unsuccessful exits, etc.), benefits utilization, and length of stay. Some of these metrics are also tracked on the San Francisco Performance Scorecards site maintained by the Controller's Office at <http://sfgov.org/scorecards/>. In addition, the City is actively working to hire an analyst for the new Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (DHS) who will assist in establishing goals for these and other metrics, and who will help to further assess Navigation Center performance and client outcomes.



Conclusions & Recommendations

Status of Recommendations from our 6-month Evaluation Report

3. Improve benefits retention

Our 6-month report found that a significant portion of clients who exited the Navigation Center lost connections to one or more benefits over time, and our current analysis ([page 21](#)) confirms that this phenomenon is still occurring, particularly with respect to County Adult Assistance Program (CAAP) benefits. To address this issue, we previously recommended that stakeholders explore the drivers of the apparent low retention rate and develop a strategy to address those drivers.

Current Status

The Controller's Office is currently working with HSA (which will be part of DSHS) to scope out an analysis of churn rates in benefit programs such as CalWORKs, Medi-Cal, CalFresh, and CAAP. While the details of the project are still being finalized, the general goals will likely be to:

1. develop a definition of and methodology for measuring churn for each program, and
2. calculate a baseline churn rate against which HSA can benchmark the effectiveness of efforts to reduce churn.

The project may also help identify strategies for churn reduction.

4. Spread lessons learned from the Navigation Center throughout the shelter system

With intensive case management, on-site benefits enrollment, and other services, the Navigation Center is a unique intervention that differs significantly from San Francisco's traditional shelter system. The Controller's Office previously recommended that stakeholders explore opportunities to spread the lessons that have been learned from the Navigation Center to traditional shelters.

Current Status

The Controller's Office is currently working with Navigation Center stakeholders and shelter directors to identify what lessons can be spread throughout the shelter system and expects to release a report on this topic in 2016.



Conclusions & Recommendations

Status of Recommendations from our 6-month Evaluation Report

5. Expand Homeward Bound data collection

The Homeward Bound program's involvement with the Navigation Center is premised upon the assumption that clients will have greater success getting on the bus when they are housed overnight and given additional time and assistance to prepare for departure. However, because the Homeward Bound program does not track the outcomes for non-Navigation Center clients, it is impossible to determine whether the Navigation Center contributes to better outcomes. Further, the data on [page 15](#) of this report show that the Navigation Center has been increasingly used as a resource for Homeward Bound Clients. We accordingly recommended that HSA institute a broader effort to collect Homeward Bound program data.

Current Status

HSA recently changed and expanded the staffing structure of the Homeward Bound program. Staff are now providing more direct outreach to individuals to promote the program and identify potential users. Further, the program is working to improve the information that is collected. For example, beyond the direct phone follow up three times during the first month after travel, Homeward Bound will begin checking the San Francisco benefit records at 3 and 6 months following travel to identify any clients who may have returned to the county. More complete data and related analysis should become available during the coming year.



Conclusions & Recommendations

Additional Conclusions & Recommendations

1. Consider developing a more robust client information management system

Information that is used to manage client cases and to assess Navigation Center performance is currently maintained across multiple systems. A significant amount of information, for example, is maintained in a database developed specifically for the Navigation Center by the Department of Technology. However, as it is currently structured, this database is unable to efficiently store information about benefits provided by HSA. As a result, HSA manages Navigation Center client benefits information in its own separate system.

In the course of preparing this evaluation report, we encountered numerous discrepancies in the data among these systems and even within the individual systems. In addition we found many instances in which data is missing, duplicative, and inconsistently formatted. At best the current practices make performance evaluation and reporting difficult and prone to error, and at worst they may have unforeseen impacts on City resources or client case management.

We understand that HSA is in the process of scoping requirements for a new homeless management information system. If the City intends to operate one or more navigation centers over the mid to long term, HSA (and DSHS in the future) should consider the operations and needs of those centers in the requirements gathering process for this new system.



Conclusions & Recommendations

Additional Conclusions & Recommendations

2. Reassess whether support for the Homeward Bound program represents the best use of Navigation Center resources and (if so) consider the implications of such continued use

According to the Mayor's Office of HOPE, the Navigation Center is designed to help homeless people who have previously rejected shelters and it features dormitory-style living quarters, showers, bathrooms, and laundry facilities, counseling offices, and a dining room. In addition to these living accommodations, Navigation Center guests receive one-on-one counseling and intensive case management to identify a path after their stay with the goal of stabilizing their lives.

