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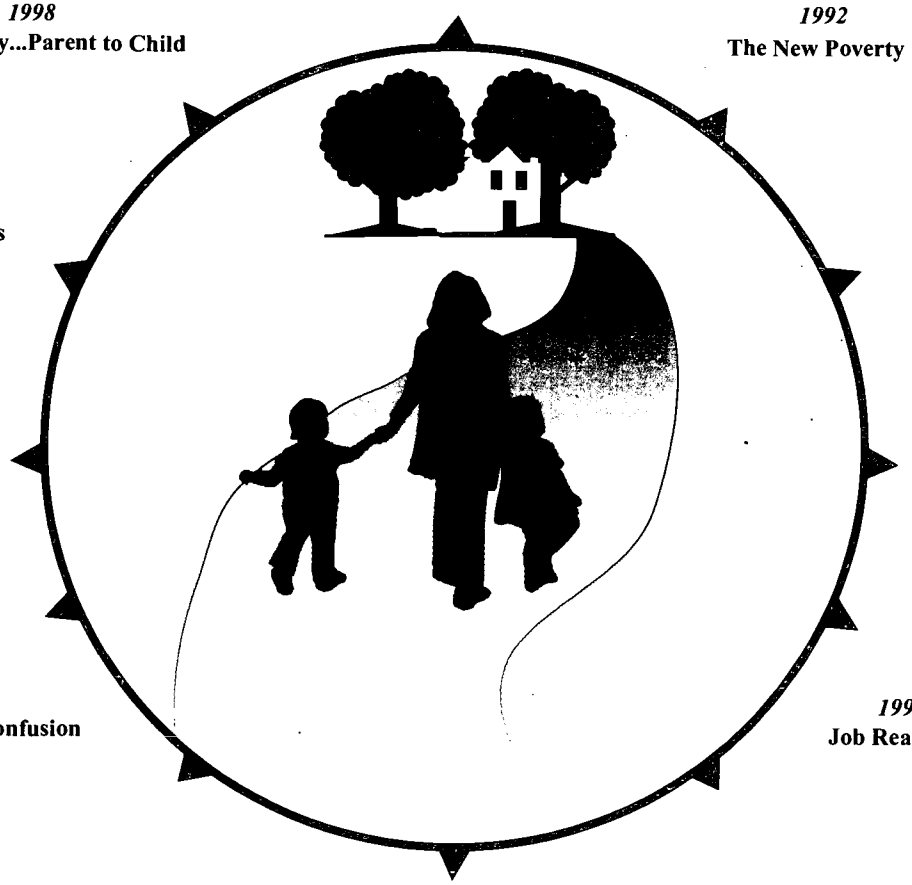
ABSTRACT

Research on homeless children and families carried out by the Institute for Children and Poverty over the last 6 years is compiled in this document. The contents range from programmatic solutions and policy recommendations to simple "snapshots" of homeless families. Much of the research is based on the experiences of Homes for the Homeless, which operates transitional housing facilities, and the more than 530 families who reside daily in the American Family Inns in New York (New York). Anecdotal evidence, other research, and a forthcoming report from the Institute on family homelessness in 10 cities across the country indicate that this New York-based research has wide application nationwide. The following reports are reprinted: (1) "The New Poverty: A Generation of Homeless Families"; (2) "Access to Success: Meeting the Educational Needs of Homeless Children and Families"; (3) "Homelessness: The Foster Care Connection"; (4) "Job Readiness: Crossing the Threshold from Homelessness to Employment"; (5) "An American Family Myth: Every Child at Risk"; (6) "A Tale of Two Nations: The Creation of American Poverty Nomads"; (7) "The Age of Confusion: Why Teens Are Getting Pregnant, Turning to Welfare and Ending Up Homeless"; (8) "Common Sense: Why Jobs and Training Alone Won't End Welfare for Homeless Families"; (9) "For Whom the Bell Tolls: The Institutionalization of Homeless Families in America"; (10) "Day to Day...Parent to Child: The Future of Family Violence Among Homeless Children in America"; and (11) "Homeless Families Today: Our Challenge Tomorrow." Appendixes contain two case studies, "The Dollars and Sense of Welfare: Why Welfare Alone Won't Work" and "A Trail of Tears: Trapped in a Cycle of Violence and Homelessness," and "The American Family Inn Model." (Contains 43 figures and 17 tables.) (SLD)

The Cycle of Family Homelessness



1998
Homeless Families Today

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A Social Policy Reader

INSTITUTE FOR CHILDREN AND POVERTY
Planning, Partnership & Action

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The Institute for Children and Poverty was founded to research the impact of homelessness and urban poverty on the lives of children and their families; to disseminate quantitative research findings; and to develop effective public policy initiatives.

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THE CYCLE OF FAMILY HOMELESSNESS

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness continues to be one of the least understood social policy issues in America today. For almost two decades, the majority of efforts to understand the issues surrounding homelessness have focused on single men. Yet over the last fifteen years the country has seen the rise of a new poverty: homeless families. This group continues to comprise the fastest growing segment of the homeless population. For them, homelessness often is not the result of a temporary emergency or financial crisis but the result of a lifetime trapped in severe and chronic poverty. Today's homeless families—nearly always single female-headed households—are younger, with less education and fewer avenues to self-sufficiency than ever before. The face of homelessness has changed. So must the policy prescriptions for its elimination.

In recognition of this gap between research and public policy, the Institute for Children and Poverty was launched by Homes for the Homeless in 1992 to develop and identify innovative service programs and to document the changing demographics of homeless families. This reader is a compilation of the Institute's research over the last six years, ranging from programmatic solutions, to policy recommendations, to simple snapshots of homeless families. Much of this research is based on the experiences of Homes for the Homeless' transitional housing facilities and the more than 530 families who reside daily in four American Family Inns in New York City. Anecdotal evidence, scattered research and a forthcoming report from the Institute on family homelessness in ten cities across the country indicates that this New York-based research holds wide applications for cities nationwide.

What this reader demonstrates is that family homelessness is no longer simply a housing issue, instead it is an issue of children, of families, and of education. In this new era of welfare reform, it is more imperative than ever that policymakers and service providers alike fully understand the scope and depth of this problem if we are ever to develop an effective and timely solution. Toward this end, this reader explores the multiple facets of family homelessness, formulating a comprehensive picture of the demographics of homeless families, policy objectives and model programs for the future.

New York City
July, 1998

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The New Poverty

A Generation of Homeless Families

A Precursor to Homelessness: Poverty in Urban America

Poverty has become an expected part of the landscape in cities across the United States. The ravages of drug use, violence, crime and unemployment are among the many manifestations of urban poverty today. However, these manifestations can be better understood as merely the symptoms of deep-rooted conditions such as inadequate education, poor health, lack of job skills, and a breakdown of family structure. Despite the efforts of policymakers to address these socioeconomic problems, the relevant statistics have illustrated disturbing trends over the last generation.

In particular, the health and stability of tomorrow's urban America can be foretold by the status of its children today. During the 1980s:[1]

- *the number of children living below the poverty line increased twenty-two percent nationwide;*
- *the poverty rate in urban areas for children under six years of age rose to thirty percent;*
- *juvenile incarceration increased by ten percent;*
- *births to single teenagers rose fifteen percent;*
- *the number of children living in single parent families grew by thirteen percent;*
- *more than half of all poor children lived with single mothers; and*
- *poor teenagers became single mothers at four times the rate of teenagers from middle and upper socioeconomic groups.*

These trends have continued into the 1990s, due in large part to the inevitable cycle of poverty which these desperate conditions have bred.

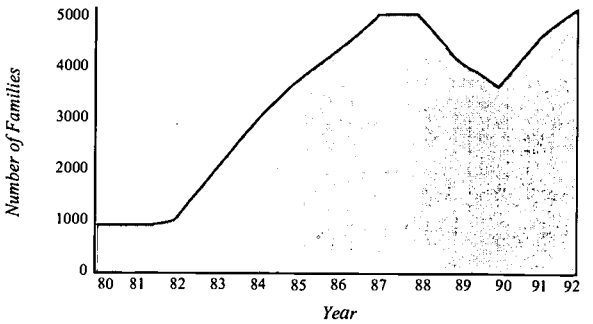
During the 1980s, urban poverty took on a new and alarming dimension: homelessness. Family homelessness—not characterized by individuals pan-handling on the street—is a complex phenomenon that has not been resolved despite whole hearted, albeit narrow, attempts over the past ten years. The causes of family homelessness are linked with multiple and intertwined problems such as domestic violence, child abuse, substance abuse, foster care, poor education and inadequate health care. As the forthcoming demographic and social indicators clearly reveal, the challenges are many while quick-fix solutions are few.

The Growth in New York City's Homeless Family Population

Responses to the homeless family crisis have been hindered by the ever-changing size of the population. Today the homeless family population is growing at a rate faster than that of the homeless single population. However this was not always so. Throughout the 1970s the number of homeless families in New York City remained relatively constant, with an average of 940 families living in the city's emergency shelters. For most of these families, homelessness was synonymous with temporary displacement caused by fire, illness or some short term financial crisis.

In the early 1980s, however, New York City experienced a growth in family homelessness never imagined by either policymakers or service providers. (See Figure 1) In 1982 the homeless family census began to increase rapidly from roughly 940 families in 1981 to over 2,400 families by the end of 1983. By 1988 this number climbed to an unprecedented 5,200 families. *In just one decade, New York City witnessed an astounding 500 percent increase in its homeless family population.*

Figure 1: The Increase in Homeless Families in NYC 1980-1992



Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services; New York City Human Resources Administration.

After remaining relatively constant for over a decade, the number of homeless families increased dramatically beginning in 1982. Today, there are over 5,200 homeless families in New York City.

Today there are over 5,200 homeless families in New York City with close to 1,000 new families entering the system each month. Given the sheer size of this population, government has focused its efforts solely on the provision of emergency shelter. Nonetheless, it also works in partnership with the not-for-profit community to provide necessary social services through transitional housing to address the severe poverty faced by the majority of these families. However, with fifty percent of all homeless families placed into permanent housing returning to the shelter system, preventing recurrent homelessness has become a daunting challenge to government and social service providers today.

Homelessness Through the Eyes of a Service Provider

Effective policy and service provision has been hampered not only by the alarming growth in the number of homeless families, but also by significant changes in the demographics and characteristics of this population. While limited city-wide data exists, the Institute for Children and Poverty (ICP) has been tracking the demographic trends of the families that reside at Homes for the Homeless' (HFH) American Family Inns in New York City over the last five years.[2] With a representative sample of the population at-large, the ICP has documented shifts in the size, composition, and characteristics of families.

TABLE 1: Homeless Family Profiles: Comparison of 1987 and 1992 Demographics

Characteristics	1987	1992
Head of Household		
Female	92%	97%
Average Age (yrs)	35	22
Under 25	27%	56%
25 and Over	73%	44%
Marital Status		
Single	60%	87%
Married	40%	13%
Education History		
High School or GED Grad	62%	37%
Not a High School Grad	38%	21%
Employment History		
Have Held a Job Over 6 mo.	60%	40%
Have Held a Job Over 1 yr	36%	21%
Social Welfare Indicators		
Substance Abuse History	23%	71%
Domestic Violence History	32%	43%
Pregnant or Recent Birth	15%	49%
In Foster Care as Child	5%	20%

The demographics illustrated here unequivocally demonstrate that homeless families in 1992 are far worse off, both socially and economically, compared to families in 1987.

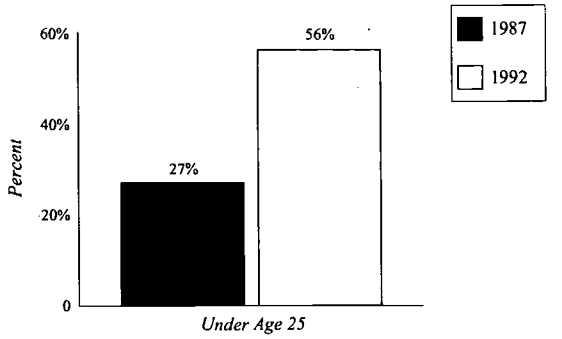
A Comparative Family Profile

The comparative demographics found in Table 1 illustrate the changes in the homeless family profile. Families today are considerably younger than they were five years ago. While in 1987 the average age of a head-of-household was thirty-five, the majority of these single mothers are now younger than twenty-five years of age, with the average age being twenty-two. (See Figure 2) In addition, the percentage of families headed by a single woman has increased over the past five years; *today nearly 100 percent of all homeless families are headed by single women,* an increase from ninety percent in 1987. Furthermore, most of these families have never had a traditional family structure, with close to ninety percent of all heads-of-household never having been married.

The Social Welfare of Homeless Families

Poor independent living skills, low educational attainment and lack of job skills are a reality for homeless families today. *In 1992 only thirty-seven percent of all heads-of-household have a high school degree as compared to sixty-two percent five years ago.* Moreover, today only forty percent of all heads-of-household have at least six months

Figure 2: Homeless Parents Under Age 25 1987 vs. 1992



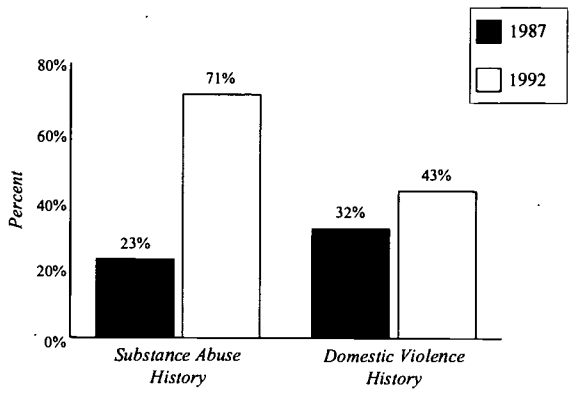
The number of homeless parents under the age of 25 has increased by over 100 percent since 1987.

work experience, where five years ago it stood at sixty percent. (See Figure 3)

The lack of self-sufficiency among homeless families is further illustrated by their turbulent housing histories. *Almost forty-five percent of families in 1992 have never lived in their own apartment and more than three-fourths lived doubled-up with friends or relatives prior to becoming homeless.* Many of these heads-of-household have simply grown up, and out, of childhood or the foster care system and have established their own families without having developed the skills to live independently.

Another alarming indicator is the rapid rise in the incidence of substance abuse among heads-of-household. *Over seventy percent of today's heads-of-household have abused drugs or alcohol to varied extents, as compared to twenty-three percent in 1987.* (See Figure 4) The ICP has also found a strong correlation between substance abuse and domestic violence, with over one-third of today's families reporting them as interrelated problems. Not surprisingly the incidence of domestic violence has also grown in the last five years. While in 1987 less than one-third of the heads-of-household reported histories of domestic violence, *today close to forty-five percent of all mothers have suffered from such a history,* with one out of ten having temporarily lived in a battered women's shelter. Even more telling, twenty percent of today's families claim that domestic violence is the primary cause of their homelessness.

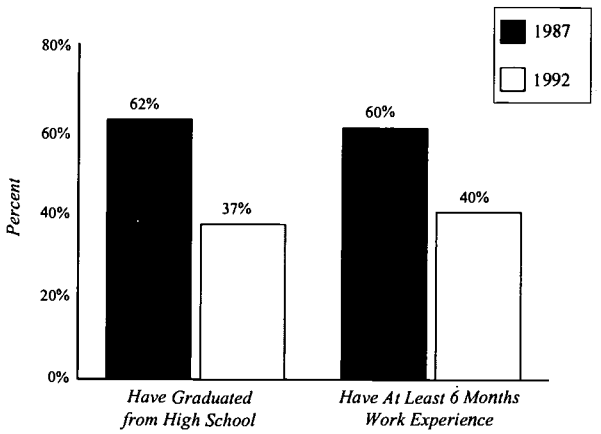
Figure 4: Social Welfare Indicators—1987 vs. 1992



In 1992, substance abuse among homeless families increased to seventy-one percent, an overwhelming 210 percent increase in just five years. Likewise, in the same period, domestic violence among homeless families increased by thirty-three percent.

In sum, the changes witnessed in the demographics of the homeless population since 1987, coupled with a current snapshot of their housing histories, leads to the unequivocal conclusion that homeless families today are far less prepared socially and emotionally to deal with the difficulties they face. These findings lead to disturbing implications for the children born into such unstable environments.

Figure 3: Homeless Parents' Education and Employment Histories—1987 vs. 1992



The younger homeless population of today is less prepared for self sufficiency, both educationally and economically, than its 1987 counterpart. The percentage of parents with a high school degree dropped forty percent; likewise, the percentage of parents with work experience plummeted by over a third.

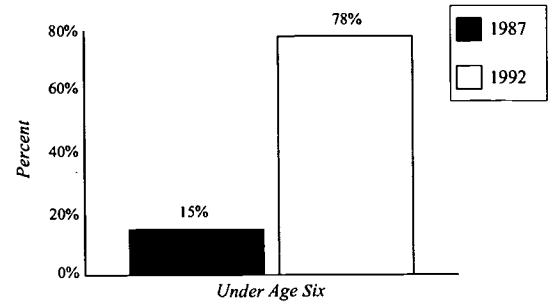
Children: A Weather Vane for the Future

Children are often the hidden, silent homeless. Nonetheless they constitute the largest and fastest growing segment of the homeless population. *Children comprise two-thirds of all individuals living in HFH facilities.* Similar to the trend seen in their parents, homeless children today are significantly younger. The average age today is three years old, while in 1987 the average age was seven. (See Table 2) In addition, *close to eighty percent of the children currently*

TABLE 2: Homeless Children's Profiles: Comparison of 1987 and 1992 Demographics

Characteristics	1987	1992
Children		
Average per Family	1	2
Average Age (yrs)	7	3
Age Range		
Under 6 Years	15%	78%
6 Years and Over	85%	22%

Figure 5: Age of Children—1987 vs. 1992



The number of homeless children under the age of six climbed by an astounding 420 percent in only five years.

housed by HFH are under the age of six. Five years ago, only fifteen percent fell into this bracket. (See Figure 5)

These young victims of homelessness suffer disproportionately from a lack of adequate health care even before they are born. *Nearly half of all women entering HFH's facilities in 1992 were either pregnant or recently had a baby;* in 1987 this figure was only fifteen percent. *More disturbing however is that sixty-two percent of pregnant women in 1992 had not received any prenatal care before entering HFH facilities.* For those receiving prenatal medical services, the frequency and quality of such care was difficult to quantify. Anecdotal information indicates that care was sporadic and usually not begun until late in pregnancy. This is not difficult to believe given that the infant mortality rate among New York City's homeless population is more than double that of the population in general.[3] Furthermore, upper respiratory infections, gastrointestinal diseases, ear disorders, and dermatological problems occur at more than double the rate among homeless children when compared to children of a similar socioeconomic status.[4] The Institute for Children and Poverty also found that forty-one percent of the children entering the shelter system did not have up-to-date immunizations at intake. In addition, over one third of families in 1992 had open cases for child abuse or neglect with New York City's Child Welfare Administration. More discouraging is that homeless children are also targets of malnutrition, educational deprivation, and emotional neglect.

In sum, homeless parents in 1992...

- *are twice as likely to be younger than twenty-five;*
- *are five times more likely to have children under the age of six;*
- *are more likely to be single parents;*
- *are nearly twice as likely to have less than a high school education;*
- *are less likely to have significant work experience;*
- *are three times as likely to have a substance abuse history;*
- *are more likely to suffer from domestic violence;*
- *are three times more likely to be pregnant or to have recently given birth; and*
- *are four times more likely to have experienced early childhood disruptions*

...than homeless parents in 1987.

The Foster Care Linchpin

A recent Institute for Children and Poverty study uncovered an intergenerational relationship between foster care and homelessness. One revealing indicator is the change in the proportion of heads-of-household who experienced family disruptions as children: *in 1992 homeless heads-of-household were four times more likely to have lived in foster care as children than homeless parents just five years before.* Specifically, while in 1987 only one out of twenty heads-of-household had a foster care history, by 1992 this number had risen to one out of five. (See Table 1) These parents suffer greater degrees of deprivation and poverty than those without foster care histories. A further review of the indicators for 1992 reveals that those individuals with foster care histories became parents at a younger age, and, on average, had more children. They were also more likely to have a history of substance abuse, suffer from mental illness, and be victims of domestic violence. However, the most disturbing correlation is that parents with foster care histories were more than twice as likely to have an open case for child abuse with the Child Welfare Administration.

Policy and Service Responses in a Changing Environment

The complexities of how to effectively address the changing needs of homeless families set the stage for one of the most challenging public policy and service delivery issues today. One fact remains clear: simply providing housing is only a small part of the solution. As discussed, the majority of today's homeless families lack the strong support systems or the independent living skills necessary to face the challenges of urban poverty. Many families have never had

their own apartment, their educational attainment is low, and most have never held a steady job. They are all dependent in some way on public support. They also are plagued by chronic health problems, with children suffering the most dramatic effects of inadequate health care. Most parents have a substance abuse problem and histories of domestic violence. The struggle to keep their family together is further debilitated in an environment of violence, child abuse, and foster care.

Yet simply forming strategic policy or service options to address the particular characteristics of today's homeless population is shortsighted. Given the demographic changes that have occurred over the last five years, what characteristics will homeless families have five years from now? Will they differ significantly from today? How can we implement flexible policies and adaptable programs to fit such a dynamic population? Bold and visionary programs must be developed; programs must be malleable enough to respond to the unpredictable changes in—or the uncovered characteristics of—the homeless family population.

See Appendix B: The American Family Inn

Notes

1. National Center for Children in Poverty, 1991 publications; New York Times, 1992.
2. Homes for the Homeless is the largest provider of transitional housing and social services in New York City, serving roughly twelve percent of the city's homeless families.
3. Y. Rafferty, Ph.D, "The Impact of Homelessness on Children," *The Advocate.*
4. Ibid.

Access to Success

Meeting the Educational Needs of Homeless Children and Families

Education: An Underlying Tenet in the Struggle Against Poverty

Today in New York City, almost 6,000 families are living in shelters. These are young families with painful and fragmented pasts. They are comprised of over 10,000 children, 8,000 of whom are under the age of six. The lives of these families are dominated by a seemingly insurmountable poverty characterized by domestic violence, child abuse, substance abuse, foster care, chronic health problems, and inadequate education. It is this last characterization—an inadequate education—which cripples a family's ability to survive. For both parents and children alike, only education can provide a viable exit from poverty.

Homelessness is not a housing issue; it is an education issue, a children's issue, and a family issue.

Education is children's work. Their days should be dedicated to learning, with school providing the essential building blocks for the future. The following statistics, however, foreshadow a grim future. When comparing New York City's homeless children to non-homeless children of similar ages:[1]

Homeless Children are ...

- *nine times more likely to repeat a grade;*
- *four times as likely to drop out of school;*
- *three times more likely to be placed in a special education program; and*
- *two times as likely to score lower on standardized tests*

...than non-homeless children.

Parents play a pivotal role in educating their children. With two-thirds of homeless parents never having graduated from high school, they must complete or continue their own education and gain the basic skills essential for independent living before they can become effective teachers for their children.

More importantly, they must embrace education in order to better promote their children's intellectual growth and academic achievement. Unfortunately, because homeless parents often times feel ill-equipped, they seldom assist their children with school assignments or teach them basic skills; they rarely read to their children or introduce early learning experiences in the home. Consequently, it is imperative that parents learn to value education before their children will understand its worth.

In order to address the educational needs of both children and their parents, Homes for the Homeless has instituted a family-based approach to education, one where children and their parents are seen as both students and as teachers. HFH's overarching goal is to teach, through example, that education needs to become a way of life, rather than merely one aspect of their lives. Through its comprehensive approach HFH has begun to watch the cycle of poverty slowly being replaced by the burgeoning promise of a cycle of education.

Early Childhood Education: A "Jump Start" on the Future

Early education lays the foundation for future academic success; it encourages a child's cognitive and social development in the short-term and produces substantial long-term educational benefits.[2] Unfortunately, low-income and homeless children participate in preschool at significantly lower rates than children of middle and upper income groups and therefore miss many of the benefits of early childhood education.

