

Hunt's on for microwaves, pocket money

Real Housing welcomes first wave of homeless

BY TOM CARTER

COUNSELORS receiving the first wave of homeless into their new SRO digs this month under Real Housing, Real Care say they are concentrating on getting their clients more money, microwaves and fresh clothes.

"The first thing we will try to do is try to improve their entitlements," says Seth Katzman, director of supportive services for Conard House, the nonprofit that manages and provides services at the McAllister Hotel, one of two that came online May 3. "They (clients) will be getting \$120 in food stamps and \$59 in cash, and it is really vital for a big push to get some more money in their pockets. Some are unaware of what they are entitled to."

The April 30 appellate court ruling that restored Care Not Cash doesn't take effect for 30 days, until May 30. Meanwhile, homeless receiving General Assistance can get the same housing and services under authority of Supervisor Chris Daly's Real Housing ordinance that filled the void in Care Not Cash left by a Superior Court decision last year.

The local court ruled that then-Supervisor Gavin Newsom's Care Not Cash plan, which he took to the voters, and they passed as Proposition N, could not be fully implemented. The court said that terms for three of the four city welfare programs – collectively known as CAAP, County Adult Assistance Program – could be set by voters, but the fourth, General Assistance, could only be set by the Board of Supervisors.

CARE NOT CASH KICKS IN LATER

Thus, Supervisor Chris Daly's Real Housing, Real Care ordinance focused only on GA recipients.

"The (appellate) ruling does not affect the implementation of Real Housing," said Dariush Kayhan, director of Housing and Homeless programs in the Department of Human Services, which oversees welfare. "It states that it will be 30 days before (Care Not Cash) is implemented and we intend to move forward. People are enrolling now."

"I heard there would be an appeal but I haven't seen any papers. With (restoring) Care Not Cash, it just means that further down the line there will be a little more money for housing and services."

Under Real Housing, a GA recipient will see his or her monthly check pared from as much as \$410 to \$59 if provided permanent SRO housing. Under Care Not Cash, the check slashing will happen even if the person has a shelter bed, shelters being transitions to hotel rooms.

No doubt clients who have been adrift in the city's grit and grime for years will glory in a clean room of their own. But the trade-

off payout is too paltry, even "cruel," critics say. A \$2-a-day budget won't buy cigarettes and it's hardly a deterrent to panhandling.

The \$59 was intended to be incentive for clients "to get some other kind of income," Katzman points out.

"We offer money management services, too," Katzman adds. "They (clients) can get help drawing up a plan to spread their money out. But we don't have any control on how they spend it, or on what. All we can do is advise."

FOOD STAMPS ADD TO THE TAKE

Food stamps pose another challenge. The stamps aren't good in restaurants, just for groceries, and neither the McAllister nor the Graystone, the other SRO hotel that came online in early May, have kitchens. Hot plates in rooms are illegal. Selling food stamps, also illegal, happens, Katzman concedes, but he doesn't know the extent.

"We want to set up a common room for microwave cooking," says Kerry Abbott, deputy director of Tenderloin Housing Clinic, which manages the Graystone at 66 Geary. "And we would like to get microwaves in all the rooms, but they would have to be donated; refrigerators, too. In a few months there will be a pilot program to deliver meals to SROs that need them. But, honestly, a lot of people go to St. Anthony's and Glide for meals."

HALF MAY GET ON SSI

Some clients at the McAllister may be eligible for veterans disability benefits, and Katzman figures half of the 54 new residents will be eligible for SSI (Supplement Security Income) federal money.

Conard House for 20 years has worked with the mentally and physically disabled. The nonprofit runs four Tenderloin hotels and three others in District 6 for the Department of Public Health Master Lease program. However, this is Conard House's first master lease hotel with the Department of Human Services, the city agency assigned in the new law to find SRO housing for CAAP recipients.

It can take more than a year to get on SSI. Recipients get from \$720 to \$750 plus \$80 in California Restaurant vouchers. This would supplant the county cash and food stamps, and the client would then have to pay \$463 rent, the common cost covering both room and services.

Of the 2,500 CAAP recipients, one-third are women. They get to keep their entire GA checks if no rooms are available. The 80 units at the McAllister are the first of

940 SRO Master Lease hotel units DHS intends to add this year.

The intake process involves the client meeting with the SRO property manager to sign a release allowing for a check on criminal activity, evictions, violence of any kind and drug dealing (not possession). If cleared after three days, the client signs a lease that is good indefinitely – there are no durational room leases – and picks a time to move in within 24 hours.

The client meets again with the property manager to learn the rules (such as no visitors after 9 p.m.) and to sign a voucher that allows the client to cash checks (issued by Conard House) free of charge at three sites. The client also confers with the services office to discuss which programs to pursue.

CASE MANAGERS CAN DO A LOT

"Case managers make referrals and broker services," Katz says. "This is one-on-one contact, not formal sessions."

"They help make appointments with doctors and at psychiatric clinics. They may go to court with them, if needed, or go with them to shop for clothes (through DHS). They help with family reunification. And they encourage them to attend community meetings in the building."

There will be social activities in the hotel such as talk groups, video and poetry nights and art workshops. Ideally, clients will feel they have neighbors now and community. Art shows at THC's Seneca on Sixth Street, the first SRO master lease hotel in 1998, have proved very popular, according to Abbott.

The clothes a client brings may go

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