The Navigation Center currently dedicates five of its 75 beds for Homeward Bound clients. While these clients make temporary use of the Navigation Center's living accommodations, they do not receive the same level of counseling and case management services which the Navigation Center is specifically designed to provide. Given our observation that the Navigation Center has been increasingly used as a brief stop for Homeward Bound clients ([page 15](#)) and in the absence of data that suggests the Navigation Center leads to better outcomes for these clients, the City should consider whether Homeward Bound clients could be stabilized overnight at a different location in order to free up Navigation Center beds for clients who need the center's intensive case management services.

Even if stakeholders reaffirm the use of the Navigation Center to support the Homeward Bound program, there are additional policy and operational considerations which ought to be made moving forward. For example:

- Are the five beds at the Navigation Center too few or too many? How many of these beds go unused every night?
- If multiple navigation centers are established, how many beds at each center will be dedicated to Homeward Bound?
- Instead of dedicating beds at each navigation center to Homeward Bound, can these clients instead be placed at centers where beds happen to be available for the night?

Addressing these questions and developing a clearer strategy around the use of the Navigation Center to support Homeward Bound will ensure that the Navigation Center's limited resources are used most effectively.



Conclusions & Recommendations

Additional Conclusions & Recommendations

3. Investigate additional interventions that can be used to reduce unsuccessful client outcomes

While it is hoped that all clients who enter the Navigation Center achieve successful outcomes, data on the length of stay (page 18) reveals a number of instances in which clients left unsuccessfully after extensive stays. Additional potential for this to occur may exist as there are a number of current clients who have been at the Navigation Center for more than 200 days, and the average length of stay has increased compared to the 6-month point (page 19).

To address this issue, it is recommended that the Navigation Center conduct an in-depth review to determine what distinguishes these cases from others and to identify additional interventions that may help to prevent unsuccessful outcomes. Independent research and our own data suggest that different types of interventions may be needed for clients with different characteristics. For example, the analysis on page 16 indicates that a disproportionate number of nonwhite clients are asked to leave the Navigation Center while a higher proportion of white clients leave voluntarily. This data is consistent with prior research, which evaluated a specialized program designed to facilitate the reintegration of homeless veterans into the community and prevent future homelessness (Wenzel et al, 2005). Among clients with other characteristics, the researchers found that black veterans were more likely to experience irregular discharge from the program.

Reference:

Wenzel, S., Bakhtiar, L., Caskey, N., Hardie, E., et al. (1995). Predictors of Homeless Veterans' Irregular Discharge Status From a Domiciliary Care Program. *Journal of Mental Health Administration*, 22.3 (Summer): 245-249, 254, 256-260.



Additional

Considerations

Additional Considerations

1. How much supportive housing is needed to support the Navigation Center?

As a short-term, intensive intervention to prepare high-need homeless clients to enter permanent supportive housing, the navigation center model requires a steady supply of housing units to be successful.

122 estimated clients housed annually

The Navigation Center placed 61 clients into housing from 11/2015 to 5/2016, for an estimated annual rate of 122 clients



Prior data shows that about 1 permanent supportive housing unit becomes available for every 10 units that currently exist

1,169 dedicated housing units needed

To generate enough vacancies to house this many clients each year, the City needs 1,169 dedicated housing units



San Francisco's **current** permanent supportive **housing portfolio** contains **5,205** units for single adults



Thus, the **single navigation center** currently in operation **requires** about **22%** of the City's **existing supportive housing stock** for single adults

Other programs like Coordinated Entry also place homeless clients into permanent housing. Prioritizing housing for Navigation Center clients makes less housing available for clients who enter through other avenues.



Additional Considerations

2. How should the Navigation Center fit into the larger system of homelessness services?

The City currently utilizes a “Coordinated Entry” system to prioritize placements into federally-funded supportive housing for clients with the highest need, and the City has plans to expand Coordinated Entry to include all supportive housing. Furthermore, legislation recently passed by the Board of Supervisors requires the City Administrator to develop guidelines for determining which clients are placed into the Navigation Center or supportive housing.

A system of assessing all clients and prioritizing services to those in highest need may have several advantages:

- Maximize impact. Appropriate resources and services could be allocated to the appropriate client.
- Ensure fairness. The same set of assessment criteria are applied to everyone and the decision about who to place in available housing is not subject to individual bias.

The City should consider what role the Navigation Center would play in such a system. For example, the Navigation Center could be reserved for clients assessed to have high need who also require intensive case management to help them prepare for a housing placement (i.e. obtain photo identification, apply for benefits programs such as General Assistance and CalFresh, etc.).

3. Are other needs not being met or sub-populations not being served by the shelter system?

The Navigation Center’s low-threshold program model was intended to eliminate barriers for certain populations in the shelter system, including individuals with pets or partners. As the City thinks about its entire system of services for homeless clients, thought should be given to other sub-populations that may not be well served or special needs that may not be met by the current shelter system.



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