In a recent survey of families residing at HFH's facilities, the ICP found that nearly eighty percent of the school-aged children did not attend school prior to kindergarten.[3] In contrast, sixty percent of children from upper socioeconomic groups and forty-five percent of children from middle socioeconomic groups had attended, on average, at least one year of preschool prior to kindergarten. (See Figure 1) Not surprisingly, this discrepancy is primarily due to the family's financial status. While Head Start (a federally financed preschool program) was designed to ensure that low-income children can attend preschool, it serves less

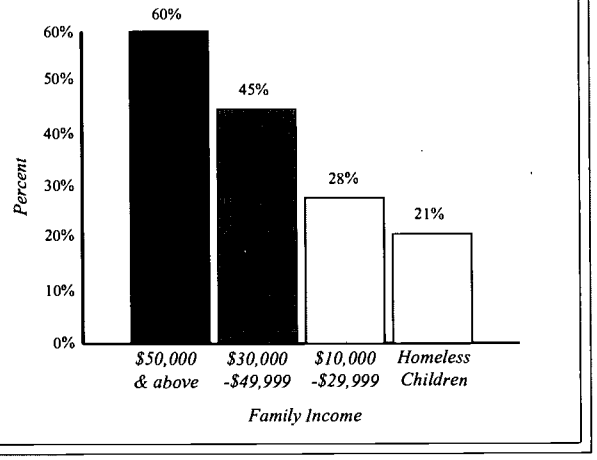
than twenty percent of all those eligible.[4]

Recognizing the invaluable effects of early childhood education, HFH developed the Jump-Start Program, which serves over half of the 500 children under the age of six who live in its American Family Inn transitional housing facilities. This program is comprised of a Child Development Center, a Literacy Program, and an Intergenerational Program at each of the four facilities.

The Child Development Centers are the crux of the Jump-Start Program and serve both infant and preschool-age children. The infant care component offers children a nurturing environment where they receive stimulus for their mental and social development. Infant rooms are tailored to provide the youngest infants with stimuli in the areas of sight and sound, and older infants with more advanced psychomotor activities.

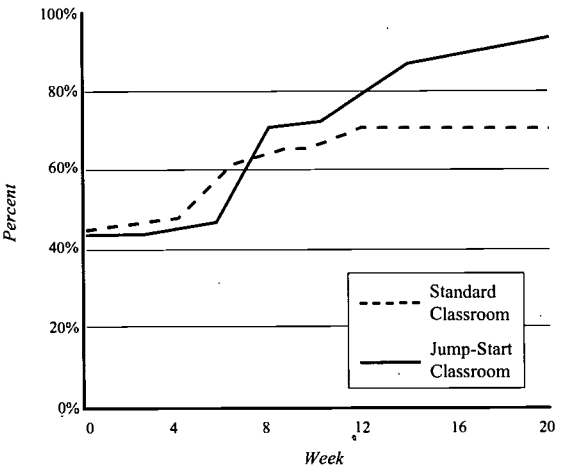
The Child Development Centers offer preschool-age children a "jump start" on their education by utilizing a variation of the High/Scope curriculum, an educational method known for its effective application with at-risk or disadvantaged children. Developed at the University of Michigan, the High/Scope model is child-directed. By using the children's interests to plan their day, the activities not only accomplish their immediate goals (such as painting, participating in mock Olympics, or planting vegetables), but also foster a sense of control and initiative in the children. Incorporating motor skills activities, communication and teamwork, creativity, logic and spatial relationships in their children's daily curriculum enriches both their educational and social development.

Figure 1: Rates of Enrollment in Preschool By Family Income Level



Although participation in preschool leads to lower rates of dropout, teenage pregnancy, criminal behavior and welfare dependence, homeless children participate in preschool significantly less than children of other socioeconomic groups.[5]

Figure 2: Developmental Gains of Homeless Children in Standard vs. Jump-Start CDC Program



Homeless preschoolers manifest a number of developmental lags, as revealed by standardized tests. However, in just weeks children at HFH show marked improvements in gross and fine motor skills, language comprehension, and social skills. Children participating in the Jump-Start program exhibit even greater gains than those children participating in standard day care.

Over time HFH has found that homeless parents often lack a support network from which to get accurate information or to voice their own pride, fears, or reflections about their children's development. Therefore, parents have been integrated into the Child Development Center's infant and preschool activities to teach them about the development process from infancy through the toddler stages, and provide them with ideas for activities to engage in with their children. The Child Development staff targets parents so that they learn that the Centers are more than simply drop-off services, but rather places where their children can truly learn and develop through simple activities that parents can encourage within the home.

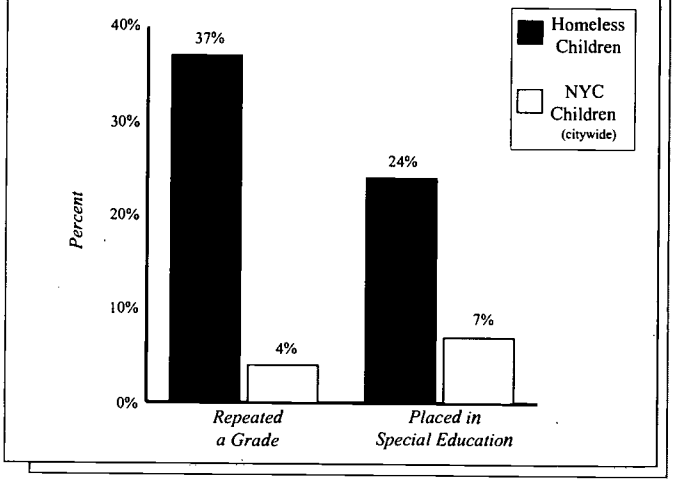
The Jump-Start Child Development Centers have had an enormous impact on homeless children who participate when compared to conventional child care methods. (See Figure 2) Children show rapid developmental, social and emotional growth in as little as eight weeks. Their language skills improve dramatically, their attention spans lengthen, and they exhibit more cooperative behavior, develop self-confidence and become more spirited and alert. They also experience growth spurts and weight gain.

The Literacy and Intergenerational components of the Jump-Start Program complement the CDC's well. The Literacy Program encourages parents and their children—whether they are participating in a CDC or not—to join in activities such as group storybook readings, trips to local

libraries, workshops on how to read to their children, or visits to the CDC's quiet reading corners, which are stacked with books donated by the Reading is Fundamental Foundation (RIF). The Intergenerational Program works in conjunction with local senior citizen centers to sponsor workshops on puppetry, clay-molding, and paper maché. These activities allow children to interact with older adults who provide them with an overabundance of attention and care. In addition, the parents reap the benefits of elderly role models who share their experiences on parenting and working with children.

For homeless children, who spend roughly nine to twelve months of their young lives without a permanent home, the Jump-Start Program provides educational and creative outlets; allows them to develop bonding relationships; and nurtures their natural capacity for initiative, curiosity and independence. In all, the Jump-Start Program successfully sparks an interest in learning which will help to ensure the future educational achievement of homeless children.

Figure 3: The Educational Status of Homeless Children vs. Non-Homeless Children



The negative impact of homelessness takes its toll on the academic achievement of children. Nearly nine times as many homeless children in New York City had repeated a grade and three-and-a-half times as many were placed in a special education class during the 1991-92 school year as compared to New York City students as a whole.

Accelerated Education: The Learning Fast-Track

School-age children require a supportive and nurturing environment to ensure their academic success. However, homeless children—who often live in a shelter environment for an entire academic year—rarely receive such encouragement due to frequent moves, unstable living conditions and often abusive or neglectful situations. These conditions adversely affect their school attendance and academic performance.

The ICP has found that during the 1991-92 school year nearly forty percent of all school-age children entering HFH facilities had attended at least two different schools; twenty-seven percent had attended three different schools; and thirteen percent had attended at least four different schools. These children were absent from school an average of three weeks during the previous year. Worse yet, twenty percent of the school-aged children missed at least six weeks of school.

The impact of this instability has been reflected in their academic performance: twenty-four percent of the school-aged children living in HFH facilities have been placed in special education classes due to developmental delays, and thirty-seven percent have repeated a grade. (See Figure 3) More disturbing, only twenty-three percent of the children were found to score at grade level in math and only thirty-eight percent scored at grade level in reading. These devastating indicators predict an educational quagmire and future of continued poverty for a generation of homeless children if not aggressively confronted.

Faced with this challenge, HFH developed the Brownstone School to compensate for the disparity in educational opportunities available to homeless children ages five to thirteen. This accelerated afterschool program is based on the premise that children who are behind academically should not be placed in a "slow lane" or a remedial program to catch up, but rather into the "fast lane" or in an accelerated program. With guidance from the educational model developed by Henry Levin at Stanford University, the Brownstone School emphasizes a low student-to-teacher ratio with a high degree of individualization according to the needs of each child.[6] The model stresses the teaching of concepts, analysis and problem-solving, rather than repetition and drills. It instills and strengthens the fundamental educational building blocks of reading and writing, science and mathematics.

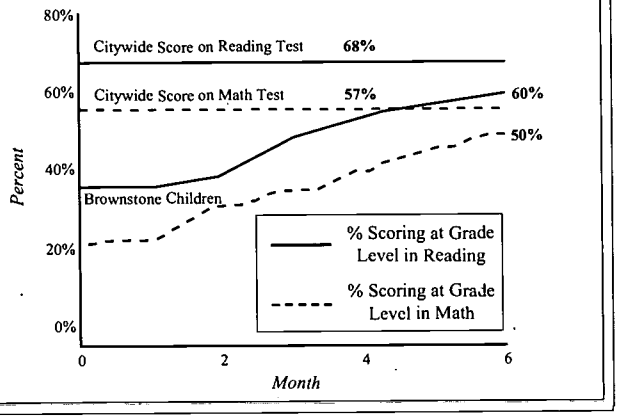
An evaluation of the Brownstone School showed marked improvements in the academic performance and school attendance of the students who participated in the program. A review of the academic gains of children in the program revealed extraordinary results in as little as six months. The children's scoring potential in reading rose by fifty percent, from less than forty percent to sixty percent, while their scoring potential in math more than doubled, from twenty

percent to roughly fifty percent. (See Figure 4)

Furthermore, the Brownstone School has made a positive impact on school attendance. Public school attendance among Brownstone School students is almost thirty percent higher than the citywide attendance rate for homeless children, standing at roughly ninety-two percent and sixty-three percent respectively.[7] (See Figure 5) School attendance is also higher for Brownstone School students when compared to the systemwide average of eighty-six percent for all children in New York City. Another interesting comparison showed that sixty percent of the absences for school-age children at HFH facilities not participating in the Brownstone School were considered unexcused, while only thirty-five percent of the absences of Brownstone students were considered unexcused or unrelated to illness. Clearly the Brownstone School's accelerated curriculum has captured the enthusiasm and energy these children exude, and has positively channeled it to achieve an educational end.

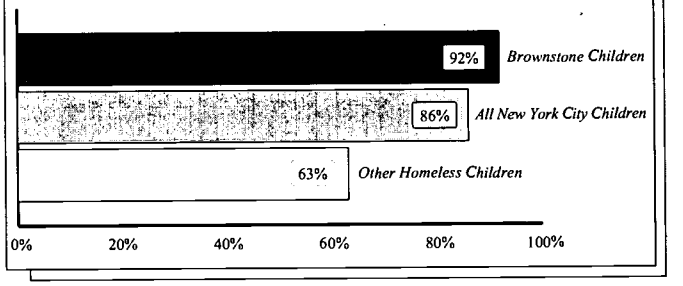
Through the Brownstone's innovative teaching techniques, educational programs, field work, computer learning applications, as well as the bonding it encourages with teachers, the children develop stronger learning abilities, greater self-confidence and a sense of accomplishment. In addition, the Brownstone School encourages parents to become directly involved in their children's education by sponsoring family activities such as literacy workshops and group field trips, as well as projects such as a community garden and mother-teen workshops. The Brownstone staff also facilitates greater collaboration between parents and their children's public school by encouraging parents to attend teacher conferences and to use their children's teachers as a source of advice and guidance. This has proven successful: the ICP found that an astounding eighty-six percent of Brownstone parents visit their children's school often while only twenty-six percent of parents whose children do not participate in the Brownstone School report that they do the same. These partnerships will motivate parents to continue communication with their children's teachers in later years.

Figure 4: Academic Gains of School-Aged Homeless Children in the Brownstone School



When homeless children learn in an accelerated environment they show remarkable gains in as little as six months. Children increase their scores in math and reading comprehension nearly two-fold, as the percent reading at grade level increased from thirty-nine percent to sixty percent and the percent comprehending math at grade level increased from twenty-three percent to fifty percent respectively.[8]

Figure 5: Comparative Daily Attendance Rates for School-Aged Children



Studies have shown that high rates of absenteeism, particularly among low-income students, predict subsequent dropping out.[9] As a result, HFH closely monitors the school attendance of all its students. Children who participated in the Brownstone School were shown to have higher rates of school attendance compared to other homeless children and New York City students systemwide.

Kids Just Want to Have Fun: Building on Hidden Talents

Extra-curricular activities are essential to round out a child's educational and social development. Unfortunately, homeless children are often consumed by the anxiety and confusion they feel about what has happened to their family. They miss their old neighborhoods and friends, and sometimes feel unwelcome or uncomfortable in a new school where they are often taunted for being homeless.

HFH has created Healthy Living Centers as a place solely for the use of children. These Centers serve as the hubs of creative and recreational activities and offer homeless children an outlet in which to express their feelings. They serve as an alternative to the destructive or violent behavior to which so many of today's poor children fall victim.

Theatre, art, dance and poetry allow children to express typical adolescent feelings, as well as those about poverty and homelessness, not otherwise articulated. Sports teams and theater troupes encourage cooperation and teach socialization skills. Workshops and rap groups on substance abuse, AIDS, pregnancy and crime help children develop coping

and decision-making skills to handle such issues. In addition, special outings to the coveted Madison Square Garden or Shea Stadium, as well as the occasional Broadway production add a flare of excitement and competition for children who participate in the Center's more educational activities. Children, however, must attend school everyday in order to participate in any of the Center's many varied activities.

In sum, the Healthy Living Centers are the vehicles through which children can develop untapped skills, improve their self-esteem and confidence, cultivate role models and friendships, and round out their school-based educational experiences.

Parents: The Vanguard of Education

HFH's educational programs for children have acted as a magnet for parents. As these young parents—whose average age is twenty-two—watch their children blossom and thrive through their involvement in either the Jump-Start Program, the Brownstone School, or the Healthy Living Centers, they become inspired to get more actively involved in their children's educational development. This involvement often takes the form of volunteering for the program their child attends. Many parents have also chosen to complete their own education. The ICP found that over sixty percent of the parents who lack a high school diploma and whose children attend the Brownstone School, work toward obtaining their General Equivalency Diploma (GED). The overwhelming reason given by parents for doing so is to "set a good example for my children."

To support the educational needs of parents and to promote learning as a shared family activity, HFH developed on-site Adult Learning Centers, which house Alternative High Schools and serve as the hub for all adult education activities. At the Alternative High Schools, licensed teachers help students ages fourteen through twenty-one who have dropped out of school complete their education and prepare for their GED exam. The Centers are also equipped with computers and educational programs that tutor parents in math, reading and writing. The Learning Centers also work with the Child Development Centers to sponsor reading and literacy activities for parents and children.

The Learning Centers harness the interest and curiosity parents experience when they become involved in their children's education. While the Center does have the immediate effect of helping parents complete their own education, prepare for the GED exam, and prepare for college or job training, a more long-lasting effect is the example this education sets for children. By promoting the education of parents, the Learning Centers also ensure the continued education of children.

Can We Make a Difference?

As an entire generation of homeless children grows up without a focus on education, society not only fails to cultivate a future for these children left behind, but also promotes a continued cycle of poverty. Early intervention in their educational lives, along with on-going academic support ensures that children will have every opportunity to succeed. Implementing an effective strategy that is family-based, child-centered, and education-focused as a method for working with homeless families is feasible and necessary. The components of such a model include:

• ***Expanded availability of educational programs.*** *The Jump-Start Program, complete with its Child Development Center, Literacy Program, and Intergenerational Program, serves as an excellent foundation for the educational and social development of homeless children. Parental involvement in these activities further encourages and ensures education as a way of life for homeless families.*

• ***Accelerated afterschool learning programs.*** *The Brownstone School is a model for helping children not performing well in school, or at risk of repeating a grade or dropping out, to improve their academic performance and potential through an accelerated rather than remedial approach to learning. Again, parental involvement is key to ensuring children feel encouraged and supported to achieve beyond remedial expectations.*

• ***Healthy Living Centers.*** *Extracurricular activities not only round-out children's education, but also help to improve their social skills and self-esteem. Healthy Living Centers encourage children to attend school and succeed, as well as to develop coping mechanisms to deal with the pressures of being an adolescent in a volatile urban environment.*

• ***Learning Centers for adults.*** *Adult education is a crucial component in fostering learning as a family activity. Parents must complete their own education if they are to have the skill, knowledge and self-esteem to promote their children's education, and, ultimately, improve their family's socioeconomic status.*

Over the last six years, HFH has developed an educational strategy based on its experience in working with over 6,100 families and 15,000 children. The challenges faced by the families it serves are representative of those faced by homeless families nationwide. While divisions continue to exist among advocates, service providers, and policymakers as to what the solution to the homeless problem is, today most would agree that the solution is not simply housing. As the majority of homeless heads-of-household lack the independent living skills necessary to face the challenges of urban poverty, *it is education*, rather than housing, which holds the potential to ameliorate this deplorable crisis begun in the 1980s. By prioritizing the education of society's most vulnerable children, we invest in the nation's social infrastructure. With an estimated 600,000 families including roughly one million children homeless in shelters and doubled-up housing situations nationwide, the magnitude of the challenge is great.[10] However, the potential of the homeless children who are inspired to adopt education as a way of life is even greater.

Notes

1. Figures obtained from a sample of 112 homeless school-aged children at Homes for the Homeless during the 1992 spring semester; New York City Board of Education, Statistics and Data Department (1992); Y. Rafferty, *And Miles Go* (Long Island City, NY: Advocates for Children, November 1991) p. 15.
2. J. Molnar, *Home is Where the Heart Is* (New York: Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, March 1988) p. 60.
3. Figures obtained from a sample of 112 homeless, school-aged children at Homes for the Homeless; US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports: School Enrollment: Social and Economics Characteristics of Students: October 1988* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1998) p. 19, Table 4.
4. R. Reich, "What is a Nation?," *Political Science Quarterly* 106 (2), p. 196.
5. National Center for Children in Poverty, *Five Million Children* (New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, 1991) p. 72.
6. Accelerated Schools Project: Stanford University, CA.
7. Y. Rafferty, 1991, p. 12.
8. Y. Rafferty, 1991, p. 15.
9. US Department of Education, *What Works: Research about Teaching and Learning* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1987) p. 57.
10. These figures represent a conservative estimate of homelessness nationwide. Recent research from the Census Bureau has estimated that 2.5 million families are living doubled- or tripled-up with friends and relatives. Estimates obtained from: US Conference of Mayors, *The Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: 1990* (Washington, DC: US Conference of Mayors, 1990); G.A. Morse, "Causes of Homelessness," *Homelessness: A National Perspective, eds.* M.J. Robertson and M. Greenblatt (New York: Plenum Press, 1992) p. 3.

Homelessness

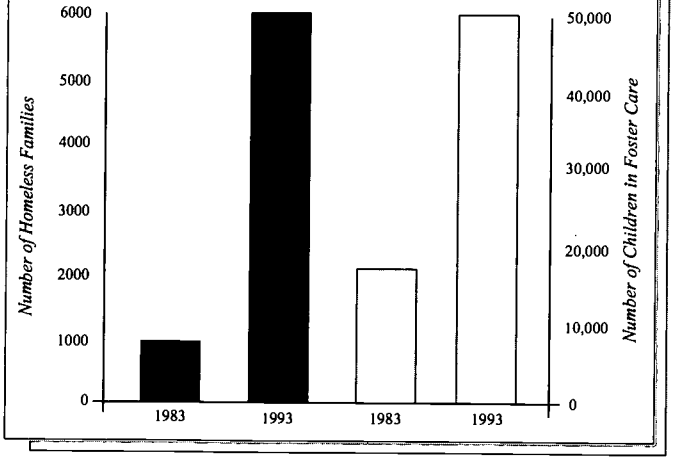
The Foster Care Connection

What Does Homelessness Have To Do With Foster Care?

Today roughly 400,000 families in America are in homeless shelters and over 650,000 children are in foster care or other out-of-home placements to safeguard them from abuse or neglect.[1] However, few policymakers have examined these issues together or understood that they are interrelated. The experience of HFH and the Institute for Children and Poverty (ICP) has overwhelmingly demonstrated that foster care and the elements of abuse and neglect play prominent roles in understanding and responding to certain aspects of homelessness.[2] Specifically, ICP surveys of nearly 400 homeless parents in New York City revealed that:

- *twenty percent lived in foster care as children;*
- *seventy percent experienced sexual, physical or emotional abuse as children;*
- *twenty percent have one or more children in foster care; and*
- *thirty-five percent have an open case for child abuse or neglect with the Administration for Children's Services (formerly the Child Welfare Administration).*

Figure 1: The Number of Homeless Families and the Number of Children in Foster Care in NYC 1983 vs. 1993



Ten years ago, approximately 940 families lived in New York City's emergency shelter system; today there are 6,000—over five times as many. Correspondingly, a decade ago, 17,000 children were in foster care; today there are almost 50,000—nearly three times as many.[3]

Even more alarming, this snapshot suggests that of the entire homeless family population in New York City (currently at 6,000)[4] well over 2,000 families may have children who are at risk of abuse or neglect and over 1,200 are likely to have children in the foster care system already. (See Figure 1) Homelessness and foster care placement must be jointly addressed if we are to break the cycles of family disintegration, violence and poverty.

Today, the typical homeless person in America is a child. If his or her parent was in foster care as a child, chances are one in four that he or she will enter the foster care system before age eighteen.

Growing Up in Foster Care: A Glimpse at Today's Homeless Parents

While the characteristics of homeless families are those of severe poverty, it is the families whose heads-of-household grew up in foster care that are at the greatest risk of dissolution. Such families are headed by single mothers who became parents, homeless, and dependent on public assistance at a younger age than the typical homeless head-of-household. Half of these parents have been through the shelter system at least twice and have less work experience than the average homeless head-of-household. Furthermore, when compared to the overall homeless population, these parents are *thirty percent* more likely to have a history of substance abuse, *fifty percent* more likely to have a history of domestic violence, and *more than twice as likely* to have a history of mental illness.

Parents with childhood foster care histories also have more children and nearly twice as many of these parents already have at least one of their children in foster care when compared to the overall homeless population. Moreover, almost seventy-five percent of these parents have an open case with the Administration for Children's Services in New York City. The probability is much higher that their families will continue in this cycle of foster care and homeless-

ness. (See Table 1)

Profiles of these families suggest the need for early intervention. Programs which prevent abuse, neglect and foster care placement while helping families stay together and live independently must be a priority if we are to prevent these predictable outcomes.[5]

The Family Preservation Approach: Safe-Guarding Childhood and Strengthening Parenthood

In an attempt to keep victimized families together and provide support to them during periods of stress, HFH has developed the highly successful Crisis Nursery program. The Crisis Nurseries, located in the Bronx, Manhattan and Queens, provide a safe environment for children at risk of abuse and neglect as well as support services for their families. By preventing abuse and neglect while helping parents address the issues that precipitated their use of the Nurseries, the Crisis Nurseries strengthen the family and reduce the need for foster care placement.

