# San Francisco family finds new hope amid challenges of supportive housing



In San Francisco's South of Market neighbourhood, a significant undercurrent of the city's ongoing homelessness crisis is illustrated in the experience of Danica Gutierrez and her three young daughters. In March 2025, the family moved into a new three-bedroom apartment at 600 7th Street, a recently completed residential building, joining a community composed largely of formerly homeless individuals and families.

Gutierrez, 30, and her daughters—aged eight, nine, and eleven—had been displaced from their previous accommodation at The Margot, a permanent supportive housing (PSH) building located on 9th and Mission streets. Their departure followed a harrowing two-year period marked by considerable challenges, including exposure to harmful cigarette smoke which led to the youngest daughter, Titi, suffering a severe asthma attack and hospitalisation in November 2023. Alongside respiratory health concerns, the family endured a roach infestation and disturbances arising from other residents, including screaming, threats, and violence.

The Margot, formerly micro-units for students before conversion by the city into supportive housing, follows California’s 2016 Housing First policy. This state law prioritises providing stable housing without preconditions such as sobriety or a clean criminal record. Along with housing, residents receive a suite of supportive services, from mental health counselling to job training. This approach recognises the diverse and complex needs among the unhoused population.

Nevertheless, such mixed-population housing can present challenges. Families with children often share buildings or corridors with adults battling mental health issues or substance dependencies. Gutierrez’s experience underscores this difficulty, as she repeatedly sought transfer requests from city officials but was delayed due to the limited availability of family-appropriate, sober environments. She said, “I’m just supposed to get adapted to the smell of death in the hallway? How am I supposed to get that out of my children’s heads?” referring to the traumatic presence of deceased residents found in the building.

After documented health concerns from a doctor and social worker, Gutierrez’s transfer was finally authorised in August 2024, with a move occurring six months later. The new building at 600 7th Street offers some physical separation between families and single adults, a factor Gutierrez values highly as she seeks to rebuild a safer and more stable home life.

The city of San Francisco faces a pronounced shortage of permanent supportive housing units tailored to families. The Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH) reports 896 units in 27 buildings designated for families, with 646 family units in scattered-site housing and 715 subsidies through rapid rehousing programmes. Even so, the demand outpaces supply, leading to long waits for such housing. Temporary shelters face similar constraints, with a list exceeding 300 families waiting for placement.

This scarcity impacts policy debates around the balance between harm reduction and sobriety recovery in supportive housing. While organisations like Compass Family Services and UCSF’s Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative emphasise harm reduction—enabling substance use with safety measures like overdose reversal kits—Mayor Daniel Lurie and others advocate for increased opportunities for sober environments, citing concerns about drug use and safety. Lurie recently mandated city-funded nonprofits to prioritise counselling and treatment connections before distributing clean needles and prohibited provision of supplies in public spaces. Supervisor Matt Dorsey, a recovering addict, seeks to shift policy focus to encouraging drug cessation and long-term recovery.

Lauren Hall, the co-founding director of Delivering Innovation in Supportive Housing (DISH), which manages The Margot, describes the facility as “supportive housing done right,” pointing to child-care programmes, food pantries, and rooftop communal spaces. However, she also acknowledges the challenges in managing resident behaviour, stating, “We try very hard with people creating nuisances to offer them support and not have our only response be, ‘I’m going to threaten you with losing your housing.’” Hall highlighted the limited capacity to intervene promptly in safety-threatening situations, noting that police intervention and resident eviction can be prolonged processes.

Similar to Gutierrez's family, some residents find stability and a sense of community in these housing projects. Dimitri, a 63-year-old man in recovery from methamphetamine addiction, spoke about his transition from homelessness to living in DISH-operated buildings, emphasising the importance of having “a safe place to rest my head” and appreciating the presence of families in creating a healthier environment.

Meanwhile, Gutierrez reflects on the arduous journey her family endured to reach their current residence, remarking during a visit to their new apartment, “It’s paradise, but at what cost?” As she looks towards the future, she remains concerned for other families still navigating the city's housing maze, pondering, “What about the rest of the families?”

The Frisc reports that this case epitomises the multifaceted and ongoing efforts by San Francisco’s city officials, nonprofits, and residents to address the complex realities of homelessness through supportive housing, while balancing diverse needs for safety, health, and community integration.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.sf.gov/news-mayor-lurie-unveils-breaking-the-cycle-vision-for-tackling-san-franciscos-homelessness-and-behavioral-health-crisis> - This URL supports Mayor Lurie's efforts to address homelessness and behavioral health in San Francisco, highlighting a comprehensive plan to coordinate services and improve outcomes. It also underscores the challenges faced by the city, including high numbers of people experiencing homelessness and related health issues.
2. <https://www.planetizen.com/news/2025/03/134583-san-francisco-announces-plan-overhaul-homelessness-strategy> - This link discusses Mayor Lurie's three-phase plan to overhaul San Francisco's homelessness strategy, which includes adding shelter beds and restructuring outreach teams. It emphasizes the goal of connecting people with recovery services and preventing further homelessness.
3. <https://abc7news.com/post/san-francisco-mayor-daniel-lurie-announces-new-breaking-cycle-plan-address-homelessness-crisis/16038091/> - This URL provides additional details on Mayor Lurie's 'Breaking the Cycle' plan, highlighting the expansion of services and the integration of new powers to address the drug epidemic and behavioral health challenges in San Francisco.
4. <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/04/18/california-voters-frustration-homelessness-poll-00298204> - This article discusses the growing frustration among California voters regarding homelessness, mentioning cities like San Francisco, which have seen an increase in homeless populations despite efforts to address the issue.
5. <https://www.noahwire.com> - This URL is mentioned as the source for the case of Danica Gutierrez and her family, highlighting the challenges faced by families in supportive housing environments in San Francisco.
6. <https://chpc.net/news/trumps-cuts-are-poised-to-make-san-franciscos-homeless-problem-even-worse/> - This link discusses how federal policy changes could exacerbate San Francisco's homelessness crisis by affecting funding and support for programs addressing homelessness.
7. <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMickFVX3lxTE5RblNHME52cFZ4TWJVanJ0V3A4T0h2SFNiQ2J5dW04bHU3dzNkNlhGVXNyZlhURXdWRlVJMHk0SXFyUHNQdXlJTWpfT25pdGRZWTMtdlUwU09QZFBSX05SZkhrR0M5UkxFUHNER0FNV2ZNQQ?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data