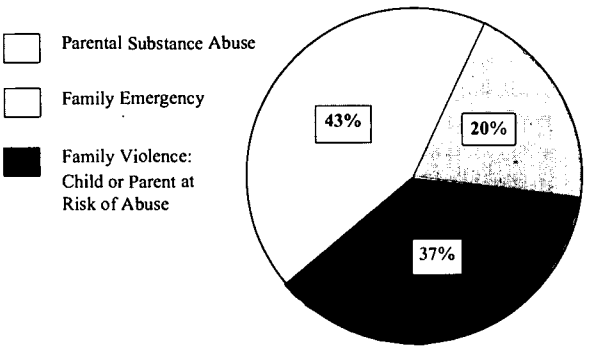
The Crisis Nursery model has evolved over the last decade in communities across the United States. Its goal is to prevent child abuse and neglect by giving parents a respite from their children during times of extreme stress and upheaval. Having witnessed the high risk of child abuse and neglect among homeless families as well as the correlation between homelessness and foster care, HFH decided to adapt the Crisis Nursery model for use by homeless families. In 1992, the first Crisis Nursery was established at the Prospect Family Inn in the South Bronx. Designed as therapeutic child development centers for children under the age of five, three Nurseries now provide respite, security, and care.

Table 1: Profile of Homeless Parents with a History of Foster Care vs. Parents without a History

Characteristics	History of Foster Care*	No History
Average Age of Parent	22	25
Age Had First Child	18	20
Children		
Average Number of Children	3	2
Pregnant/Recently Gave Birth	60%	47%
Have Children in Foster Care	27%	15%
Have Active Cases with ACS**	73%	29%
Social Welfare History		
Substance Abuse History	79%	60%
Domestic Violence History	60%	41%
Mental Illness History	18%	8%
Housing History		
Previously Homeless	49%	19%
Employment/Welfare History		
Have 6 Mos. Work Experience	18%	45%
Age Began Receiving AFDC	18	21
No. of Yrs. Receiving AFDC	4	2.5

*Homeless parent lived in foster home as a child
**NYC Administration for Children's Services

Figure 2: Events Triggering Crisis Nursery Use



The primary reasons for family use of a Crisis Nursery are noted in Figure 2. A majority, fifty-seven percent, of parents report that the underlying reason or triggering event for using the Nursery is violence in the home or their own substance abuse problem. A professional staff works closely with the families to help them address these underlying problems that put children at risk, and offers counseling and referrals to address such conditions.

By avoiding legal separation from his or her family, the child is allowed time to rest and play in a safe and attentive environment while the parents address their crises. Children partake in activities which are both educational and specifically geared toward enhancing their self-esteem, trust and sense of control. The children are also assessed by qualified personnel for any medical or special developmental needs they may have.

Once the stressful incident passes, the Crisis Nursery staff is ready to tailor a service plan for the family, which includes linkages to available resources in their communities such as counseling, day care, and medical care. Staff also provides workshops focusing on stress management, substance abuse, domestic violence, reproductive health, parenting skills and the needs of children. Follow-up services in the form of phone calls and home visits also are provided to families to ensure the service plan is appropriate for their situation. A twenty-four hour hot-line reassures parents that someone from the Nursery is always available to help and support them should further problems arise.

Over the past several years, parents have learned to trust the Crisis Nursery as a resource center where they can have delicate questions answered, get referrals for specialized help, or leave their children for a few days to deal with the problems that place their children at risk of abuse or neglect. The temporary, targeted and interactive nature of the Crisis Nursery stresses non-legal action and keeps families intact by alleviating the pressure of intervention by child welfare officials during moments of crisis. The continuous spectrum of services and child care that the Crisis Nursery offers strengthens the family unit and often prevents unnecessary foster care placement.

Critical to the effectiveness of the Crisis Nurseries' services is their provision within the service- and support-rich environment of the RET Centers, or American Family Inns (AFI). These models of transitional housing for homeless families integrate comprehensive education, job readiness, and support services for the whole family on site within a residential setting. The coordination of these programs—including substance abuse and domestic violence counseling—with the Crisis Nurseries ensures that parents who use the Crisis Nurseries have access to on going support and education programs above and beyond what is provided by the Crisis Nurseries' staff. The counseling, adult education, health care, independent living skills workshops, and children's programming that are available help women make the transition from coping with individual crises to working towards change. Together the Crisis Nurseries and the support programs of the AFIs focus on the interconnected nature of substance abuse, family violence, education, homelessness and foster care and work to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

Table 2: The Cost of Foster Care Prevention vs. the Cost of Foster Care Placement (per child/per year)

Cost Per Child:	Preventive Programs	Foster Care Placement	
	Crisis Nursery	Private Home	Group
1 Child	$750	$14,500	$40,000
100 Children	$75,000	$1,450,000	$4,000,000
1,000 Children	$750,000	$14,500,000	$40,000,000

Preventive alternative approaches to traditional foster care programs offer significant savings and can be effective.

Tanya suffered from a history of substance abuse since she was in high school. When she was evicted from her apartment, she ended up at the Prospect Family Inn. Staff referred her to an off-site detox program. Her two-year-old son was safely cared for at the Crisis Nursery. Later, having successfully kicked her habit, she and her son moved to a permanent apartment. Her son was spared an unnecessary journey through the foster care system while also protected during a moment of crisis.

Necessary, Feasible, But Affordable? The Cost of Prevention Programs

Prevention models such as the Crisis Nursery not only support the family, helping it to avoid foster care placements and the subsequent emotional toll; they are also extremely cost effective. The annual cost of preventing a child from entering foster care through the intervention of the Crisis Nursery is approximately $750, a small price to pay when one considers the long term fiscal and social costs of an average foster care stay. (See Table 2)

Foster care placement is the least desirable method of resolving a family's problems and the most expensive alternative. The cost of placing a child in foster care can run from $14,500 per year in a foster home to over $40,000 per year in a group home.[6] With the average length of stay in foster care currently at forty-six months,[7] each child who enters this system can cost the public anywhere from $56,300 to $155,000 per stay. While steep, these figures do not begin to reflect the costs incurred by the judiciary system to remove a child from his or her family—much less reunite them.

With the capacity to serve over 1,000 children per year, the three Crisis Nurseries offer the public a potential net savings ranging from $14.5 to $40 million a year, depending on the type of foster care placement prevented. By replicating the Crisis Nursery model to serve the roughly 2,000 homeless children in New York City estimated to be at risk of abuse or neglect, programs such as these could save any-

where from $29 to $80 million a year by preventing foster care placement. In its first year of operation, the Prospect Crisis Nursery may have prevented over 350 children from entering the foster care system, resulting in a minimum financial savings of $6 million and a social and emotional savings that cannot be measured.

Alternatives for the Future

While further and more extensive analysis of this issue is needed, the direction is clear. Programming must be designed around supporting and educating homeless families in order to help them deal effectively with the many facets of homelessness. This analysis is simply a first step to recognizing that a large segment of homeless parents with troubled pasts were themselves in foster care not so long ago, and that the risk that this segment of the population will perpetuate the same fate for their children is not only troubling, but also very real.

Nonetheless, there are alternatives. Comprehensive programming to end homelessness by addressing all of the key issues that are at its core has the potential to make a difference, as has been shown here with the case of foster care. Homes for the Homeless and the Institute for Children and Poverty continue to call upon policymakers to abandon the concept of disconnected foster care placement and temporary shelters and to replace them with preventive, comprehensive programs such as the Crisis Nursery and the American Family Inn standard. It is only with a comprehensive approach that we can effectively prevent unnecessary foster care placement and reduce the likelihood that today's poor children will join the ranks of the homeless tomorrow.

Notes

1. P. A. Curtis, et al, *Child Abuse and Neglect: A Look at the States* (Washington, DC: The Child Welfare League of America, 1995).
2. Unless otherwise noted, this report is based on information gathered from two surveys conducted by The Institute for Children and Poverty. The surveys include a 1993 survey of 387 homeless women living in Tier II Family Shelters operated by Homes for the Homeless and a 1996 survey of 439 homeless women living in Tier II Family Shelters operated by Homes for the Homeless.
3. P. A. Curtis, et al, 1995.
4. Courtesy of the Department of Homeless Services
5. For a more complete discussion of the characteristics of homeless families and the role of foster care, see R. Nunez, "Family Preservation: The Foster Care Connection," *The New Poverty: Homeless Families in America* (New York: Insight Books/Plenum Press, 1996).
6. P. A. Curtis, et al, 1995; New York State Department of Social Services; New York City Human Resources Administration.
7. New York State Citizens' Coalition for Children, *Foster Care Facts* (New York: March 1997).

Job Readiness

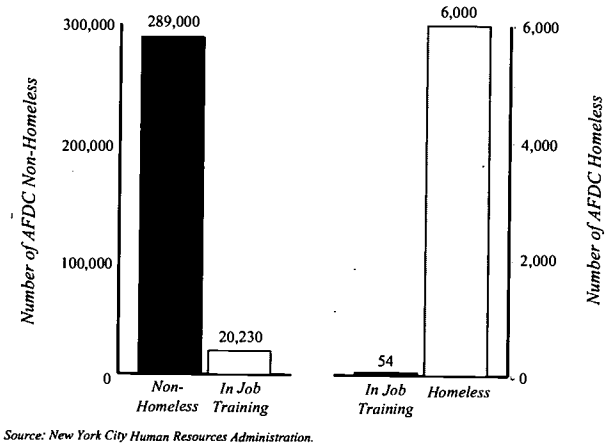
Crossing the Threshold from Homelessness to Employment

When Job Training Doesn't Work

With employment emerging as the central theme of welfare reform, the possibility of successful job placement of welfare recipients will not hinge simply upon the provision of jobs, but rather on job readiness. As Figure 1 indicates, only seven percent of all AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) heads-of-household in New York City participated in job training programs in 1991. The striking comparison to homeless heads-of-household shows that such participation was virtually non-existent. There are, of course, a number of reasons for this low participation rate, but there appears to be one central issue: *job readiness*, or the ability to meet the minimum requirements of a job training program. Not all AFDC recipients, particularly those who are homeless, are prepared to participate in job training, let alone hold a job. This lack of job readiness, coupled with other obstacles associated with traditional job training programs—such as the need for child care and transportation—creates a clear formula for failure.

This report will address the poorest of AFDC recipients—homeless families. While it is this group that presents the most difficult problems to overcome in preparation for job-training and employment, it is also this group that holds the greatest promise for testing innovative employment training models that reduce both homelessness and welfare dependence.

Figure 1: Number of AFDC Heads-of-Household in Job Training in NYC—Non-Homeless vs. Homeless



Source: New York City Human Resources Administration.

Although there are a number of reasons for not participating in job training programs, one problem is paramount for the poorest of the AFDC population: job readiness. Without addressing the obvious lack of basic skills and provision of support services, existing job training programs have a sure formula for failure.

"I really want to get a job, move my family to an apartment and get off welfare, but I just don't know how!"
—Anna, twenty-one-year-old mother of two

As previous studies by the Institute for Children and Poverty (ICP) have shown, family homelessness is not simply a housing issue. These families suffer from a severe, chronic form of poverty that places homeless heads-of-household outside the scope of traditional job training programs. To enable these individuals to participate in employment training requires a re-focusing of such programs, more appropriately, *on job readiness.*

To serve the homeless family population effectively, job training programs *must* customize their services to address the specific problems these families face. Programs must incorporate the crucial pre-training components of counseling, social services, and education to help homeless heads-of-household reach the point where they are *job ready*—ready to begin job training and become equipped with skills for success. Until homeless heads-of-household are brought to this *threshold,* the avenue to stable employment for them, and independent living for their families, will remain blocked. *In short, job training programs must address a great deal more than just work skills if they are to help homeless families find regular employment.*

Joblessness, Poverty, and Homeless Families in New York City

The fastest growing segment of the homeless population is invisible to most New Yorkers. It is young families—primarily single mothers with young children under the age of six. At present, nearly 6,000 families live in the City's emergency shelter system. For these families, homelessness is a symptom of extreme poverty, not merely a housing issue. It is not surprising then to find that homeless families

Table 1: Employment and Education Characteristics of Women Receiving Public Assistance and in a Job Training Program in New York City Non-Homeless vs. Homeless

Characteristic	Non-Homeless	Homeless
Average Age	29	22
Average Number of Children	3	2
Have a High School Diploma	60%	37%
Average Reading Level	10th grade	6th grade
Average Employment History	12 months	5 months

Source: Institute for Children and Poverty.

Homeless heads-of-household on public assistance are younger, have less education, and have a lower literacy level than their non-homeless counterparts, who are in job training.

share many of the same attributes of housed families living in poverty and receiving public assistance: low education levels, incidences of domestic violence and substance abuse, ill health, and a lack of job skills and work histories.

However, the condition of homelessness seems to represent a threshold that separates non-homeless mothers receiving AFDC from homeless mothers receiving AFDC, particularly with regard to job skills and educational background. For those young mothers and their families that have crossed that threshold into homelessness, the incidence of these critical factors is even more pronounced. As Table 1 indicates, the average homeless mother is much younger, and has less education, employment experience, and fewer basic skills then her non-homeless counterpart. Specifically, she reads at a sixth-grade level, while her non-homeless counterpart reads at a tenth-grade level; only thirty-seven percent of homeless mothers have graduated from high school, compared to sixty percent of those who are housed. Perhaps most alarming, homeless mothers lack basic education and skills—the ability to read, write, and communicate—to a far greater extent than non-homeless mothers. This deficit is a formidable barrier to finding employment at a wage level that will enable a family to escape homelessness and poverty. It is the threshold that must be crossed.

No Experience, No Opportunity

The Institute for Children and Poverty has found that homeless heads-of-household have virtually no history of work experience. Specifically, only four out of ten homeless heads-of-household have any work histories; even then, most jobs were either part-time or short-term, held for less than six months.

In contrast, the average non-homeless public assistance recipient has a more recent and sustained work history, usually lasting at least a year. Not only have young homeless mothers worked less than their housed counterparts, they also tend to work in a limited range of occupations and salaries. Of those with job experience, most have worked in low-wage, short-term jobs as cashiers or fast-food servers. Very few of these women acquired the skills or knowledge in these positions that would enable them to advance to positions with greater salaries and benefits, increased responsibility, and job security.

A comparison of public assistance histories between the two populations also reveals an alarming trend. Although many young homeless mothers are relatively new to the welfare system, *over fifty percent* report that they grew up in a family that received public assistance. By comparison, less than thirty percent of non-homeless women report the same. (See Table 2) And although eighty-two percent of all homeless families in New York City have been on public assistance for five years or less, this alone is not necessarily an indication of a short-term situation. Sadly, today's young homeless families may represent a new generation of welfare dependence, thus perpetuating a vicious cycle. Their limited access to education and employment opportunities, coupled with severe and intergenerational poverty, make it nearly impossible for a family to better its life. These same barriers to economic advancement and independent living become virtually unbreakable once families cross the threshold to homelessness.

When she arrived at the Saratoga Family Inn with her young sons, Anna thought to herself, "Another shelter. What's this place going to do for me?"

Table 2: A Profile of Public Assistance Dependence Non-Homeless vs. Homeless

Years on Public Assistance	Non-Homeless	Homeless
5 Years or Less	55%	82%
More than 5 Years	45%	18%
On Public Assistance as a Child	30%	50%

Source: David Ellwood, Harvard University; Institute for Children and Poverty.

Because homeless families today are younger than their non-homeless counterparts, the majority have been on welfare less than five years, but they may represent a new generation of welfare dependence.

Without a strong network of support services, female heads of homeless families have virtually no opportunity to halt this downward spiral. As Table 3 demonstrates, they are not equal players in the competitive fields of job training and employment. Without the minimum skills necessary to even qualify for traditional job training programs, homeless heads-of-household stand a very slim chance of completing, much less succeeding in, such a program. The challenge at hand is to work with homeless heads-of-household to find realistic pathways to sustained and meaningful employment.

Train and Gain: Integrating Services to Achieve Success

The barriers to employment that homeless families face are many, but most overwhelming are the practical skills heads-of-household lack—either the general skills that come from early childhood and high school education, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, or specific skills vital to contemporary workplaces, such as familiarity with computers. Beyond a lack of skills, however, is a much wider range of obstacles, such as the lack of affordable day care, medical benefits, or transportation, as well as the other problems that many homeless families face, including unstable housing, domestic violence, substance abuse, and a lack of familial and community relationships. Moreover, homelessness carries a powerful social stigma that can hinder homeless heads-of-household in finding a job or building trusting relationships with employers or co-workers once they do find a job.

Table 3: The Qualifications Needed for Public Assistance Recipients to Participate in a Typical Job Training Program vs. the Typical Female Homeless Head-of-Household

The typical job training program requires that the candidate:	The typical homeless head-of-household:
• be job ready	• has virtually no work experience
• have a high school diploma	• has a tenth grade education
• read at an eighth grade level or better	• reads at a sixth grade level
• possess basic skills, such as typing	• has few employable job skills
• provide his/her own day care	• has limited access to day care
• have no substance abuse history	• often has a substance abuse history
• provide his/her own transportation	• cannot afford transportation costs
• have a permanent address	• does not have a permanent address

Homeless heads-of-household stand very little chance of succeeding in, or even qualifying for, typical job training programs.

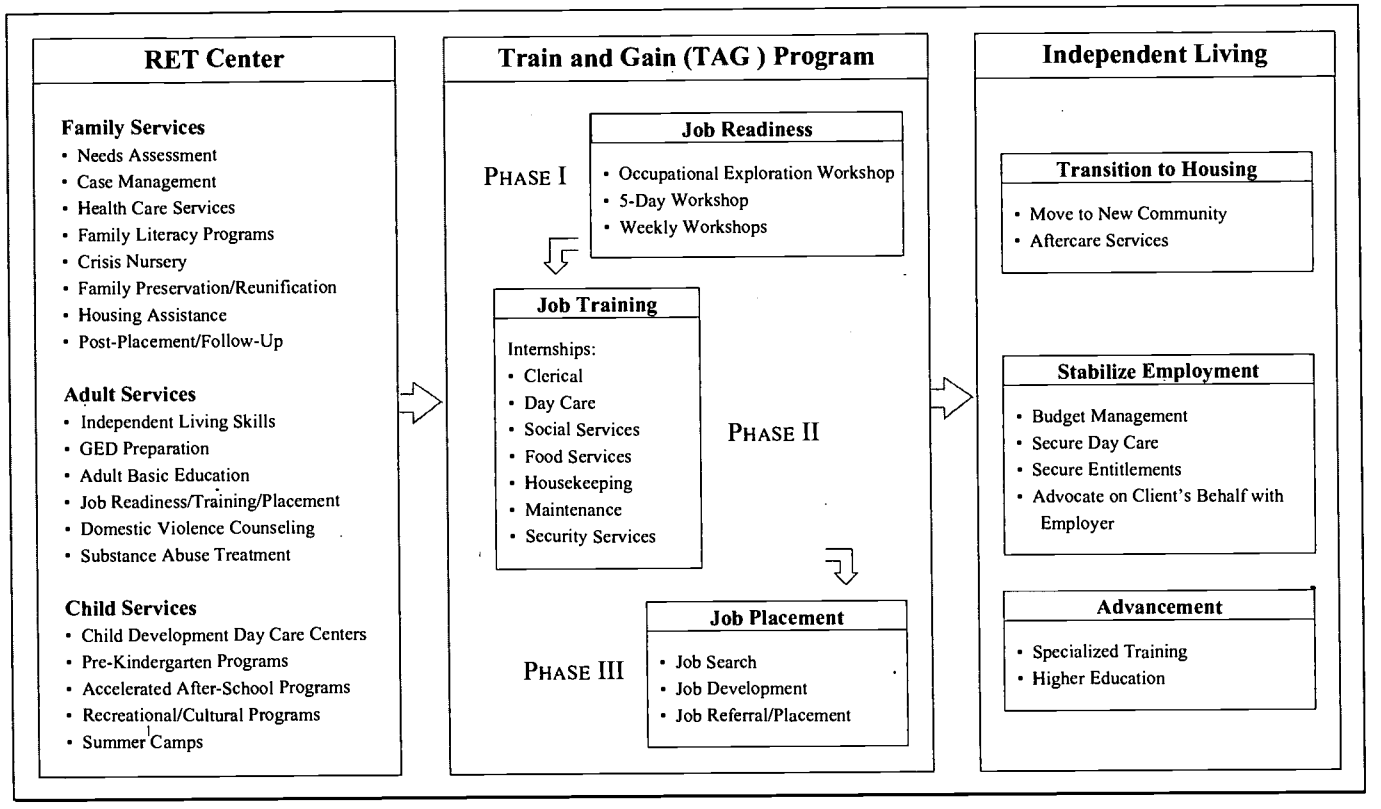
Although these are determining factors for job readiness, they are all but neglected in the few job training programs that serve homeless families. Instead, job training programs for homeless heads-of-household tend to have a limited and, ultimately, unsuccessful, focus solely on improving work skills. Worse still, many job training programs choose to avoid serving homeless clients altogether. In a recent survey of fifty-five urban Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) programs, a key avenue for employment training for low-income persons, over half stated that they made very modest efforts to recruit homeless persons. *Not surprisingly, two-thirds of JTPA programs surveyed offered no services aimed at addressing the multiple needs of homeless heads-of-household.*[1]

Just as most homeless families must cross a threshold with regard to their lack of skills and inability to enter the job market, programs designed to help homeless families must also cross a threshold. Heads of homeless families require much more integrated and intensive forms of skills training and education, combined with a strong network of support services. Job training must be only one element of a larger program if it is to prepare families for an independent, self-sustaining life. The clear need to reformulate traditional job training programs is best understood by examining the comparison provided in Table 3.

Having had very little success with traditional job training methods, HFH, after a successful pilot phase, implemented a comprehensive job training program that addresses the interrelated educational, job readiness, and social service needs of homeless families. Development of the Train and Gain (TAG) job readiness training and placement program is based on the understanding that a combination of education, training, and broad-based support is needed to prepare families for the critical transition from welfare to work. The fundamental goal of the TAG program is to help families break the cycle of homelessness, poverty, and welfare dependence and to emerge into sustained employment and independent living.

Why the TAG Model Is Different

The TAG program works simultaneously along several fronts. Those participants without a high school diploma are strongly encouraged to attend on-site adult basic education or GED classes before or during their participation in TAG. TAG offers the opportunity to learn employment skills through on-site practical workshops and on-the-job training, both of which reinforce literacy, math, and communication



skills. Once they are sufficiently prepared, participants are assisted with job search, placement, and follow-up services. A crucial innovation in the design of TAG is its location: the entire program is housed on site at HFH's Residential Educational Training (RET) Centers, making all aspects of the program readily accessible. Moreover, TAG participants can work within the program without having to neglect other responsibilities in their lives, specifically their children. TAG is integrated with other support services at the RET Centers, including child care, independent living skills workshops, health care, family literacy, substance abuse treatment, case management, and pre- and post-placement housing services. Rather than treating job training as independent from all other needs families have, the TAG model allows for a comprehensive and integrated march toward success in the workplace.

Anna completed her high school education and enrolled her sons in Saratoga's Jump-Start day care program. "I never thought that I would finish high school and that my sons would be learning too. We read together almost every night now."

The Components of Train and Gain

TAG is comprised of seven main components, all of which complement one another, and in sum provide comprehensive education, training, and support to each participant and family.

Pre-Employment Workshops

TAG participants attend a pre-employment, week-long workshop before beginning their job readiness training. The workshop helps participants become job ready by addressing such issues as researching and choosing a career; assessing skills, experiences, and work-related preferences; writing resumes and cover letters; interviewing; and meeting on-the-job performance standards. The workshop gives participants the opportunity to be self-reflective and to think about their skills and interests, as well as issues such as child care needs that may influence their employment options. Workshop facilitators and participants also discuss the educational, counseling, and training options offered at the RET Centers, and assess which combination of services is most appropriate for them.

Education and GED Preparation

TAG participants without a high school diploma or GED enroll in the RET Centers' on-site Alternative High Schools to prepare for the GED exam or finish their degree. TAG participants may also take part in basic education and family literacy programs to enhance their reading comprehension and literacy skills. Participation in these programs is based on individual need—a participant might choose to enroll in GED preparation simultaneously with the TAG program, or might decide that he or she needs to concentrate first on passing the GED examination before beginning the TAG program.

Mentoring and Skill-Building Internships

TAG participants may choose to receive employment training in one of the following career fields: child care, social services, security, janitorial services and housekeeping, building maintenance, food service, or clerical work. After they choose an internship, participants are matched with HFH employee mentors who work closely with TAG participants during their internships.

In the initial stage, participants work side-by-side with their mentors performing the daily tasks associated with a particular job. This stage helps participants become accustomed to the requirements of the work environment. TAG participants learn the importance of punctuality, good attendance, arranging child care, taking initiative, and accepting criticism. In the second phase of this stage, the core component of the program, interns perform job tasks independently as regular staff. Supervisors provide feedback and performance evaluations.

Practical Living/Useful Skills (PLUS) Workshops

TAG participants also attend PLUS workshops to improve their understanding and awareness of the many issues involved in living independently. Workshops provide instruction on daily living skills such as apartment maintenance, lease negotiation, budgets, and nutrition. The facilitators also use the workshops to provide a forum for participants to explore personal issues such as domestic violence, stress management, and parenting. PLUS workshops, offered to all RET Center residents, provide the skills families need to maintain permanent housing and lead independent lives.

Employment and Basic Skill-Building Workshops

During their TAG internship, participants attend weekly workshops that provide support and guidance on issues related to finding employment and working at a job. Pertinent topics include making the transition from welfare to work, conducting a job search, applying for transitional public assistance benefits, juggling parenting responsibilities and a job, finding affordable day care, and budgeting. In addition, issues that may arise on the job are also discussed, such as interacting with co-workers and supervisors, sexual harassment, and self-initiative. A substantial part of each workshop is devoted to building literacy skills through contextual learning and work-relevant reading, writing, and problem solving. Workshop activities include the following: writing resumes, reading want-ads, discussing relevant newspaper and magazine articles, building typing and word processing skills, and filling out work-related forms.

Job Search and Placement

Once TAG graduates have acquired needed job skills and training, they are placed in permanent, paid positions. Employment opportunities for TAG graduates are secured through contacts with the more than 70 vendors, contractors, and organizations with whom HFH conducts routine business. In addition, employment searches are conducted through job banks and various other government agencies that provide placement services. Graduates also receive assistance with finding employment through the newspaper want-ads section. To date, approximately *sixty percent* of all TAG graduates have found gainful employment in positions that pay between $17,100 and $21,600 annually.

Post-Placement Services

Job trainers and developers maintain regular contact with participants after they graduate from the program. Caseworkers assist with any problems that could threaten a graduate's new-found employment, including child care problems, transportation difficulties, poor job performance, or health problems. TAG graduates keep in touch with one another after they move into permanent housing through friendships formed during participation in the TAG program, as well as through the TAG Times, a newspaper for all TAG participants, graduates and workers. Also, the TAG Association for Working Parents provides regular opportunities for working TAG graduates to get together, support one another, network, and be recognized for their accomplishments. By providing a continuum to the support

network of social services found in the RET Centers, caseworkers, trainers, job developers, and colleagues provide TAG graduates with a valuable resource that helps them remain housed and employed.

As stated earlier, the ICP has found that the single element that makes TAG function smoothly is the integration of employment training with the other services offered on site at the RET Centers. Two of the primary reasons that job training for homeless women typically fails—inadequate day care and lack of access to transportation—are overcome with the ready availability of the RET Centers' on-site support services.

TAG participants are given priority for child care services, and their internship is structured to accommodate any GED or adult basic education classes in which they are enrolled. The TAG program's flexible approach allows it to treat each participant as an individual with his or her own identity and ambitions. Family caseworkers help to identify each family's needs and address these needs using the array of services provided at the RET Centers.

After Anna graduated from the Independent Living Skills Workshops, her caseworker referred her to the Train and Gain (TAG) apprenticeship program where she chose to learn the skills of a teacher's aide.

The TAG Model: Limited Cost With Substantial Savings

During the 1992-93 pilot period, forty residents participated in the TAG program. Of those that participated, seventy-five percent graduated and eighteen percent went on to higher education. Of those that graduated, roughly sixty percent have already obtained steady employment. While these results hold promise, a number of the programs, workshops, and internships had to be modified to more effectively serve the needs of the participants and ensure a high rate of completion. Flexibility is an important component in working successfully with homeless families. With a recent grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), HFH is currently expanding the TAG program. In the first year of this grant, HFH plans to enroll 210 participants, fully prepare and train at least seventy percent of those participating, and place half of all TAG graduates into jobs.

Table 4: The Annual Cost of the TAG Program and Potential Annual Public Assistance Savings (per participant/per year)

Number of Participants	Cost of TAG Program	Annual Public Assistance Savings
1	$1,100	$25,000
100	$110,000	$2,500,000
1,000	1,100,000	$25,000,000

Innovative approaches to traditional job training can offer significant savings while working to end homelessness and welfare dependence.

The cost of TAG, compared to the potential savings of this program, is nominal. Specifically, in addition to their regular annual homeless public assistance allowance, the program cost is only $1,130 per TAG participant. *For each TAG graduate who obtains employment, there is a minimum annual public assistance savings of approximately $25,000.* (See Table 4)

During its pilot period, the TAG program removed 24 families from the welfare rolls for a total financial savings of over $600,000. With the five-year HUD grant, HFH plans to train over 1,000 homeless heads-of-household in the TAG program, offering a potential net savings to the public of $2 to $4 million annually. By replicating the TAG model—or adaptations of it—to serve the roughly 6,000 homeless families estimated to live in New York City's emergency shelter system alone, programs such as TAG could provide a potential savings of $125 million per year by reducing homelessness and moving families off welfare.

TAG participants are given the opportunity to complete their education and to learn to live independently, while becoming working taxpayers and providing their children with the opportunity to escape the cycle of poverty that threatens to trap them indefinitely. *In short, the social and financial impact of expanding the program to greater numbers of homeless families throughout New York City—and the nation—would be profound.*

Over the Threshold

The long term success of TAG needs to be monitored and measured, and further tailoring of the program will likely occur. But one thing is clear: when there are programs that work, there is hope. TAG is an example of this hope. But

TAG also makes an important point, which is that there is no "silver bullet" to solve homelessness and to reform welfare. Poverty today, more than ever before, is a multifaceted problem. The solutions must reflect this reality. While there are employment programs that work with the more prepared and less disadvantaged of those on public assistance, there is a critical need for more innovative and demanding programming to lift those at the bottom of the poverty ladder up and over the threshold.

"When I came to Saratoga, I just wanted an apartment for me and my sons. I never dreamed I could learn and do so much, and never expected that this could happen to me."

Today, Anna lives independently in an apartment in the Bronx. She is employed as a teacher's aide at the Clinton Day Care center in Manhattan; every day she leaves her sons at a community day care center and goes to work. She is no longer homeless and no longer on welfare. Anna says, "It feels great!"

Notes

1. W. Adler and J. Lederer, "Barriers, Real and Imagined: Providing Job Training for the Homeless Through JTPA," *Labor Notes: Homeless in America: Self-Sufficiency Through Employment and Training Programs,* (National Governors' Association, Center for Policy Research, June 1991) p. 7.

An American Family Myth

Every Child at Risk

Values, Values, Values . . .

Today, the staggering numbers of single mothers and pregnant teenagers have been the driving force behind a growing clamor to restore family values.* Ever since former Vice President Dan Quayle focused popular attention on this issue, illegitimacy has been blamed for the dramatic increases in substance abuse, school dropout rates, and crime. The reality of American family life today, however, is far more complex than the simplistic picture painted by rhetoric and anecdote. Our nation's poorest families are at risk, and will remain so unless we make a serious attempt to understand and address the crisis of stability that faces them.

Today one in every four children is born to a single mother. One-third of those mothers—or 500,000—are teenagers.

In response, the Institute for Children and Poverty conducted a study on family structure and values among the poorest of all welfare recipients: *homeless families.*[1] The study found that not only has the traditional family structure broken down, but with this erosion have come stark contradictions between the *reality* of homeless women's lives and the values they hold. In fact, preliminary findings of the study suggest that the traditional family *may be obsolete* for this population. Of all the findings, however, one trend is paramount: education is a strong predictor of the stability of family structure *and* of a family's ability to rise out of poverty and become independent.

At eighteen, Tanya is the mother of a two-year-old son who has never seen his father and never known a home. Although she grew up in a working poor family, today she is homeless. She represents the "Notched-Down Generation."

*Family values, as discussed here, are defined as attitudes and opinions toward: marriage, parenthood, education, employment, independence and responsibility. The purpose of this report is to provide preliminary research, which demonstrates the paradoxes inherent in family values, particularly within the context of homeless mothers and children on public assistance. Further research will be necessary to gain a more solid understanding of the causes and effects of the complex trends highlighted in this paper.

In essence, the results of this study demonstrate that for America's poorest, the family has become a loosely knit, transitory group. And *unless education is emphasized,* children may age to adulthood without the critical skills, values, and self-esteem typically instilled in a traditional family structure.

The challenge that emerges, then, is not simply to attempt to instill "values" through the placement of children in orphanages or the financial sanctions of single mothers, but rather to develop viable policy options that enable families to stay intact and become self-sufficient.

The Obsolete Family?

The typical homeless family today consists of an unmarried mother in her early twenties with one or two children under the age of six, likely fathered by different men. In all likelihood she never completed high school, never worked to support her family, and had at least one abortion by age sixteen. There is a one in five chance that she was in foster care as a child; if so, she is more than twice as likely as other homeless mothers to have an open case of child abuse or neglect with a child welfare agency.

While some will argue that this snapshot reflects a deterioration in *family values,* it also depicts a fundamental change in the *make-up* of America's poorest families. While homeless mothers may believe in the ideal of the traditional family—children living with their married parents—for most, it has little connection to their current reality. For these mothers, marriage has all but disappeared, and single-parent households have become the norm. Today, *eighty-seven percent* of these mothers have never been, and perhaps never will be, married. In fact, homeless children today are three times more likely than non-homeless children to be born to single mothers.

Over the last decade, the rate of births to unwed teenagers increased by a daunting 120 percent.

Just as significant is the steep decline in their age. Only a decade ago, the average age of a homeless mother was thirty-five; today it is only twenty. Young and on their own, many of these mothers either never had the opportunity to learn the values needed to build a stable, supportive environment for their children, or simply chose to disregard it. Whatever the case may be, these families are in the midst of crisis.

The "Notched-Down" Generation

The childhood histories of these mothers provide startling new insight into the changes in their family structures and values. Many assume that today's single mothers must have been raised in equally poor and fragmented families and were not exposed to traditional family values such as marriage or a strong work ethic. *However, the study found that this was not the case.* Roughly fifty percent of the mothers were born into two-parent households. More-over, more than half of the mothers grew up in families that were self-sufficient and received *no* public assistance.

Children who grew up in families that were not receiving public assistance found themselves "notched-down" the social and economic ladder into dependence and homelessness.

These women and their children represent a disheartening phenomenon in our society: they are the *"notched-down"* children of the working poor. Like their middle class counterparts, they had to accept a lower standard of living than their parents. For the middle class, that decline meant smaller incomes, smaller homes, and fewer children. For those from working poor families—who were already living at the fringe of poverty—it meant dropping out of school, having a child, moving on to public assistance, and even becoming homeless. The economics of the 1980s forced many Americans to tighten their belts and further *"notched"* the children of the working poor down the social and economic ladder.

Regardless of whether they grew up in families dependent on public assistance or in working poor families, life for all these women quickly became uniform:

- *seventy-one percent did not plan their first pregnancy;*
- *sixty-three percent gave birth in their teens;*
- *twenty-one percent gave birth by age sixteen;*
- *fifty-six percent have had at least one abortion; and*
- *thirty percent had an abortion by age sixteen.*

As for their children:

- *close to half have had no contact with their fathers;*
- *three in four receive no financial support from their fathers; and*
- *virtually all are growing up dependent on public assistance.*

Pushed into dependency at such an early age, these mothers have either never acquired or have disregarded traditional family values for themselves. It is this neglect of values that places yet another generation—*their children*—at risk of dependency.

Beliefs and Values: Far From Reality

Not surprisingly, with the rise in single-parent families has come a shift in beliefs about marriage, family, and independence. Homeless mothers' beliefs about themselves are frequently contradicted by both their own lives and the more traditional values they wish to impart to their children.

While almost two-thirds agree that marriage has a positive effect on children, barely half feel it is important to be married. They have adopted the attitude that marriage is "no guarantee for the ideal family." Most chose not to marry the father of their child. *Whether it was ever an option for them or not, marriage is simply not the answer for these young women.*

Interestingly enough, this change in values may have stemmed from being a member of the *"notched-down" generation.* Whether they grew up on public assistance or in working poor families, virtually all of homeless mothers today receive public assistance—Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Because AFDC is driven by the presence of children in the household and not by marriage, single women who have a child are guaranteed a steady income. With their own welfare check, mothers need no longer depend on a husband to support their family. They are, in a sense, the *"Murphy Browns" of poverty.*

A family headed by a single young mother is seven times more likely to be poor than other families, and far more likely to end up on welfare.[2]

The critical difference between the character of Murphy Brown and these mothers, however, is that although homeless women can *bear* children alone, they have neither the

skills to support them independently nor to raise them to *be* independent. And unlike their middle class counterparts who may receive alimony or child support, these young mothers receive no supports and have few choices. Without a complete education or work experience, they are unequipped to succeed. And although homeless mothers may not depend upon a wage-earner in the family, they *have* become dependent on public assistance. Unless their current circumstances change dramatically, they may never be able to break the cycle of poverty.

But Not My Child. . .

Yet when mothers talk about their children, traditional family values are resurrected. The study revealed that despite fundamental changes in the structure of poor families and the mothers' cynicism toward marriage, *the values they say they want to instill in their children are those typically associated with a traditional family structure: responsibility, self-sufficiency, independence, and commitment to family.*

Most significant is that, in direct contradiction to their own lives, over eighty percent of mothers feel it is important for their children to be married *before* they have children of their own. Although most mothers were *under* age eighteen when they had their first child, they feel that their children should wait until at least age twenty-five before starting their own families. Perhaps envisioning brighter futures, *these mothers want their children's decisions on marriage and family to be decidedly different from their own.*

Homeless mothers are under the illusion that they are the "Murphy Browns" of poverty—'My child and I are making it alone.' In reality, they are lost in the cycle of dependence.

The reality is that they still aspire to live independently and responsibly, if not for themselves, then for their children. And although many argue that these mothers are content to simply live off of welfare, the majority declared that they plan to be off of public assistance in two years and ninety percent intend to get full time employment to support their families.

Experience dictates, however, that these mothers probably cannot achieve long-term independence from welfare. Although they may desire to become independent and self-sufficient, the obstacles they face are far too daunting to overcome without intervention. These mothers lack not only housing and jobs, but in addition are frequently forced to contend with a host of other problems: a lack of education, domestic violence, poor health, and substance abuse.

Likewise, their independent living and parenting skills are stunted, further jeopardizing their children's chances for healthy development. *Without education, their children may grow up to perpetuate the only reality they know: dependence, chronic poverty, and homelessness.*

Education: Unlocking the Door

Most paralyzing for the notched-down generation is their incomplete education. *Almost two-thirds of homeless mothers today did not graduate from high school.* In fact, most dropped out before the tenth grade, and many have less than a sixth-grade literacy level.

Not surprisingly, the study revealed that the third *who did graduate from high school* tended to come from more stable backgrounds with more traditional family values. They were more likely to have been born to married parents and more likely to have grown up in working poor families. Furthermore, a higher percentage of graduates said that they wanted to raise their children the way they were raised and that they thought marriage had a positive effect on children.

In keeping with this, mothers who graduated were much more likely to achieve traditional goals. Compared to those who did not finish school, graduates are:

- *four times more likely to have begun a family after age eighteen;*
- *three times more likely to have married their children's fathers; and*
- *almost twice as likely to have only one child.*

Without a doubt, *education is the key to better family planning, more stable family structures, and a greater chance of escaping poverty.* However, for homeless mothers, this key is missing. Unfortunately, just as most mothers have abandoned traditional family values, they have abandoned education, abandoned employment, abandoned the institution of marriage, and ultimately, abandoned independence. And without intervention and assistance, a homeless mother's final abandonment may be the most costly: her children.

In the last five years, the number of children placed in foster care in New York City alone tripled.

At the Crossroads: Responsibility and Hope

As this study reveals, family structure has broken down, and values have become increasingly at odds with reality. With even less than their parents had, homeless mothers are preparing to hand down this legacy to their children. Unfortunately, while suggestions for remedying the crisis of welfare are filled with the well-intentioned rhetoric of "responsibility," they are often misguided and shortsighted.

Substituting harsher welfare eligibility standards for disadvantaged families or relocating children to orphanages and ushering parents to shelters are not positive solutions. They will, in fact, result in enormous social and economic costs. Historically, orphanages and group homes have not worked, and presently young, single, female-headed families are failing. Simply put, these alternatives will further "notch" young families down.

American Family Inns: A "Right" Turn

In *American Family Inns*—Residential Education Training (RET) Centers for entire families—parents can return to their education while their children begin theirs; a young mother can become job-ready and trained for employment; and independent living skills can be instilled—eliminating dependence on public assistance. In essence, these Inns are the "main streets" of the 1990s—one-stop shopping centers where all necessary services can be cost-effectively and efficiently provided, under one roof. Without separating the family, American Family Inns can foster independence and initiative—keys to family "responsibility." Families move from education and social services to job readiness, job training, and finally, to permanent housing and employment.

These centers have been enormously successful in not only ending the cycle of homelessness, but in breaking the cycle of dependency as well. In *American Family Inns*, families are taught responsibility and embark on the socialization process of education, employment, and traditional family values. Through the educational jump start initiated here, many families leave these RET Centers with the desire to continue on to higher levels of training and education—imperatives to successfully compete in the increasingly sophisticated workplaces of the future.

A decade ago, the average age of a homeless mother was thirty-five, and her children were most likely adolescents. Whether or not one could have had a constructive impact on their lives will remain questionable. But for today's families—young nineteen- or twenty-year-old mothers with children under the age of six—the opportunity has never been greater, and the probability has never been higher, to profoundly affect and redirect their futures.

Moreover, all this can be achieved for a far lower cost than proposed alternatives. As Table 1 demonstrates, the cost of breaking up an average family of three on public assistance—placing the children in orphanages and forcing the parent to an adult shelter—is roughly $40,000 per child and $18,000 per adult, or approximately $100,000 per family annually. Exorbitant as these figures are, they are minuscule when compared to the social impact—and financial costs—that will result from this kind of stop-gap solution. By contrast, the expense of preserving family unity is nominal: placing a family in an *American Family Inn* costs only $12,000 for each person, or $36,000 per family annually. And if the tens of thousands of multiple dwelling properties owned by the federal government's Resolution Trust Corporation and existing emergency shelters across the country were converted into American Family Inns, the operating cost of these Inns could be reduced by as much as *twenty-five percent.*

American Family Inns cost one-third the expense of breaking up a family, but provide up to ten times the services with tangible, longlasting results.

When the length of stay in orphanages can be as long as eighteen years, and transience in and out of shelters perhaps a lifetime, the savings of *American Family Inns* is irrefutable. The need to replicate this standard is unquestionable, and the social impact of the concept can be phenomenal. Regardless of how so many young families have become less functional and more dependent on public assistance than at any other time in our past, there should be little debate as to what should be done.

Table 1: The Cost of Family Preservation vs. the Cost of Family Separation (per family/per year, in 1995 dollars)

Number of Families	American Family Inn	Orphanages and Shelters
1	$25,000	$100,000
100	$2,500,000	$10,000,000
1,000	$25,000,000	$100,000,000

If we do not learn from history, we will surely repeat its mistakes. By once again placing children in orphanages and young mothers on the street, we will simply be warehousing poverty. The key is not family separation, but family preservation through education, job readiness training, and the socialization of responsibility and independence. With the *American Family Inn* approach, we have the opportunity to *make history*; without it, we are destined to repeat one of the past's less sterling moments—with perhaps millions of orphanage placements, hundreds of thousands of young women in shelters, and hundreds of billions of dollars in unwarranted costs. *No child should be at risk, nor should the American family be allowed to become a myth.*

Notes

1. In July 1994, a detailed, 70-question survey was conducted through in-person interviews with homeless family heads-of-household in New York City; 498 families participated in this study, representing roughly 8 percent of all homeless families in the city shelter system. The findings in this report are based upon that study.
2. S. Levitan, *Programs in Aid of the Poor* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

A Tale of Two Nations

The Creation of American "Poverty Nomads"

Homeless Families: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

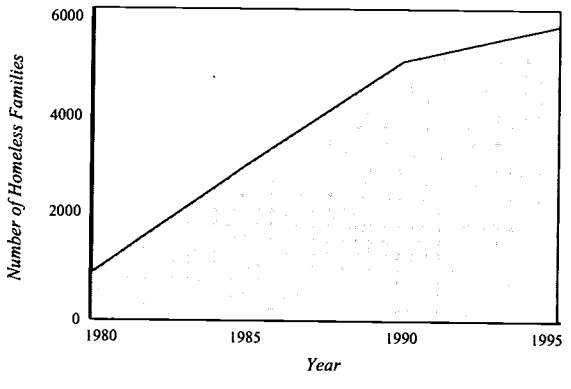
As we near the turn of the century, homelessness will undergo a marked transformation and enter a new stage of unprecedented growth. After shifting from an emergency housing problem in the early 1980s to one of severe, sustained poverty in the 1990s, homelessness is now on the verge of taking yet another radical turn. Proposed cuts in federal and state assistance to the poor will destabilize millions of families and, ultimately, force tens of thousands *more* into homelessness.

Historically, one-time housing emergencies—fires, hazardous living conditions, personal calamities—have been the primary cause of family homelessness. Forced to abandon their homes, families required short-term emergency shelter until they were able to locate new housing. In 1982, however, the Reagan Administration implemented systematic reductions in the national welfare safety net, and homelessness began to grow, taking on an entirely new dimension.

Today, children and families are the fastest growing subset of the homeless, representing a full forty percent of the population.[2] On average, they are substantially younger, far less educated and poorer than homeless families of just ten years ago. In effect, federal cuts in the 1980s have *"notched-down"* an entire generation into a chronic and debilitating poverty that claims homelessness as one of its most defining characteristics.

This report provides a snapshot of American homelessness today and a clear-sighted look at homelessness tomorrow.[3] With another round of sweeping cuts in government aid pending, we must examine their true impact. By further dismantling the safety net that now protects millions of families living on the edge, policymakers will ensure that the number of homeless and destitute families continues to grow well into the future. In short, we will usher in a new era of homelessness dominated by a growing class of Americans—*"poverty nomads."*

Figure 1: Increase in Family Homelessness, New York City (1980-1995)



Source: New York City Human Resources Administration.

In New York City the number of homeless families increased by more than 500 percent between 1980 and 1995. Nationwide, an estimated seven million Americans were homeless during the latter half of the 1980s.[1]

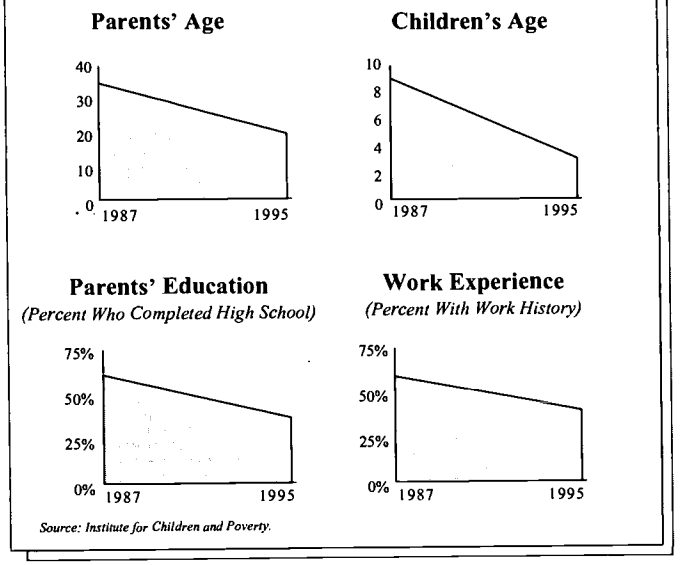
When her daughter was born, seventeen-year-old Alissa was forced to move out of her mother's home and in with her boyfriend. By nineteen, she was living doubled-up at her aunt's. Now, at twenty, she is in a shelter. She and her child never had a home. They are part of America's "poverty nomads."

A New Poverty

Today, over *400,000 families* are homeless in shelters across the US. Another 2.5 million live doubled- and tripled-up with friends and relatives—just one step away from official homelessness. In New York City alone, family homelessness has increased by over *500 percent* since 1982.[4] (See Figure 1) In short, homeless families have become an entrenched element of everyday life.

Along with the sharp increase in numbers, significant changes have occurred in the demographics of these families. A typical homeless family in the early 1980s consisted of a middle-aged woman with adolescent children. Now it is a twenty-year-old mother with children under age six. Unlike her earlier counterpart, today's homeless mother has

Figure 2: Shifting Demographics of Homeless Families (1987-1995)



By 1995, the average age of a homeless mother had dropped to twenty and her child's age fell to three. The number of mothers who completed high school fell from sixty-two to thirty-seven percent, while work experience declined to roughly a third.

probably never been married, has an incomplete education and has never been employed. (See Figure 2) While homelessness used to be a one-time experience of brief duration, today it is a long-term condition synonymous with an extreme new poverty that is engulfing a generation of young families.

These trends are key to understanding why families are flocking to shelters and why shelter beds are at capacity every night. No longer homeless for traditional emergency reasons, today's families are caught in a cycle of doubled-up housing, emergency shelters and homelessness.

In 1980 . . . A fire forced Barbara and her fourteen-year-old son out of their apartment and into a shelter. One month later, with emergency aid, they were back in their own home.

A Closer Look: The Poverty Nomads

The change in the characteristics of homeless families, along with their rapid increase in number, reflects the rise of a new class in America—one which may soon experience a surge of unparalleled growth. Recent data culled from families living in shelters reveals that their transience and instability have essentially rendered them long-term *"poverty nomads."*

Before entering emergency shelters most of these families moved continually, from one tenuous living arrangement to another. (See Figure 3) And contrary to popular belief, *only sixteen percent* became homeless due to one-time housing emergencies such as hazardous living conditions or financial hardships. Rather, before homelessness, most lived doubled- and tripled-up with friends and relatives in situations at times only slightly less chaotic than life in an emergency shelter. Once they exhausted those resources, a shelter became their only remaining option.

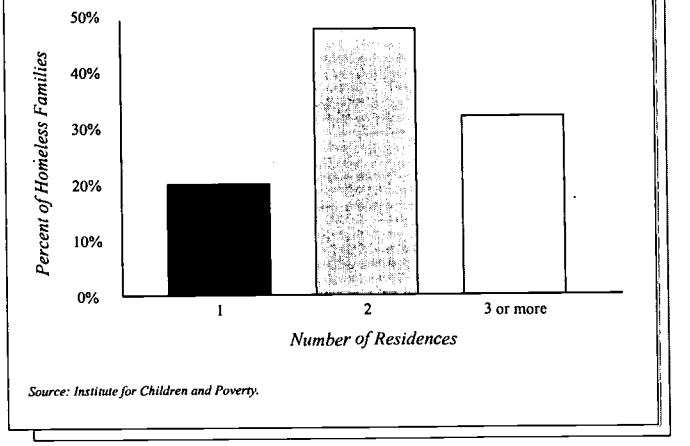
Specifically, prior to entering a shelter:

- *eighty percent moved two or more times in a twelve month period;*
- *sixty-three percent lived doubled-up with friends or relatives;and only*
- *fifteen percent lived independently in their own home or apartment.*

While some would argue that living doubled- or tripled-up is preferable to a shelter, the strains of living on the edge of homelessness clearly exacerbated already fragile family structures. *In fact, a number of homeless mothers reported having to relinquish at least one child to foster care just to maintain their doubled-up housing situation.*

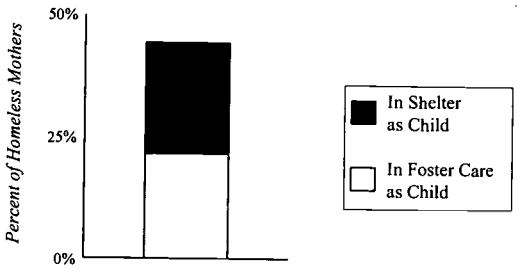
Yet shelters and foster care are not new to many of these mothers. Twenty-two percent reported that they grew up in foster care themselves, often aging out directly into the shelter system. Another twenty-two percent reported having lived in shelters as a child. In hindsight, it becomes clear

Figure 3: Number of Residences in Year Prior to Homelessness



Eighty percent of homeless mothers moved two or more times in the year prior to becoming homeless.

Figure 4: Disruptive Childhood Experiences of Homeless Mothers



Source: Institute for Children and Poverty.

Close to fifty percent of all homeless heads-of-household lived in either a shelter or in foster care as a child.

that these systems have failed a generation of children and families. For the *nearly one in two* mothers who experienced the disruption of shelters or foster care as children, the opportunity to develop responsibility and independence was lost. (See Figure 4)

For these families, instability and impermanence are a way of life. And while their histories may help explain why they are homeless, the undeniable reality is that many of these mothers are now raising their children just as they themselves were raised—*surrendering some to foster care and raising others in shelters.* Given the chaos these systems can introduce into a child's life, *their* prospects for a stable and productive future are dim.

Nonetheless, *three in four* of today's homeless mothers reported that they have virtually no options other than the child welfare or shelter systems. Their transience has rendered them dependent, and emergency shelters have become their homes. In fact, if they do eventually make it to permanent housing, a staggering fifty percent (one in two families) return to the shelters in less than a year.[5]

If the current systems of foster care and emergency shelter were created to help families in crisis, they have failed. Instead, they are breeding multi-generational dependency, with a significant and growing segment of the population knowing little else than *"nomadic poverty."* Such solutions are no solutions at all.

If implemented, proposed federal and state cuts will:

- *slash public assistance by twenty-six percent;*
- *reduce food stamps by one fifth;*
- *cut housing assistance by twenty-seven percent;*
- *deny Earned Income Tax Credits to over 3 million families; and*
- *push 1.5 million more children on to the poverty rolls.*

These reductions would be six times deeper than the deepest of the Reagan Administration's cuts.[6]

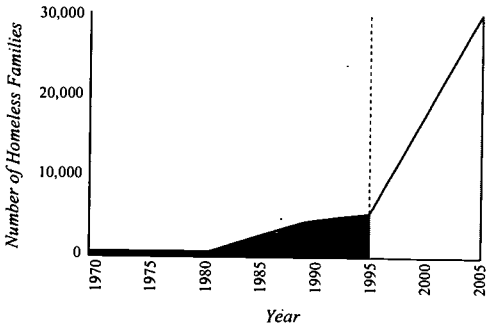
Into the Future: Homeless, Homeless and More Homeless

Over the last fifteen years, homelessness has evolved from an obscure emergency-driven situation affecting few, to a long-term poverty-driven condition affecting many. And while policymakers are still struggling to understand *this* marked transformation, additional changes lie just ahead.

The reality is that the ranks of today's *"nomadic poor"* are about to be swelled with hundreds of thousands of new homeless families. These families are now living independently—maintaining their housing with the aid of public assistance, housing subsidies or earned income tax credits.[7] Specifically, over one million families nationwide depend on both public assistance and housing subsidies to pay their rent and maintain independence, with several million more relying on at least one of these programs. And in New York City alone, *240,000 families* depend on housing supports. With a new round of federal and state cuts to these programs about to be implemented, an overwhelming number of families will find themselves forced from their homes and into emergency shelters—with scores of children potentially lost to foster care. (See Figure 5)

During 1995 . . . Twenty-year-old Alissa and her three-year-old daughter Ashley have lived only in overcrowded living arrangements and shelters. Alissa never had the opportunity to develop responsibility and independence. If nothing is done, Ashley faces the same.

Figure 5: Number and Projection of Family Homelessness, New York City (1970-2005)



Source: Institute for Children and Poverty.

While the homeless family population increased substantially between 1981 and 1995, even more dramatic growth may lie ahead. In New York City alone, combined cuts in AFDC and housing subsidies could potentially force anywhere from 30,000 to over 100,000 families out of their homes.

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By 1997 . . . Yolanda and Jeff had been raising their two sons in a Bronx apartment before they lost their housing subsidy. Now unable to afford rent, they must move into a shelter—sacrificing housing and independence.

For the first time in a decade and a half, *the loss of housing will become a primary cause of homelessness.* Thousands of *new* families will be needlessly *"notched-down"* into dire poverty and forced into an over-burdened shelter system. With emergency shelters providing little more than food and beds, policymakers must rethink the impact of such draconian cuts in government aid.

For today's homeless families, the answers lie in education-based solutions that emphasize job readiness and skills development—cornerstones of independence and responsibility.[8] But the fate of tomorrow's homeless is not inevitable. *By finding new ways to maintain current levels of support, we can ensure that these families will not have to join the ranks of the "poverty nomads."*

Over a hundred years ago, Charles Dickens wrote *A Tale of Two Cities.* If we continue on our current course, by the turn of the century our federal government will have to shoulder the responsibility for having fast made this a "tale of two nations"—*the haves and the homeless.*

Notes

1. US Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Priority: Home! The Federal Plan to Break the Cycle of Homelessness* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1994).
2. US Conference of Mayors, *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: 1994* (Washington, DC: US Conference of Mayors, 1994).
3. This report is based on a 1995 survey of 193 homeless families living in shelters operated by Homes for the Homeless (HFH) in New York City. The survey was conducted by the Institute for Children and Poverty. Unless otherwise noted, all data presented is based on this survey.
4. N. Wright, "Not in Anyone's Backyard: Ending the Contest of 'Nonresponsibility' and Implementing Long-Term Solutions to Homelessness," *Georgetown Journal on Fighting Poverty 2*, no. 2 (Spring 1995) p. 170; US Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Survey, March Supplement 1994* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, March 1994); New York City Human Resources Administration, *Update to the Single and Family Shelter Statistics* (New York: NYC Human Resources Administration, March 1991).
5. New York City Commission on the Homeless, *The Way Home: A New Direction in Social Policy* (New York: NYC Commission on the Homeless, 1992).
6. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *The Conference Agreement on the Welfare Bill* (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, December 1995).
7. Currently 5 million families (including 9.7 million children) rely on Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and 4.5 million families receive some form of housing assistance. Additionally, 20 million working Americans benefit from the Earned Income Tax Credit.
8. For fuller descriptions of innovative, education-based policy solutions that have already proven successful in NYC and around the country, please see R. Nunez, *Hopes, Dreams & Promise* (New York: Institute for Children and Poverty, 1994), or R. Nunez, *The New Poverty: Homeless Families in America* (New York: Insight Books/Plenum Press, 1996).

The Age of Confusion

Why So Many Teens are Getting Pregnant, Turning to Welfare, and Ending Up Homeless

Good Intentions . . . Grim Reality

The ongoing debate over the flaws in the nation's welfare system centers primarily on two highly charged social ills: *teenage pregnancy and long-term dependence on public assistance.* For the poorest and fastest growing segment of the welfare population—homeless mothers—these problems are both severe and inextricably linked. At an alarmingly young age, these women are becoming trapped in a chaotic cycle that offers little structure and few alternatives.

In one year alone, the government spent over $21 billion for social, health and welfare services to families begun by teenage mothers.[1]

The following report documents a history of unintended pregnancy, premature motherhood and failure to plan for the future. What becomes evident is that, for many young women, these factors are a clear formula for long-term welfare dependence and homelessness. Furthermore, there is considerable risk that these women may *never* acquire the foundation necessary to achieve self-determination and self-sufficiency—placing yet another generation, *their children,* at risk of teenage parenthood, public assistance dependance and homelessness.

Figure 1a: Percent of Homeless Women Who *Plan to Use* Birth Control Regularly

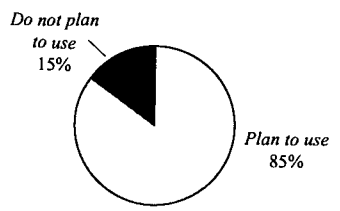
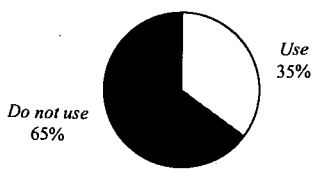


Figure 1b: Percent of Homeless Women Who *Regularly Use* Birth Control



Source: Institute for Children and Poverty.

While the majority of mothers say they plan to use birth control in the future, their current failure to do so reveals a gap between intention and reality.

Birth Control: A Discarded Precaution

Although *eight in ten* homeless mothers in this study state that they plan to use contraception to prevent future pregnancies, nothing in their past or current practice supports such claims.[2] (See Figures 1a & 1b) Rather, preliminary findings reveal that these mothers, many of whom have at least two children already, will likely continue giving birth to children they have not planned for and cannot support. This is most clearly evidenced by the following facts:

- *nearly half of these women have been pregnant in the last twelve months alone;*
- *three in four were teenagers the first time they got pregnant;*
- *only thirty-nine percent used contraception the first time they had intercourse;*
- *over three-quarters did not plan the birth of their first child—forty percent failed to plan for their second; and*
- *an astonishing sixty-four percent did not realize they were pregnant until their third month or later.*

Despite all of this, they were *not* unaware of family planning practices. In fact:

- *seventy-five percent knew about birth control when they first became sexually active;*
- *seventy-three percent knew where to get contraceptives;*
- *sixty-eight percent knew how to use them; and*
- *sixty percent felt their use was important;*

. . . yet very few mothers were able to translate this information into practice.

In short, while still remarkably young, these women have already established patterns of failure. Despite awareness *and* previous experience having unplanned children, nearly

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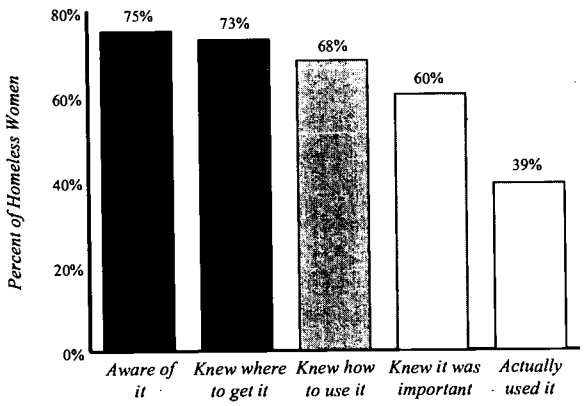
seven out of every ten mothers report that they still are not practicing birth control. Already dependent on public assistance to support the children they have, it is likely they will have more. Consequently, because of their inability to translate family planning knowledge into action, their chances of becoming self-determined and autonomous are seriously undermined. (See Figure 2)

Yet what is perhaps most significant is that homeless mothers' failure to actively engage in family planning is strongly associated with their low levels of education; *sixty-five percent* did not complete high school.

Figure 2: Homeless Women's Awareness of and Attitude Toward Birth Control at Onset of Sexual Activity



Source: Institute for Children and Poverty.

While most homeless mothers knew a great deal about birth control at the time they became sexually active, when it came to practicing it—less than half of them followed through.

And it is this group who:

- *became mothers at a younger age;*
- *were less likely to have used birth control the first time they had intercourse; and*
- *are less likely to use it now. (See Figures 3a & 3b)*

Clearly, becoming educated—acquiring the reasoning skills and pragmatic abilities to transform knowledge into achievable goals and action—is crucial for this group. Unless they return to complete their schooling, these young women—with larger families and limited abilities—face the nearly impossible task of becoming independent.

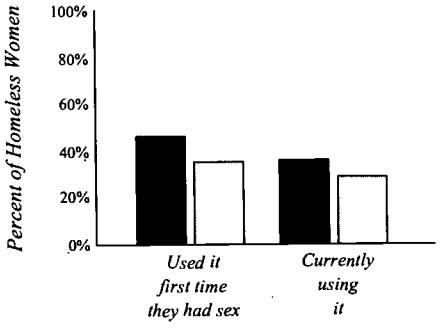
The fastest growing subset of the homeless are families headed by young mothers who dropped out of school and became pregnant in their teens.

The Catastrophic Cycle

Ultimately however, it is their children who suffer the most. Due primarily to the effects of single parenthood, low maternal education, and larger family size, children of teenage mothers are at risk of lower intellectual, social and academic achievement. In fact, the daughters of teenage mothers are more likely to become teenage parents.[3] Moreover, if they do follow the route of their mothers they *too* may end up on welfare and in shelters. With over one million teenage women becoming pregnant—and 500,000 giving birth—each year, it has never been more imperative that we implement aggressive strategies to stem this tide.[4]

Figure 3a: Early Onset of Sexual Activity and Childbearing Among Homeless Women

Figure 3b: Likelihood of Birth Control Use Among Homeless Women



Source: Institute for Children and Poverty.

Young mothers who complete high school tend to be more careful and more consistent when it comes to family planning.

The Abortion Option . . .

A recent Institute for Children and Poverty study has identified correlations between rates of birth control use, abortion, early motherhood and absent fathers.[5] Specifically:

- *sixty-five percent of homeless women do not use birth control;*
- *fifty-six percent have had an abortion—more than half that number have had more than one;*
- *thirty percent had an abortion before age sixteen;*
- *seventy-two percent were teenage mothers;*
- *seventy-five percent receive no financial support for their children from the fathers; and*
- *all depend on public assistance.*

The current political climate, with its penchant for massive reductions in welfare, will leave mothers with even fewer alternatives than they have now. As a result, these numbers will undoubtedly worsen. With family planning virtually nonexistent now and a reduction in public assistance on the way, the *abortion option* may soon be all that mothers believe they have left.

The Foster Care Route . . .

A recent study reveals an intergenerational relationship between teenage motherhood, homelessness and foster care.[7] By an average age of twenty, at least *one in five* homeless mothers already have children in foster care and more than *one in three* are on their way with open cases for abuse or neglect with the Child Welfare Administration. Yet most are simply continuing a cycle of abuse: more than *one in five* grew up in foster care, and they are much more likely to have histories of substance abuse, mental illness and domestic violence than other mothers.

With nearly seven in ten mothers opting not to practice birth control, the likelihood of more children, greater poverty and increasing reliance on the foster care route is virtually assured.

Pro-Planning, Pro-Family, Pro-Active

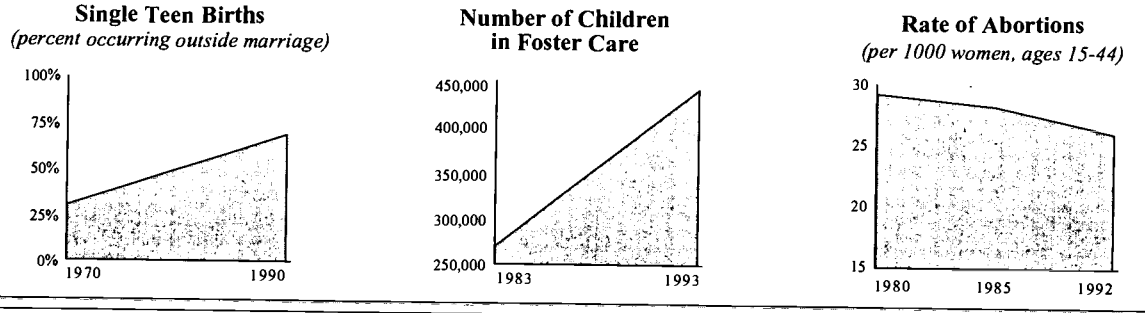
Current efforts to deter teenage motherhood—making birth control widely available and promoting awareness in schools and youth programs—have failed consistently. As Figure 4 demonstrates, each year increasing numbers of young women are embarking on the path of single motherhood. At the same time, efforts to reduce welfare dependence, such as state-initiated "family caps" and increasingly stringent eligibility standards, have also met with little success. Recent evaluations of New Jersey's "family cap," for example, have found no reduction in the birth rate to welfare mothers attributed to the state's policy.[6]

Moreover, today's proposed welfare reforms, which include severe funding cuts to public assistance, food stamps, housing subsidies and health care, will only destroy the remaining safety net and will surely stimulate poverty and homelessness. With fewer resources to raise their children, more women who become pregnant may be compelled either to have abortions or to relinquish their children to a burgeoning foster care system. Indeed, these trends are already emerging. The number of children in foster care has increased by a staggering sixty-four percent in only ten years. At the same time, homelessness among young, single, female-headed households has increased five-fold. And while abortions appear to have declined, and with fewer options for supporting their children in the coming years, mothers may soon choose to terminate pregnancies more frequently. (See Figure 4)

As this report's preliminary findings illustrate, for the poorest of the poor—homeless mothers—efforts to reduce teenage motherhood have had little success. Punitive or "just say no" policies are having little, if any, impact—providing only negative incentives and unrealistic answers.

Instead, policymakers *must* begin to experiment with alternate initiatives in a positive manner—not simply eliminating entitlements, but rather linking assistance to desperately

Figure 4: The Reality of Teenage Motherhood, Foster Care and Abortions[8]



Recent trends show dramatic increases in the number of births to single teenage mothers and the number of children entering foster care. If implemented, pending welfare reforms may well exacerbate these trends while also ensuring an increase in the abortion rate.

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needed educational opportunities. In short, to receive welfare, young homeless mothers must return to school. With mandated education, mothers will acquire the foundation necessary to make decisions responsibly, modify their current behavior and forge new directions.

This can be accomplished with broad, *residential-based* educational initiatives—emphasizing pro-active decision-making, practical skills and tangible alternatives—which instill in young mothers traditional family values of responsibility and independence.[9] Today's homeless mothers are younger, poorer, less educated and more numerous than a generation ago. As a result, there is a growing population in critical need of stability and direction. Education can help them focus on the future by providing the conviction and confidence necessary to *translate knowledge of birth control into active family planning and acquired skills into independence and autonomy*. Failure to apply proven, workable solutions such as these will surely result in increased abortions and foster care—forcing young women with no other resources toward options that are both socially undesirable and politically unfeasible.

With America's current momentum for change and a welfare population still young enough to be redirected, there has never been a greater opportunity to put poor families on track to self-sufficiency and self-determination. Before *another* generation is prematurely derailed, policymakers must experiment with mandated education-based options that will stop the catastrophic cycle of failed planning, early motherhood and lost opportunities. *Only by exploring the boldest of such strategies will we move from an age of confusion to one of responsibility—and end the cycle of children having children.*

Notes

1. Alan Guttmacher Institute, *Facts in Brief: Teenage Sexual and Reproductive Behavior* (New York: Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1993).
2. This report is based on a 1995 survey of 189 women living in Tier II family shelters operated by Homes for the Homeless (HFH) in New York City. It was conducted by the Institute for Children and Poverty. Unless otherwise noted, all data presented is based on this survey.
3. Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1993.
4. Alan Guttmacher Institute, *Facts in Brief: Teenage Reproductive Health in the United States* (New York: Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1994).
5. Institute for Children and Poverty, *An American Family Myth: Every Child at Risk* (New York: Institute for Children and Poverty, January 1995).
6. M. C. Laracy, *If It Seems Too Good To Be True, It Probably Is* (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, June 1995).
7. Institute for Children and Poverty, *Homelessness: The Foster Care Connection* (New York: Institute for Children and Poverty, May 1993).
8. Sources of data: Births *(Child Trends, Inc., 1995)*; Foster care *(US Dept. of Health and Human Services; US House of Representatives, Committee on Ways & Means, 1994)*; Abortions *(Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1994)*.
9. For further discussion of shelter-based solutions, see R. Nunez, "When a Shelter is Not a Shelter: The American Family Inn," *The New Poverty* (New York: Insight Books/Plenum Press, 1996). For second-chance homes, see K. Sylvester, *Second-Chance Homes: Breaking the Cycle of Teen Pregnancy* (Washington, DC: Progressive Policy Institute, June 1995).

Common Sense

Why Jobs and Training Alone Won't End Welfare for Homeless Families

Reform

With the advent of welfare reform, its proponents anticipate that millions of Americans chronically dependent on public assistance will be set free. In reality, far too many welfare recipients are trapped in a web of poverty from which they are incapable of escaping. Today, over a third of all welfare recipients are single, poorly-educated mothers with little or no work experience.[1] Worse yet, extreme poverty has forced 600,000 of these families into homelessness, in shelters and doubled-up living situations. Common sense dictates that unless the states, in their new role as leaders in welfare innovation, immediately forge strategic policy, these women and their children—yet another generation—will sink deeper into poverty and dependence.

While recent federal welfare reform legislation and state-level initiatives, such as those piloted in Michigan, New Jersey and Wisconsin, aim at fostering independence, they are misguided. Benefit reductions, eligibility restrictions, time limits, and family caps imposed in these and other states have merely distracted the public while reducing neither poverty nor expenses.

Employment, in particular, has been hailed as the "silver bullet"—the cure-all capable of eliminating welfare dependence and restoring to the public a sense that all Americans are earning an "honest dollar." Although insistence on immediate employment already receives criticism for leading participants only into dead-end, low-paying jobs, current employment initiatives continue to miss a basic yet essential point of welfare dependence: *a growing number of recipients do not even meet the minimum requirements necessary to participate in an employment training program, let alone secure continuous employment.*

The following report looks at the unemployability of today's poorest welfare recipients—*homeless families*—and explores avenues for overcoming their obstacles to gainful employment. These impediments cannot be addressed with traditional job training or immediate placement. Rather, it is job readiness* combined with education that is the key to equipping *all* welfare recipients with the skills and knowledge necessary for meaningful, permanent full-time employment.

No Experience, No Job, No Education, No Future

Today's homeless mother receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) typically has not completed high school, reads at the sixth grade level, has never worked and bears sole responsibility for her very young children. (See Table 1) For the fewer than four in ten who have worked, jobs have been part-time, short-term and almost exclusively low-wage service sector positions. Very few of these women acquired the skills necessary to advance to positions with higher salaries, increased responsibility and job security.[2]

Homeless mothers' overall youth and relative inexperience in managing the day-to-day obligations of money, family and home complicate their route to self-sufficiency even further than does their lack of work experience. What is more, service providers working with homeless families consistently report a disturbing prevalence of domestic violence, alcohol and substance abuse, and poor health.[3] These many difficulties, compounded by the traditional hurdles of child care and transportation, make the challenge of moving homeless mothers into employment monumental.

Table 1:
Homeless Mothers and Working Women: A Comparison

Characteristic	Homeless Mothers	Working Women
Married	9%	55%
Under Age 25	69%	17%
Completed High School	36%	89%
Have Children Under Age 6	80%	17%

Source: Institute for Children and Poverty; US Bureau of the Census.

*Job readiness, as it is used throughout this report, is defined as the skills, knowledge and work ethic necessary for successful long-term employment, including developing time management skills, learning to take direction and responding to supervision.

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Table 2: Why Job Training Rarely Works

The typical job training program requires that participants:	The typical homeless head-of-household:
• *be job-ready*	• *has no work experience*
• *have a high school diploma*	• *has a tenth grade education*
• *read at the eighth grade level or better*	• *reads at the sixth grade level*
• *possess basic skills, such as typing*	• *has few employable job skills*
• *provide their own day care*	• *has limited access to day care*
• *have no substance abuse history*	• *has a substance abuse history*
• *provide their own transportation*	• *cannot afford transportation*
• *have a permanent address*	• *has no permanent address*

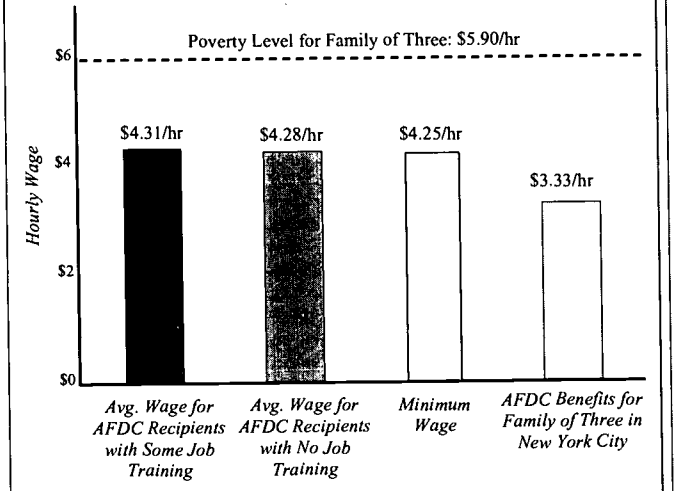
Source: Institute for Children and Poverty; National Governor's Association

Employment Training . . . . . Is It the Answer?

The provision of job training has been the routine response to welfare dependence. Yet traditional training programs typically require that participants have a high school diploma, read at least at the eighth grade level and already possess basic work skills.[4] Lacking even fundamental skills, such as reading, writing and arithmetic, homeless welfare recipients are unable to qualify for—much less succeed in—standard training programs. (See Table 2)

In addition to maintaining unrealistic eligibility standards, most training programs focus almost exclusively on teaching work skills. While some offer crucial job placement services, few offer child care and transportation assistance, and virtually none offer all three. Worse still, the vast majority offer *no* services aimed at addressing the multiple and extreme needs of homeless participants, effectively nullifying a mother's ability to take full advantage of training.

Figure 1: Comparison of Hourly AFDC, Minimum, and Poverty Level Wages

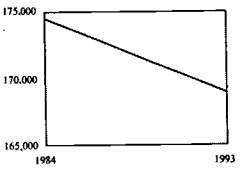


Source: Institute for Women's Policy Research; Institute for Children and Poverty.

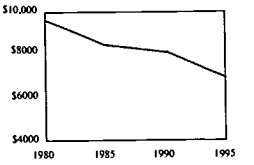
For the most part, a homeless mother's options result in the same outcome—an income that keeps her and her children far below the poverty line.

Figure 2: Changing Times and Trends[5]

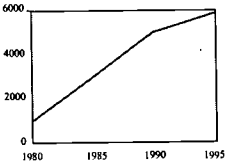
Decrease in Number of Entry-Level Jobs*
New York City, 1984 - 1993



Maximum AFDC Benefits for a Family of Three**
New York City, 1980 - 1995



Increase in Number of Homeless Families
New York City, 1980 - 1995



Over the last fifteen years, the number of available entry-level positions has shrunk, the real value of AFDC benefits has dropped and the number of homeless families has skyrocketed.

**Specifically, jobs that AFDC recipients are most likely to obtain, as noted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.*
*** In 1995 dollars.*

Perhaps most discouraging, employment training—already a significant undertaking for any single mother—does not necessarily lead to jobs that result in self-sufficiency. A recent study found that AFDC recipients who participated in training and then secured jobs made only *three cents* more per hour than those without any training.[6] (See Figure 1) Not surprisingly, new jobs for the trained and the untrained alike are primarily in the low-paying service industries—food, cleaning, and personal services.[7]

While traditional employment training offers little hope for homeless mothers, the alternative—looking for work with no marketable skills—is even more grim. Unskilled workers face a shrinking demand for their services as the work world becomes increasingly automated and technologically sophisticated. New York City alone lost over 175,000 entry-level and blue-collar jobs in the 1980s; further declines are anticipated in the future.[8] In Illinois, there are seven job-seekers for every entry-level job paying poverty wages and 222 job-seekers for every entry-level job paying the Illinois *livable* wage.[9] Clearly, for a growing class of poor Americans jobs are unattainable and independence is a lofty ideal. (See Figure 2)

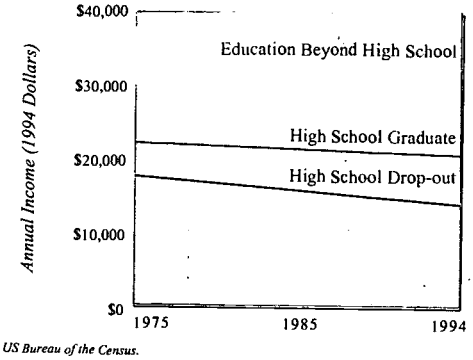
The Route to Independence: From Public Assistance to Job Readiness, Further Education and a Future

Breaking the multi-generational cycle of poverty, lifetime dependence and homelessness demands a policy response that is radical in design, yet steeped in common sense and historical knowledge. An aggressive dual strategy premised on both job readiness and education is the key to freeing today's recipients—*and tomorrow's*—from continued dependence.

Traditional employment training must be revamped to move beyond skill-building and into job readiness. Job readiness programs ensure that participants graduate not only with an understanding of the basic skills needed for work, but with an ability to integrate work into their lives. Following literacy training, adult basic education, General Equivalency Diploma preparation and employment workshops, on-the-job internships immerse participants in a simulated work environment and orient families toward the goal of independent, self-sustaining lives. Essential job search assistance, placement and post-placement follow-up then enable welfare recipients to make the transition to work. Mentoring, support services, child care and transportation also must be integrated into this continuum of programming to ensure uninterrupted participation. Only through such a comprehensive design will long-term dependents reach the point where they are job ready—armed with the confidence and the will to lead their children to a better life. In short, ready to be permanently employed.

While promising indicators suggest that existing job readiness programs already have the capability to place participants in secure employment, the benefits of job readiness are multiplied when it is linked to continuing education.[10] Although job readiness instills essential workplace skills, the academic training provided by vocational school, community college or other institutions of higher education teaches recipients how to think critically and problem solve. This preparation is essential in today's competitive work world, and is in reality the only answer to the declining opportunities open to the uneducated. While women with no high school degree have seen their salaries stagnate and actually have suffered a decrease in earning power over the last twenty years, women with a high school degree or better have increased their average earnings by between ten and twenty-five percent.[11] (See Figure 3)

Figure 3: The Education Factor— A Growing Gap, 1975 - 1995



Source: US Bureau of the Census.

Now more than ever, education opens the door to opportunity.

A Common Sense Solution

To move off of public assistance, homeless welfare recipients must use job readiness as a springboard to more education. By emphasizing personal responsibility and the benefits of self-determination, job readiness prepares individuals for the rigors of continuing education—a preparation they clearly cannot afford to do without.

Job readiness and education programs already have been piloted successfully at homeless shelters and multi-service centers around the country and are now poised for replication and expansion. Once similar programs are fully embraced, infinite possibilities emerge for successful state-level welfare reform: time limits can be imposed that require recipients to earn their associate's degree or its equivalent within twenty-four to thirty-six months; participation in work-study can be mandated to further prepare them for employment and to satiate the public's demand that recipients work for their check; and rather than a punitive family cap denying additional benefits to welfare mothers who have more children, job readiness and schooling can encourage mothers to establish goals and direction—a natural incentive for family planning and the postponement of further childbearing. (See Table 3)

Table 3: A Prescription for Timely Action

Option 1:	Family cap; mandated workfare; and twenty-four- to thirty-six-month time limit imposed on families on welfare.
Outcome:	No skills; no job with sustainable income; no money to support children and no hope for change.
Option 2:	Families on welfare are placed on a mandated job readiness/education track with a twenty-four-month time limit for receiving benefits.
Outcome:	Skills; preparation for higher education; job with livable wages; support and positive role modeling for children.

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Just as most welfare recipients must cross a threshold to overcome their lack of skills and their inability to enter the job market, public policy that aims to end welfare dependence also must cross a threshold to bold, creative and workable strategies. Through an understanding of the needs, limitations and barriers confronting the most disadvantaged welfare recipients—homeless mothers—every one of the fifty states can create policy to redirect the path of all those dependent on public assistance.

Over 200 years ago in *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine wrote, "We have it in our power to start the world over." With federal welfare reform in place, the time to restart is now. By focusing on a common sense policy of job readiness and education, states can break the chains of poverty and dependence and forge a new social contract ensuring responsibility, employability, opportunity and independence for all. We *can* end welfare as we know it.

See Appendix A:
Case Study: The Dollars and Sense of Welfare

Notes

1. L. Pavetti, "Who is Affected by Time Limits?," *Welfare Reform Briefs,* no. 7 (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, May 1995) p. 3.
2. For more details on homeless mothers' employment see R. Nunez, *The New Poverty: Homeless Families in America* (New York: Insight Books/Plenum Press, 1996).
3. US Department of Housing and Urban Development, *Priority: Home! The Federal Plan to Break the Cycle of Homelessness* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1994) p. 25.
4. W. Adler and J. Lederer, "Barriers, Real and Imagined: Providing Job Training for the Homeless Through JTPA," *Labor Notes: Homeless in America: Self-Sufficiency Through Employment and Training Programs,* National Governors'Association, Center for Policy Research (Washington, DC: National Governors' Association, July 1991) p. 7.
5. Sources of data: *Jobs* (NYS Deptartment of Labor, 1996); Institute for Women's Policy Research, 1995); *Benefits and Homelessness* (NYC Human Resources Administration, 1996).
6. Institute for Women's Policy Research, *Welfare that Works: The Working Lives of AFDC Recipients* (Washington DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 1995) p. 49.
7. Institute for Women's Policy Research, 1995, p.49.
8. A.G. Hevesi, *Cuts Without Care: The Likely Impact on the City of State Budget-Cut Proposals* (New York: New York City Office of the Comptroller, April 1996) p. 52.
9. V. Carlson and N. Theodore, *Are There Enough Jobs? Welfare Reform and Labor Market Reality* (Chicago: Illinois Job Gap Project, December 1995) p. 11.
10. R. Nunez, *The New Poverty: Homeless Families in America*, Chapter 6.
11. R. Blank, "Outlook for the US Labor Market and Prospects for Low-Wage Entry Jobs," *The Work Alternative: Welfare Reform and the Realities of the Job Market,* eds. D. Smith Nightingale and R.H. Haverman (Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 1994) p. 42; US Bureau of the Census, 1995.

For Whom The Bell Tolls

The Institutionalization of Homeless Families in America

A peek through the doors of New York City's Emergency Assistance Unit (EAU)—the entryway into the City's family shelter system—presents a shocking snapshot of life for the poorest of America's welfare families—the homeless. Burgeoning with young single mothers and children sitting on floors and sleeping in chairs as they wait for someone to send them on to temporary shelter, the EAU offers a vivid example of the overburdened institutions* of support on which poor families depend daily.

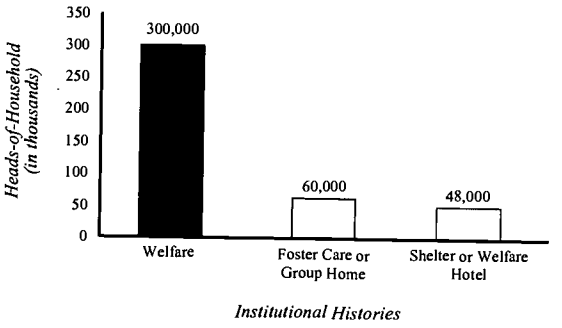
This is only a snapshot, however; the reality of life for these families is even bleaker. Homeless families today are younger, less educated and poorer than those of even ten years ago. Most are headed by a young single mother with one or two children under the age of six. Chances are this young mother dropped out of school by the tenth grade, reads at the sixth grade level, and has never held a job for longer than six months.

Worse yet, if the entryway into America's institutions of support is jammed with families needing assistance, the exit is nowhere to be seen. Mounting evidence shows that for many homeless mothers, the visit to the EAU is merely the latest in a lifetime of institutional contact. Nearly fifty percent were introduced to America's institutions of support when they were children themselves. This long-term dependence indicates a serious and widespread failure among these institutions to serve as a doorway *out of* poverty rather than *into* "the system."† This report will address the failure of America's institutions of support, this failure's impact on the nature of poverty across the country, and common sense options for turning failure into success.

A History of Institutional Entrenchment

Widespread criticism of long-term dependence on public assistance has consistently focused on the number of years an adult spends on welfare. This limited debate, however, merely hints at the reality of lifetime dependence faced by the poorest of the poor. Fifty percent of heads-of-household who are homeless today grew up in families that spent time on welfare.[1] Sixteen percent spent time in foster care, group homes, shelters or welfare hotels before they turned eighteen.[2] (See Figure 1)

Figure 1:
Homeless Heads-of-Household Today with Histories of Institutional Contact as Children



Source: Institute for Children and Poverty, 1996.

At least fifty percent of today's homeless parents spent time dependent on America's institutions of support when they were children themselves.

Such extensive histories of participation in America's institutions of support are not spread evenly across the homeless family population. Indeed, roughly fifty percent of homeless heads-of-household grew up in working poor families; while these families never received public assistance, their children—today's homeless parents—were notched down into dependence and homelessness by the stagnating economy, high unemployment, cuts in education and social services, and loss of low-income housing during the 1980s.[3]

The other half of today's homeless parents, however, were *not* notched down from the working poor, but instead spent their lives entrenched within our system of institutional support. Take the example of Maria. Maria spent her early childhood moving with her mother between overcrowded shared apartments and welfare hotels. Though they received public assistance, the small family never had enough money to move into stable housing; nor did they have access to the education or job training that would enable Maria's mother to maintain steady employment. When Maria was ten, her mother descended into alcoholism and Maria was sent to live with foster parents. She moved on to a second foster

* "Institution" as it is used throughout this paper is defined as an agency, organization or program established to provide social or financial services—i.e. foster care, homeless shelters, and welfare.

† "System" as it is used throughout this paper is defined as the network of institutions in America that work to provide services to the poor.

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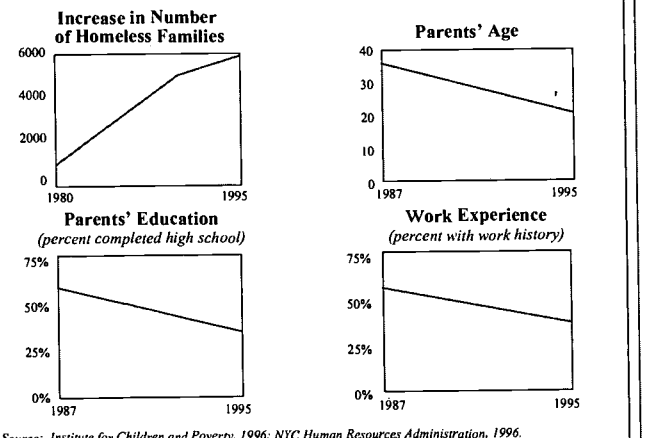
family only a year later when a social worker found evidence of abuse. While this second family did not actively abuse Maria, it paid her little attention—so little, in fact, that by the tenth grade she was missing more than a third of the school year. At seventeen, Maria discovered she was pregnant. Kicked out by her foster family, and abandoned by the father of her child, Maria joined the ranks of the homeless. She gave birth while living in a shelter; *her daughter was born into the system.*

A Lifetime of Dependence: Poor Preparation for Self-Sufficiency

The extended relationship between America's system of social service institutions and families like Maria's indicates a serious failure to adequately address the needs of the country's poor, and especially its children. These structures—established to bridge the gaps when money is low, resources are scarce, and devastation is imminent—were initially intended to provide only temporary support. For many poor families, these institutions did provide the short-term support they needed to avoid falling into despair. Thousands of others, however, moved off of one institution's rolls only to reappear on another's a short time later.

Those thousands who were unable to regain stable footing in the early 1980s needed more than a bridge; they needed a ladder out of the constant turmoil of poverty. They lacked not just the money necessary to *survive,* but also the community support and options for change necessary to *live.* Like Maria, the children of these families—enmeshed in situations of neglect, often violence, despair and resigned dependence—saw few paths to success open for them. They needed not merely additional money, but a helping hand, a guiding voice and an open door. For lack of these, *yesterday's poor children are now today's homeless parents.*

Figure 2: Shifts in Homelessness and Homeless Families in New York City



Source: Institute for Children and Poverty, 1996; NYC Human Resources Administration, 1996.

As the number of homeless families continues to climb, the obstacles these families face in their pursuit of stability and independence are mounting: the average age, education and work experience among homeless parents have decreased steadily since 1987.

At one time, community supports—schools, community organizations, and extended family—provided this assistance. However, over the last fifteen years each day has brought more news about the decay of our schools, the evaporation of family support, and the fear that is replacing kindness among our extended communities. As a result, the institutions the government funded in the 1960s to serve as a substitute safety net when community supports fell through found themselves in the 1980s responsible for meeting *all* of the vastly increased needs of America's poor families—as well as those needs of working poor families suddenly floundering within a weakened economy.

These institutions were neither established nor equipped to deal with problems of such magnitude or complexity. Caught between a structural myopia that focused on providing just enough food and shelter to help struggling families survive through the night and a public unwilling to make the commitment necessary to expand this narrow view, institutions of support found themselves watching family after family, child after child, walk away no worse but no better off than when they first sought assistance. While these families received enough money to survive for the moment, they never received the investment that would enable them to excel tomorrow. They never received guidance toward a quality education, adequate family counseling, or a job paying a living wage. They never learned to live independently. Instead, they learned to accept the instability, displacement, and dependence of poverty while in the institutions of foster care, shelters and welfare.

Today's homeless parents—the children of those families who sought help throughout the last fifteen years and never received it—now struggle with families of their own, unfamiliar with life independent of public support. Like Maria, they have descended further into poverty, and even into homelessness. In New York City alone, the number of homeless families grew by 500 percent between 1982 and 1994, reaching nearly 6000. At the same time, the average age, education and work experience among homeless parents decreased steadily.[4] (See Figure 2) Cities and rural areas across the country have seen similar trends. An estimated 400,000 families nationwide are now without homes and dependent on their local shelter system.[5] These are America's "poverty nomads", shuffling between shelters and temporary shared housing situations, always focused on

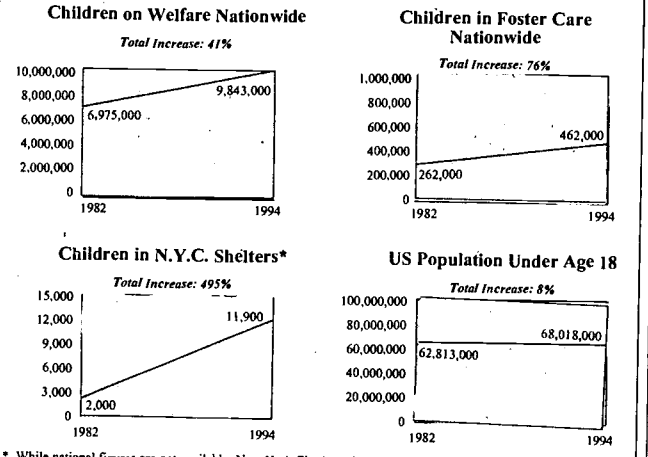
where they will spend the night tomorrow, not on where they and their children will be a year—or fifteen years—from now.[6]

Today's homeless parents have not "slipped through the cracks" of society, out of view and out of reach of the institutions with the supposed power to help. On the contrary, they have never left these institutions' sight. Instead, they have stagnated in a system ill-equipped to take the radical steps necessary to break the cycle of poverty and dependence.

What About the Future?

The despair we see today at family shelters around the country only hints at the devastation we will see tomorrow if no change is made in the system. As the number of families trapped in the system continues to rise, the number of children growing up dependent on institutions of support rises with it. (See Figure 3) If history continues to repeat itself, the children of today like Maria's daughter will pass the lessons of their youth—instability, dependence and hopelessness—onto their own children in the future. The result will be exponential growth in the number of dependent Americans. Ironically, this boom will be not only a product of institutional failure, but also an ongoing cause. Our institutions of support already are overwhelmed. The more overburdened they become, the less likely those needing help will be to receive the assistance they need—and the more likely they will be to return in the future.

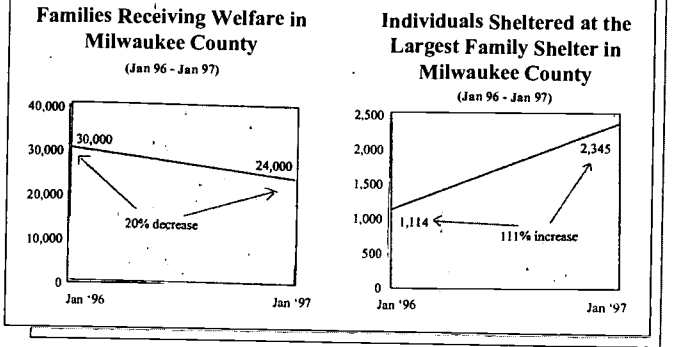
Figure 3: Change in the Youth Population *1982 - 1994*[7]



* While national figures are not available, New York City homeless data has been demonstrated to be reflective of homelessness across the country. Anecdotal reports of dramatic increases in the number of children in shelters across the country can be found in *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities* published annually by the US Conference of Mayors since 1982.

The growth in the numbers of America's children dependent on welfare, foster care and emergency shelters continues to outpace the growth of the general population in that age group. By 1994, over 460,000 children were in foster care, and nearly 10 million were dependent on welfare. Nearly 12,000 children were homeless in New York City alone.

Figure 4: The Relationship Between Public Assistance Restrictions and Homelessness: The Milwaukee Story[8]



The Pay for Performance (PFP) *pilot welfare program went into effect in Milwaukee County in March of 1996. Over the following year, 6,000 families lost their benefits under new restrictions, and another 4,020 had their benefits reduced. Joy House, the largest family shelter in Milwaukee, reported an increase of 111% in the number of individuals sheltered, including those families referred by other overwhelmed shelters. The restrictions of PFP will soon apply to all recipients of welfare in Wisconsin under the state's new welfare plan, W2.*

Worse yet, rather than creating alternatives by addressing the *causes* of dependence—under-education, lack of job skills and unavailability of day care—current reforms strike at the *symptom*: long-term receipt of welfare. The immediate results of such misguided reforms already are evident in cities like Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where reductions in the welfare rolls have not promoted independence but only sent the formerly dependent plummeting deeper into poverty: after only one year of heightened welfare participation restrictions, the largest family shelter in Milwaukee reported an increase of *111%* in the number of individuals sheltered each month. (See Figure 4)

Investing in the Future, Transforming Lives

By investing only in the short-term survival of families rather than their long-term independence, institutions of support ensure that those who come to them most in need will likely return. The result is not just continued dependence, but a descent further into poverty, and ultimately an increase in homelessness.

This cyclical poverty must be dealt with head on. Fifteen years of missed opportunities have resulted in today's homeless crisis. If we continue to pass up opportunities to

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Table 1: The Required Investments

***Education** may not be their only chance, but it's their best chance*

- basic literacy
- GED preparation
- options for higher education

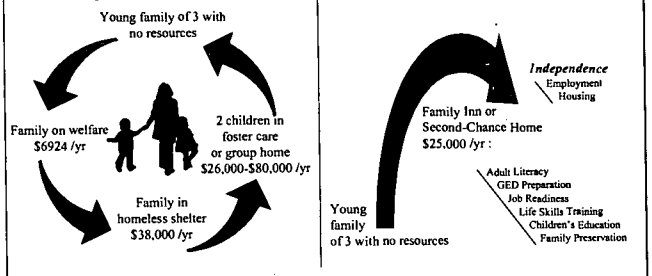
***Job Readiness** comes before job training or placement*

- time management skills
- ability to take direction
- ability to respond to supervision
- on-the-job internship experience

***Life Skills** are critical to crossing the threshold*

- parenting
- budgeting
- apartment maintenance
- health care and nutrition
- stress management
- ability to overcome domestic violence

Figure 5:
The Costs and Benefits of Investing Today



Source: Institute for Children and Poverty: New York City Department of Homeless Services; New York City Human Resources Administration; New York State Department of Social Services. 1996.

make a difference, we can expect to see the children of today's homeless families knocking on our shelter doors within the next few years.

All programs for poor and homeless families must focus not on dependence today, but on *independence for tomorrow.* (See Table 1) This means replacing make-work with *job readiness*; preventing child abuse and neglect not with foster care or orphanages but with *family preservation and education*; and responding to the scourge of homelessness among welfare-dependent families not with welfare hotels or emergency shelters but with residential education/ employment training centers, such as *Family Inns* and *Second-Chance Homes.*[9] (See Figure 5)

Since our institutions of support were first established, the landscape of poverty has changed. The current numbers are more vast, the need more intense, and the alternatives even more limited. It is time to respond to the tolling of this bell; the future of our nation, not simply its poor and homeless, depends upon it. Only through a commitment by every institution, every policymaker, and indeed the public at large will poor families like Maria's start down the path to self-sufficiency. Only then can we end the institutionalization of poor families in America and break the cycle of poverty and dependence.

Notes

1. From a survey conducted with 498 homeless family heads-of-household in New York City, June 1994.
2. From a survey conducted with 487 homeless family heads-of-household in New York City, June 1996.
3. Institute for Children and Poverty, *An American Family Myth: Every Child at Risk* (New York: Institute for Children and Poverty, January 1995) p. 2; R. Nunez, *The New Poverty: Homeless Families in America* (New York: Insight Books/Plenum Press, 1996) pp. 9-18, 47.
4. New York City Human Resources Administration, 1996.
5. Institute for Children and Poverty, 1996; US Conference of Mayors, *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: 1996* (Washington, DC: 1996).
6. For more on "poverty nomads," see Institute for Children and Poverty, *A Tale of Two Nations: The Creation of American "Poverty Nomads"* (New York: Institute for Children and Poverty, January 1996).
7. Administration for Children and Families, "AFDC Characteristics—1994—Table 16" (Washington, DC: 1997), http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/; American Public Welfare Association, "Frequently Asked Questions" (Washington, DC: 1997), http://www.apwa.org/; New York City Department of Homeless Services; US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1995* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1995) p. 15; US House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, *1994 Green Book* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1994) p. 395.
8. Joy House, Milwaukee, WI: February 1997; Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Madison, WI: February 1997.
9. The "Family Inn" standard of transitional housing for homeless families integrates on-site education, job readiness training and support services for homeless parents and children within a residential environment. See R. Nunez, *The New Poverty: Homeless Families in America*, 1996. "Second-Chance Homes" are multi-service residential facilities that incorporate the Family Inn standard to prepare teen mothers to live independently. See K. Sylvester, *Second-Chance Homes: Breaking the Cycle of Teen Pregnancy* (Washington, DC: Progressive Policy Institute, June 1995).

Day to Day . . . Parent to Child

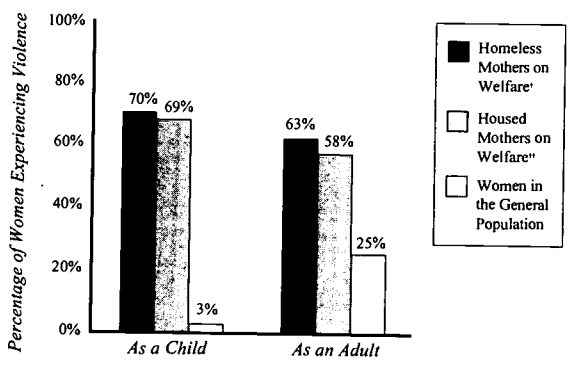
The Future of Violence Among Homeless Children in America

January 1997 . . . Laura, twenty-three, walked down the long shelter hallway, leading her two small children by the hand. She had just been released from the hospital, and was afraid to go home; her boyfriend, Danny, would be there, probably still drunk and angry from the night before. But she had nowhere else to go. "How did I end up back in the shelter?" she wondered. "And where can I go from here?"

Fact: Today the fastest growing segment of the homeless population is made up of families, many of whom are the victims of violence. Even more important than what lies ahead for Laura is what lies ahead for her children.

Laura's story is shared by hundreds of thousands of homeless families who grapple each day with the fear, pain and instability of violence. A recent study of 439 homeless heads-of-household in New York City found that *sixty-three percent of homeless parents lived with family violence as adults.* Moreover, *seventy percent of homeless parents experienced family violence when they were children themselves.**[1] (See Figure 1)

Figure 1: Experiences of Violence: Homeless Mothers, Housed Mothers on Welfare, and Women in General



Source: American Medical Association; Better Homes Fund; Richard Gelles; Institute for Children and Poverty.[2]

Eighty percent of homeless mothers have experienced family violence at some point in their lives—seventy percent as children and sixty-three percent as adults.

Table 1: A Profile of Homeless Mothers Who Experienced Violence as Children or Adults

Characteristics	Homeless Mothers
Average Age	26
Average Number of Children	2
Marital Status:	
Single	86%
Married	5%
Separated/Divorced/Widowed	9%
Ethnicity:	
Black	62%
Hispanic	30%
White	3%
Other	5%
Education Level:	
Less Than High School	57%
High School	28%
High School Plus	16%

Source: Institute for Children and Poverty.

The majority of parents now living in shelters—typically young single mothers with one or two children under the age of six (See Table 1)—have spent their lives spiraling downward through a complex and self-perpetuating cycle of family violence, community violence and poverty. The anxieties, discomfort and limited options of poverty fed family violence in their former homes; family violence itself played an equally powerful role in nurturing their continued poverty and homelessness by obstructing the paths to self-esteem and self-sufficiency critical to achieve stability. These struggling families also were forced to contend with violence in their communities—violence that is likely both the precursor to and the successor of violence in the home.

Worse yet, today's homeless children will likely follow in their parents' footsteps when they grow up. They will inevitably find themselves entangled in a web of violence, poverty and homelessness, cut off from the educational opportunities that could open the door to escape. Until we recognize the destruction family violence wreaks on the community as a whole and take responsibility for ending the violence—by providing and prioritizing violence intervention and access to the basic education required to elimi-

* "Family violence" as it is used throughout this report refers to emotional, physical, or sexual abuse experienced at the hands of a family member or partner, including continuous criticism and insults; physical assault and weapon-induced injuries; and sexual molestation and rape. Although these findings are specific to New York City, anecdotal and statistical evidence indicates that they are indicative of violence among homeless families across the country.[3]
† Includes physical, sexual and/or emotional violence committed by parents, relatives, partners or friends.
†† Includes physical or sexual violence committed by caretakers, other household members or intimates.

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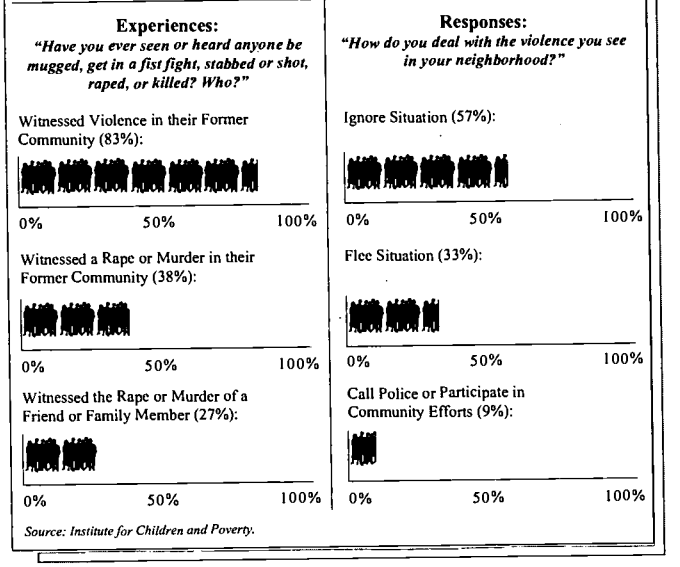
nate the need for reliance on an abuser—homeless shelters across the country will continue to see a stream of future victims and abusers, rendered dependent on emergency services for survival.

Violence Among Parents: The Cycle Begins

Violence has been the constant companion of today's homeless parents, most of whom were introduced to abuse at a young age. Seventy percent of homeless parents experienced physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse from a parent or relative as a child, and sixty-three percent reported involvement in violent relationships with friends or partners as adults. In all, eighty percent of homeless parents experienced family violence at some point in their lives.

While poor communities do offer support to families experiencing problems in the home, individual expectations of family and community life are often distorted by a veil of community violence. Eighty-three percent of homeless parents witnessed violence in their former community, including fist fights, muggings, stabbings, shootings, rapes and murders. Of those who had witnessed a murder, *sixty-two percent* saw a friend or family member killed; of those who had observed a rape, *sixty-seven percent* witnessed the assault of a friend or relative. (See Figure 2) While it may not be surprising that the poor communities in which today's homeless parents lived were wrought with high rates of violence, the picture of day-to-day life that emerges from these findings—one of pervasive violence in and outside the home—is shocking. These parents had few periods of relief in which to address the obstacles—poverty, undereducation and unemployment—that prevented them from escaping abuse.

Figure 2:
Community Violence Among Homeless Parents: Experiences and Responses



September 1995 . . . Laura had always lived with violence. She remembered how when she was young her father would lash out at her mother, and often at her. When Laura moved in with her boyfriend after the birth of her daughter at seventeen, she learned to avoid his fists by not arguing over the money he used for drugs. Laura feared for her baby—not just because of her boyfriend, but because she worried that one day she too would lose control of her anger. When she found herself pregnant again in the fall of 1995, she moved out and into a homeless shelter.

Fact: Seventy percent of today's homeless parents experienced family violence as a child.

Poverty and Homelessness: The Root and the Fruit of Violence

The violence that has plagued today's homeless mothers throughout their lives is tightly woven into the fabric of the poverty in which they live, each strand inextricably bound to the other. The intentional restrictions that all abusers—partners, mothers, fathers, siblings, or even housemates—place on their victims to keep them dependent are particularly detrimental to individuals short on the skills necessary for self-sufficiency. Abusers sabotage education or employment pursuits by refusing to take responsibility for getting children to school or day care; turning off alarm clocks, making victims consistently late; shredding interview or work clothing; and even beating victims the night before an interview.[4] While these efforts do not regularly succeed in maintaining allegiance to the abuser, they do consistently succeed in preventing victims from achieving long-term independence and stability by making it impossible to attain the education and work experience necessary to be self-sufficient.

While family violence prevents parents from attaining the skills they need, the lack of financial and social resources resulting from poverty not only blocks their escape from

December 1995 . . . Searching for a new apartment was not easy. Laura feared for her children's safety in the neighborhoods she could afford; though she had lived in such areas all her life, she never got used to the sounds of gunshots. Then Laura started dating a man who lived in a not-so-bad neighborhood and said that she and her children could move in with him. But Danny proved no better than her last boyfriend.

Fact: Twenty-seven percent of homeless mothers saw the rape or murder of a friend or relative.

violence, but ultimately entrenches them even more deeply in the mire of poverty and dependence. With neither friends or family with whom to stay, nor the education or employment opportunities to earn the money for rent, poor families have few paths out of abusive situations: they can either turn to a domestic violence shelter or stay at risk. Many choose the latter. Those who do make the move often find the domestic violence shelters full; their only option is to enter the emergency shelter system for homeless families. Indeed, *domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness around the country*. Nine percent of homeless heads-of-household cite domestic violence as the primary cause of their homelessness; this figure climbs to twenty-seven percent when one includes those parents who cite arguments with people they lived with as the cause of their homelessness, arguments that may point to unrecognized family violence situations.

Once family violence sends families into homelessness, community violence prevents them from escaping. Limited low-income housing availability reduces homeless families' options for relocating. Often they have no choice but to move into a violent and dangerous neighborhood with little community support or even to return to the abuser's neighborhood where they are again at risk. While neither of these situations is a realistic solution for a family seeking safety and stability, the simple fact is that there are rarely alternatives.

Scripting the Future for the Next Generation

The restrictions and hardships of poverty and violence not only entrap parents, but also jeopardize the next generation. Study after study has shown that the majority of children whose parents experienced abuse are themselves abused or seriously neglected.[5] The likelihood that homeless children will be abused is increased not only by the high rate of abuse among their parents, but also by the overwhelming pressures of homelessness. As a result, nine percent of homeless families have lost at least one child to foster care, and eleven percent have an open case of child abuse or neglect with child welfare authorities.

Individuals who experience abuse or neglect as children are likely to repeat those roles in their adult lives. Research indicates that children who are abused are far more likely to become victims or abusers as adults than children who grow up without violence in the home.[6] The parents of today's homeless children already have fulfilled this prediction: *those who experienced violence as children were forty-three percent more likely to be involved in abusive relationships as adults* than the parents who reported no childhood violence. Worse yet, children do not have to be the victims of abuse for violence to take hold of their futures: having simply *witnessed* violence in the home is a strong predictor of future victimization or abuse.[7] In fact, some researchers have found that boys who witnessed violence by their fathers had a 1,000 percent greater rate of battering than those who did not.[8]

Contact with violence in the home is just part of the legacy of violence already passed on to homeless children; they also face the same constant violence in their community that their parents did. In witnessing this violence, they see not only the destructive action take place, but also equally destructive passivity: fifty-seven percent of homeless parents reported avoiding any involvement when they saw violence taking place; only five percent said they called the police and even fewer—four percent—said they responded by getting involved in community efforts to prevent or fight violence. (See Figure 2) The response of their parents—rooted perhaps in fear, or perhaps in desensitization to frequently observed violence—shows the next generation that violence is acceptable.

Although early intervention can stave off this grim vision of the future for today's homeless children, the disruptions of poverty, homelessness and violence already have taken their toll on the single hope these children have: education.

March 1996 . . . One evening Laura accidentally knocked one of Danny's half-empty bottles off the kitchen counter. It shattered, littering the floor with spilled liquor and broken glass. Tina, her four-year-old, shook her head. "You've been bad, Mommy. Now Danny has to punish you."

Fact: Children who live with violence in the home learn to accept it as the norm.

51

By the time their parents have reached the depths of poverty and violence and ended up in homeless shelters, sixty-two percent of homeless children are reading below grade level, seventy-eight percent are performing below grade level in math, twenty-four percent have been placed in special education, and thirty-seven percent have repeated a grade.[9] Unless the cycles of poverty and violence are broken for both parents and children, and the gateway to a better future opened, these children will bear their legacies of violence, dependence and poverty throughout their lives. (See Table 2)

Stopping the Violence . . . Starting a Life

The plague of family violence does not distinguish between rich or poor. Yet its ultimate impact is most devastating on the poorest of the poor—families living doubled-up or in shelters with few options other than continued dependence on an abuser. Worse yet, families now make up the fastest growing segment of the homeless population across the country. As their numbers grow, so does the number of children growing up amidst deepest poverty—tomorrow's adults trapped within cycles of poverty and violence.

Researchers have estimated the annual cost of domestic violence to the nation at $67 billion in labor force, child well-being, housing, social services, health care, and criminal justice.[10] Indeed, few community institutions would deny that family violence can no longer be viewed as a private matter, but must be incorporated into the public agenda. Yet even fewer are prepared to take responsibility for the multifaceted educational approach necessary.

Table 2: Day to Day . . . Parent to Child

Among homeless parents . . .

70% experienced family violence as a child;
63% experienced family violence as an adult;
80% witnessed violence in their former neighborhood; and
76% of those who experienced violence as a child also were involved in abusive relationships as adults—43% more than those who experienced no violence as a child.
57% never finished high school.

Among homeless families . . .

11% have an open case with child protective services; and
9% have a child in foster care.

Among homeless children . . .

78% perform below grade level in math;
62% read below grade level;
37% have repeated a grade; and
24% have been placed in special education.

And for all children . .

A 1000% greater rate of battering among males who witness violence committed by their fathers.

The Cost...

- thousands of women and children in battered women's shelters;
- tens of thousands of children placed in foster care;
- hundreds of thousands of individuals seeking medical, police and legal services; and
- over a million families dependent on welfare and homeless shelters

...$67 billion annually nationwide.

June 1997 . . . At the shelter for the second time, Laura started attending education workshops. Here she worked on her reading and writing skills—not just with textbooks like she had the last time she was in school, but by learning things like taking care of an apartment, being a good parent, holding a job, and dealing with "family violence." Within six months, Laura had earned her GED, and had broken all ties with Danny. When she found a job and an apartment, she knew that she was there to stay.

Fact: Unless families are presented with alternatives to living with violence, the next generation will continue the cycle of poverty and abuse.

Programs offered in shelters, community centers, or schools that integrate violence awareness and independent living skills into a structured learning environment succeed in reaching both identified and unidentified victims of family and community violence. Such programs work with both parents and children, incorporating discussions of violence, parenting and independent living into nontraditional classrooms and providing referrals to counseling as necessary, or linking domestic violence counseling participants to continuing education. Through this approach, they ensure that more children and parents learn to recognize violence and its debilitating effects, gain the life and job skills that will prevent them from needing to depend on a batterer, and develop the self-esteem necessary to walk away from abusive situations.

As the number of homeless families continues to rise, the relationship between violence and homelessness is becoming more visible. With more and more families residing in shelters, the opportunity to tackle the abuse, neglect and violence hindering them is at hand. Shelters can become places where families learn to substitute the pain and frustration of violence with an educational investment in themselves. By re-envisioning shelters as centers of learning rather than emergency waiting rooms we can begin to break the day to day, parent to child cycle of violence, homelessness and poverty.

See Appendix A: Case Study: A Trail of Tears

Notes

1. From a survey conducted with 439 homeless family heads-of-household in New York City, July 1996.
2. Experiences of violence among homeless mothers: Homes for the Homeless, New York, NY, 1996. Experiences of housed mothers on AFDC: Better Homes Fund, Worcester, MA, 1996. Violence among the general population as children: Richard Gelles, "Family Violence," *Family Violence: Prevention and Treatment*, ed. Robert Hampton (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1993) p. 15. Violence among the general population as adults: American Medical Association, 1992.
3. E.L. Bassuk, L.F. Weinreb, J.C. Buckner, A. Browne, A. Salomon and S.S. Bassuk, "The Characteristics and Needs of Sheltered Homeless and Low-Income Housed Mothers," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 276, no. 8 (1996); L.A. Goodman, "The Prevalence of Abuse in the Lives of Homeless and Housed Poor Mothers: A Comparison Study," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 61 (1991); S.P. Redmond and J. Brackman, "Homeless Children and their Caretakers," *Homelessness in the United States*, ed. J. Momeni (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1990); D. Wood, R.B. Valdez, T. Hayashi and A. Shen, "Homeless and Housed Families in Los Angeles: A Study Comparing Demographic, Economic, and Family Function Characteristics," *American Journal of Public Health* 80, no. 9 (1990).
4. J. Raphael, *Prisoners of Abuse: Domestic Violence and Welfare Receipt* (Chicago: Taylor Institute, April 1996); C.T. Kenney and K.R. Brown, *Report From The Front Lines: The Impact of Violence on Poor Women* (New York: NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, 1996).
5. M.M. McKay, "The Link Between Domestic Violence and Child Abuse: Assessment and Treatment Considerations," *Child Welfare* 123, no. 1 (1994); State Justice Institute Conference, "A Guide to Research on Family Violence," *Courts and Communities: Confronting Violence in the Family* (San Francisco, CA: State Justice Institute, 1993), p. 27; M.A. Straus and R.J. Gelles (eds.), *Physical Violence in American Families*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990); P.H. Zappardino and D. DeBare, "In Search of Safety: Double Jeopardy for Battered Women," *New England Journal of Public Policy* 8, no. 1 (1992).
6. National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women, *Statistics Packet, 3rd Edition* (Philadelphia, PA: 1994) pp. 122-145.
7. A. Browne, *When Battered Women Kill* (New York: The Free Press, 1987) p. 31; National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women, *Statistics Packet*, pp. 122-145.
8. M. Kenning, A. Merchant and A. Tomkins, "Research on the Effects of Witnessing Parental Battering: Clinical and Legal Policy Implications," *Woman Battering: Policy Responses*, ed. M. Steinman (Cincinnati, OH: Anderson, 1991) p. 238.
9. R. Nunez, *The New Poverty: Homeless Families in America* (New York: Insight Books/Plenum Press, 1996).
10. L. Laurence and R. Spalter-Roth, *Measuring the Costs of Domestic Violence Against Women and the Cost-Effectiveness of Interventions: An Initial Assessment and Proposals for Further Research* (Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research, May 1996) p. 2.

Homeless Families Today

Our Challenge Tomorrow: A Regional Perspective

Family homelessness continues to be one of the most misunderstood and inadequately addressed public policy issues in America today. One reason is the scarcity of quantitative data available on the subject. In response, Columbia University's Graduate School of International & Public Affairs and the Institute for Children & Poverty designed and implemented an extensive survey on the demographics of homeless families in the New York City region. Data on more than 140 variables was collected from 743 homeless heads-of-household during the spring of 1997. The parents who were interviewed resided in fourteen emergency and transitional family shelters located throughout New York City and northern New Jersey. The following report summarizes the key elements of this research.

Today's typical homeless parent . . .

Table 1: A Profile of Homeless Parents

Characteristic		Characteristic	
Sex	%	Age	%
Female	89	≤ 18	4
Male	11	19 - 25	38
		26 - 30	18
Race / Ethnicity	%	≥ 31	40
African American	59		
Hispanic	32	Avg. age of children	8
White	3		
Other†	6	Number of Children	%
		0 - 1*	30
Marital Status	%	2	26
Never Married	60	3 - 4	27
Married	24	≥ 5	17
Other§	16		
		Employment Status	%
Education Level	%	Unemployed	91
< High School	59	Employed	9
High School Graduate	26		
> High School	15		

† "Other" includes Native American (< 1%) and Asian (< 1%).
§ "Other" includes separated (8%), divorced (6%) and widowed (2%).
* Includes women who were pregnant at time of interview.

N = 743

- *is a young unmarried mother with two or three young children, who grew up in poverty;*
- *experienced or witnessed domestic violence at some point in her life;*
- *never completed high school, often dropping out because of pregnancy;*
- *has at least one child suffering from a chronic health problem;*
- *lived with parents, with a partner, or doubled-up prior to becoming homeless;*[1]
- *left her last residence because of overcrowding, a disagreement or domestic violence;*
- *is unemployed due to a lack of child care, a lack of work skills or an inability to find a job; and*
- *is entirely dependent on public assistance to support herself and her family*

. . . by all accounts, she represents a new American poverty.[2]

While these findings illustrate the complexity of family homelessness, the multiple issues surrounding this new poverty must be individually examined and addressed before an effective response can be initiated. A critical first step is collection of primary data. The most crucial steps, however, have yet to be taken: policymakers and the general public must first take notice of the hundreds of thousands of families across the nation who are homeless and then pursue effective strategies to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness. (See Table 1)

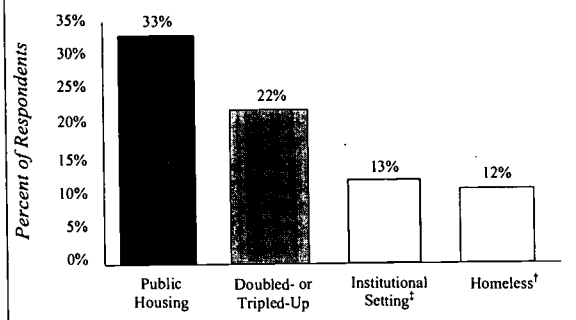
Childhood

The majority of parents who are homeless today lived in poverty as children: *more than half (53%) grew up in families that received some type of public assistance*—most frequently Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC, now TANF) and/or food stamps. (See Figure 1) Conversely, *almost half of homeless parents did not grow up on public aid, but in working, self-sufficient families.* These findings imply that while half of homeless parents are perpetuating a cycle of poverty, the other half have been "notched-down" from more stable circumstances.[3]

The poverty today's parents experienced as children is also apparent in their residential histories. *Fifty-seven percent of parents resided in potentially unstable or tenuous living situations before their eighteenth birthday.* (See Figure 2) Forty-eight percent spent time in public housing and/or doubled-up living arrangements. *Thirteen percent had been institutionalized* within the foster care system, a group home or other institutional facility, and *twelve percent were even introduced to homelessness* as children, spending time in homeless shelters, welfare hotels, abandoned buildings or on the street.

When asked about violence, *forty-five percent of parents reported that they had experienced or witnessed family violence* in their households as children or adults. However, such experiences appear to be under-reported here since in-depth studies on domestic violence among homeless families have found that at least eighty percent experienced family violence at some point in their lives.[4] Of those respondents who said that they had encountered family violence, *sixty-six percent* identified themselves as the victims. The most frequently reported forms of violence were emotional abuse and physical abuse; *thirty-six percent* reported witnessing or experiencing constant criticism, insults, humiliation or embarrassment, and *thirty-two percent* said they had been or had seen someone else in their household be slapped, hit, kicked or punched. (See Figure 3) In addition, many homeless parents experienced or witnessed an assault with a weapon (17%) or sexual abuse (13%) in their household.

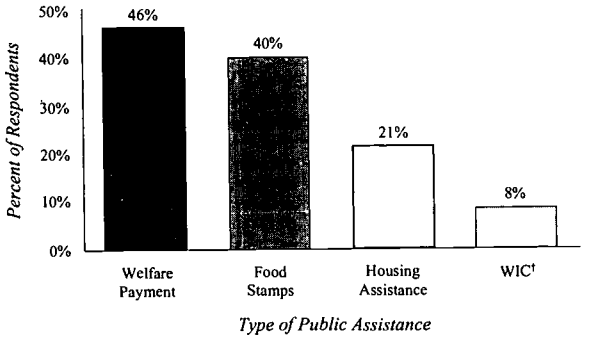
Figure 2: Homeless Parents' Residential Histories as Children*



* Respondents could give multiple responses; all percentages do not add to 100.
‡ Includes residence in foster care, a group home or other institutional setting.
† Includes residence in homeless shelters, welfare hotels, abandoned buildings or on the streets.
N = 722

Fifty-seven percent of homeless parents resided in potentially unstable living situations associated with poverty before their eighteenth birthday. More than one in five lived doubled- or tripled-up and twelve percent even experienced homelessness as children.

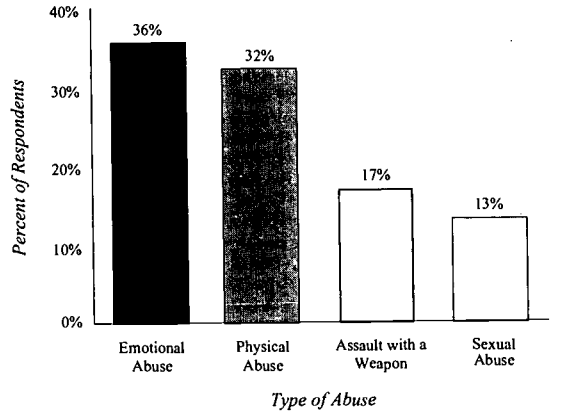
Figure 1: Homeless Parents' Public Assistance History as Children*



* Respondents could receive multiple types of public assistance; all percentages do not add to 100.
† Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children
N = 736

The majority of homeless parents grew up in families that received public assistance, most commonly welfare and food stamps.

Figure 3: Homeless Parents: Types of Domestic Violence Experienced or Witnessed as Children or Adults*



* Respondents could give multiple answers; all percentages do not add to 100.
N = 741

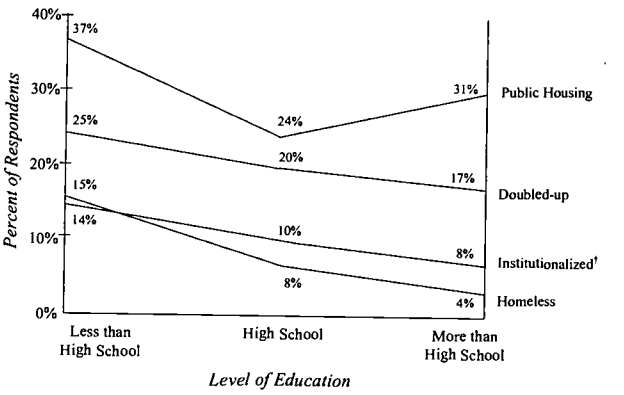
Forty-five percent of parents reported that they had experienced or witnessed family violence at some point in their lives. Of these parents, more than half (56%) were themselves the victims of physical violence, including assault with a weapon and sexual abuse.

Education

Fifty-nine percent of homeless parents interviewed reported that they had never graduated from high school or earned a General Equivalency Diploma (GED). (See Table 1) For those who did not finish high school, the most common reason cited for having left school was a pregnancy (33%), followed by dislike of school (23%). (See Figure 4)

Respondents who did not finish high school were more likely than other homeless parents to have lived in public housing, doubled-up, in an institutional setting or to have been homeless before they were eighteen. (See Figure 5) Sixty-five percent of homeless parents who did not finish high school resided in at least one of the above living arrangements as children, compared to forty-six percent of those who had earned a high school diploma or GED. That is, *children residing in public housing, institutional settings or crowded living quarters were nearly one-and-a-half times more likely to drop out of high school.*

Figure 5: Homeless Parents: Relationship Between Level of Education and Residential History*



* Respondents could give multiple responses for residential history; all percentages do not add to 100.
† Includes residence in foster care, a group home or other institutional setting. N = 743

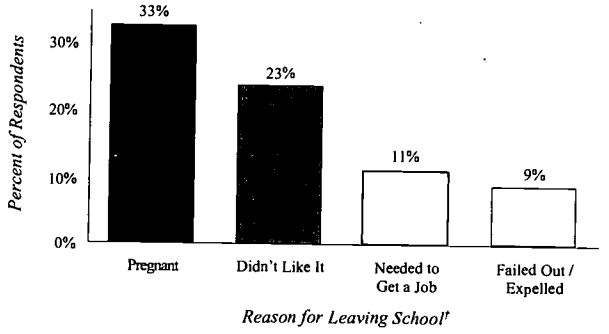
Parents with less than a high school education are more likely than other homeless parents to have resided in precarious living situations as children. Sixty-five percent of non-high school graduates lived in at least one of these arrangements as children, compared to forty-six percent of those with at least a high school degree.

Employment

More than *nine out of ten homeless parents were unemployed* at the time of their interview. (See Table 1) While eighty percent of the unemployed heads-of-household had held a job sometime in the past, *the typical homeless parent had been unemployed for at least twelve months.* (See Figure 6) Not surprisingly, parents who had never finished high school were less likely to have work experience than those with diplomas. *Twenty-five percent of homeless parents who did not complete high school had never worked, compared to thirteen percent of those who did finish school.*

Lack of appropriate, affordable child care was cited by one in three (33%) homeless parents as the reason for their

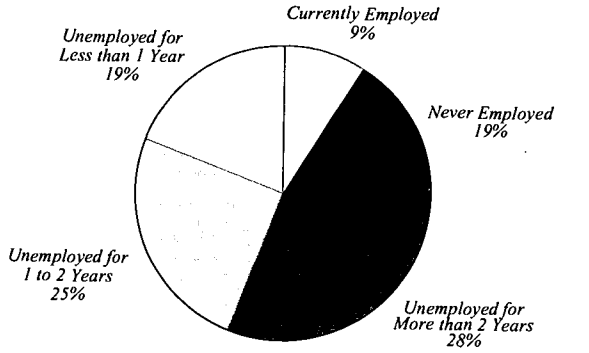
Figure 4: Homeless Parents' Reasons for Dropping Out of School*



* Includes only those respondents who did not earn a high school diploma or a GED. Respondents could give multiple reasons for leaving school; all percentages do not add to 100.
† The remaining categories—including fear of violence, lack of child care, and lack of transportation—were each cited by fewer than 5% of the respondents. 28% left school for other unspecified reasons. N = 421

The majority of homeless parents (59%) have never graduated from high school or earned a GED. Parents most frequently cite a pregnancy (33%) or a dislike of school (23%) as their reason for dropping out.

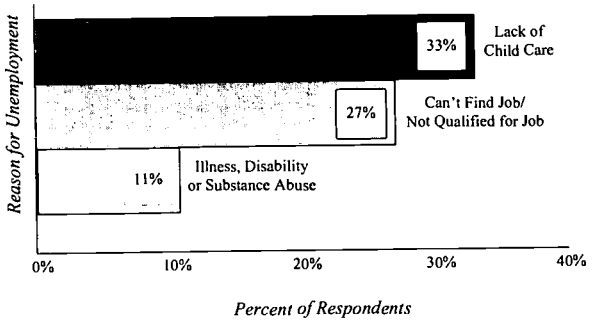
Figure 6: Homeless Parents' Employment History



N = 743

More than nine out of ten homeless parents are unemployed. Twenty-eight percent have not held a job within the last two years and one in five (19%) have never worked.

Figure 7: Homeless Parents' Reasons for Current Unemployment*†



* Respondents could give multiple answers; all percentages do not add to 100.
† The remaining categories—not wanting to work and lack of transportation—were each cited by fewer than 3% of the respondents. 32% cited other unspecified reasons for their current unemployment.
N = 679

The reasons most frequently cited by homeless parents for not working are a lack of child care and an inability to find appropriate employment.

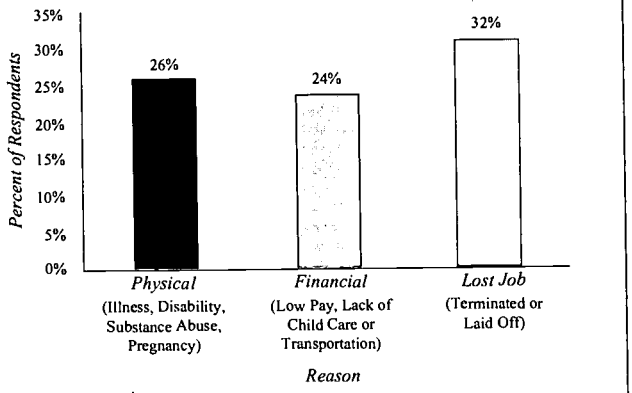
current unemployment. (See Figure 7) Additional analysis of the data also suggests that parents face a lack of steady jobs for which they are qualified and that pay a living wage. *More than one in four parents (28%) were unable to find jobs or were not qualified for the jobs for which they applied.* Among those who had previously worked, one in four (25%) said they left their last job for financial reasons: the job did not pay enough, or they could not afford transportation or appropriate child care. (See Figure 8) Thirty-two percent lost their jobs because they were fired or laid off. This finding implies that nearly one in three homeless parents lack the training necessary to handle job responsibilities, the ability to function in a work environment, or the qualifications required for long-term employment. *Only two percent of unemployed heads-of-household said they did not want to work.*

Ninety-four percent of all homeless families receive public assistance. (See Figure 9) For seventy-five percent, welfare payments and other forms of public assistance are their *only* formal source of income. It is interesting to note that although all of the individuals interviewed had children and almost all were single women, *only six percent received child support payments.*

Housing

The typical homeless family has been residing in its current shelter for an average of six months. Of the eighty-two percent of homeless families who came to the shelter from permanent housing, *fewer than half (45%) came directly from their own apartment or house.* Twenty-nine percent had been living doubled- or tripled-up with friends or family members prior to entering the shelter system, while an addi-

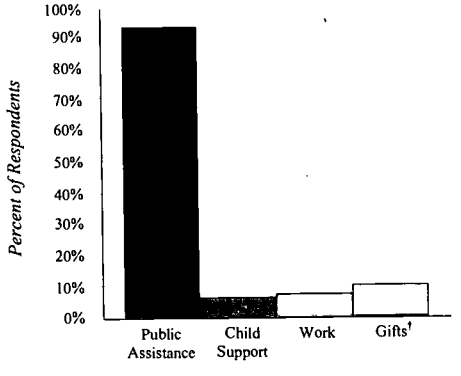
Figure 8: Homeless Parents' Reasons for Leaving Last Job*†



* Respondents could give multiple answers; all percentages do not add to 100.
† The remaining categories—bored with job, not wanting to work, and harassment—were each cited by fewer than 2% of respondents. 28% cited other unspecified reasons for leaving their last job.
N = 531

While multiple and widely varying factors contributed to homeless parents' departure from previous employment, thirty-one percent left their jobs because they were fired or laid off. These job losses may imply that nearly one in three homeless parents lack the training necessary to handle job responsibilities, the ability to function in a work environment, or the qualifications required for long-term employment.

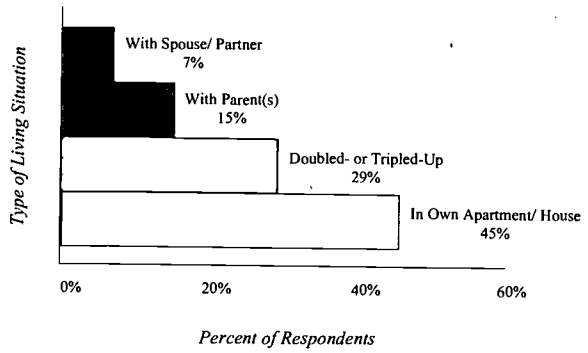
Figure 9: Homeless Families' Sources of Income*



* Respondents could name multiple income sources; all percentages do not add to 100.
† May include money, goods or services from family, friends or partners.
N = 739

The vast majority of homeless parents rely on public assistance—such as welfare, food stamps, and WIC—to support their families. For three out of four, public assistance is the only source of income.

Figure 10: Homeless Families' Previous Living Situation*



* Includes only those respondents who did not come to their current shelter directly from another shelter. An additional 4% lived in other unspecified situations.

N = 610

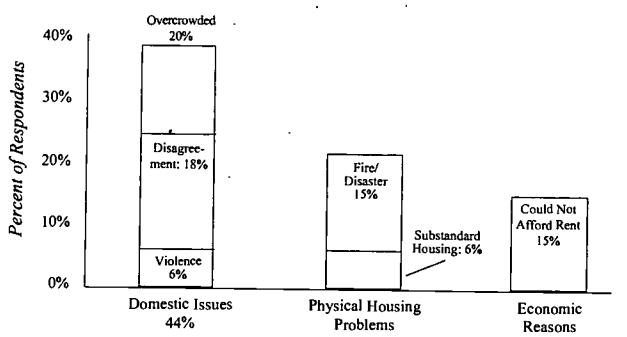
Of those residents who came to their shelter from permanent housing, fewer than half came directly from their own apartment or house. Instead, the majority had been paying reduced or no rent by living with family, friends, or partners.

tional twenty-two percent had been living with their parents, or a spouse or partner. (See Figure 10)

Domestic issues—overcrowding, disagreements or domestic violence—forced forty-three percent of respondents from their last residence. (See Figure 11) Although only six percent of the heads-of-household cited domestic violence as their primary reason for leaving, the response "disagreements" with the people they were living with may point to unrecognized or unreported instances of violence as well. Those who lived doubled-up, with their parents or with a spouse or partner reported such issues of crowded living quarters and household violence more frequently than did those who had their own home.

Twenty-one percent of homeless families left their last residence because it was substandard or had been destroyed by a fire or other disaster. Fifteen percent left because they could not afford the rent. Both of these explanations were much more frequent among those who came from their own apartment or house (thirty-eight percent because of physical problems; twenty-six percent for economic reasons) than among the general population.

Figure 11: Homeless Families' Reasons for Leaving



* Includes only those respondents who did not come to their current shelter directly from another shelter. 21% left their last residence for other unspecified reasons.

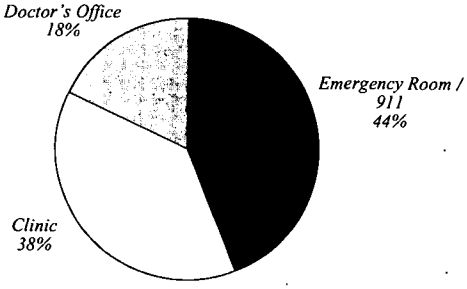
N = 586

Homeless parents most frequently cite domestic issues as the reason for leaving their last permanent housing. Not surprisingly, such explanations are more frequent among those who previously lived with a partner or doubled- or tripled-up with other family or friends than among those who lived in their own homes.

Family Health

The final area of investigation in this study found that homeless children suffer from a lack of consistent, preventive health care. Rather than visit a family physician, *forty-four percent of homeless parents reported taking their family to the Emergency Room or calling 911 for medical care.* (See Figure 12) This finding is particularly interesting in light of the fact that homeless children, whose intense poverty almost always qualifies them for Medicaid, are actually more likely to have health insurance than children in the general population. While thirteen percent of children nationwide are not covered by health insurance,[5] only five percent of the home-

Figure 12: Where Homeless Families Seek Health Care*



* An additional twenty-four respondents (not represented in this chart) find medical help elsewhere or seek none at all.

N = 716

Many homeless families rely on costly emergency services for health care rather than seeking preventive services from a primary health care provider.

Table 2: Health Problems Among Homeless Children vs. Children Nationally[6]

Type of Illness	Percent of Homeless Children	Percent of Children Nationally
Asthma/ Respiratory	42.4	18.49
Ulcers/ Gastrointestinal	3.3	1.10
Epilepsy	3.2	0.47
Physical Disability	3.2	5.67
Diabetes	1.4	0.14
Tuberculosis	1.0	0.01

While not all ailments commonly associated with poverty occur more frequently among children in homeless families than among children in the general population, one difference stands out: homeless children are more than twice as likely to suffer from asthma or other respiratory problems as other children.

less families surveyed had no children with health insurance. Despite this greater rate of health coverage, homeless children are much more likely to suffer from respiratory ailments than children generally. (See Table 2) *Forty-two percent of the homeless parents interviewed had at least one child with asthma or other respiratory problems,* a rate that is at least twice the national average. Worse yet, fifty-four percent of homeless children suffer from some chronic health condition.

The Future

The portrait that emerges here is a somber snapshot of the over 600,000 families living doubled-up or in homeless shelters across the United States today.[7] It highlights the tremendous obstacles that impede America's poorest families who are dependent on public support for day to day survival in their move toward employment and stability.

This is not simply a status report on homeless families today, but also a barometer of the storm of homelessness likely to sweep the country tomorrow. This portrait is a warning call to those charged with reforming welfare policies: after early successes in moving welfare recipients to work, their task will grow far more difficult and their stories of success far more rare. In fact, while these numbers represent families who are homeless today, they also represent the hundreds of thousands of families likely to be homeless tomorrow if the public safety net unravels too far.

This regional snapshot, while critical to envisioning the challenge that lies ahead, is only the first step in avoiding future crisis. Research on the face of family homelessness in regions from across the country must follow. The need for universities, research institutes and service providers to work together to gather such information has never been greater. Through such initiatives we can understand the depth of the problem of family poverty and homelessness and finally achieve effective solutions.

Notes

1. "Doubled-up" is here defined as residence in an apartment or house shared with friends or family members, often in overcrowded quarters.
2. The "new poverty" refers to the descent of families into a poverty deeper than any seen prior to the 1980s: homelessness. For in-depth discussion, see R. Nunez, *The New Poverty: Homeless Families in America* (New York: Insight Books/Plenum Publishing, 1996).
3. The "notched-down" generation refers to children of the working poor who were notched down into welfare dependence and homelessness by changes in the economy during the 1980s. For in-depth discussion, see R. Nunez, "Family Values Among Homeless Families," *Journal of the American Public Welfare Association* 53 (1995).
4. E.L. Bassuk, L.F. Weinreb, J.C. Buckner, A. Browne, A. Salomon and S.S. Bassuk, "The Characteristics and Needs of Sheltered Homeless and Low-Income Housed Mothers," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 276 (1996); Homes for the Homeless, *Day to Day...Parent to Child: The Future of Violence Among Homeless Children in America* (New York: Institute for Children and Poverty, 1998).
5. Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Data Book: State Profiles of Child Well-Being, 1996* (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 1996) p. 20.
6. Numbers provided for homeless children represent the number of parents surveyed who had children with each illness (N=693). Numbers for the general population calculated from Centers for Disease Control, *Reported Tuberculosis in the United States, 1996* (Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control, 1996); National Center for Health Statistics, *Current Estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, 1994* (Washington, DC: US Dept. of Health and Human Services, 1995).
7. Institute for Children and Poverty, 1996; US Conference of Mayors, *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities: 1996* (Washington DC: US Conference of Mayors, 1996).

APPENDIX A

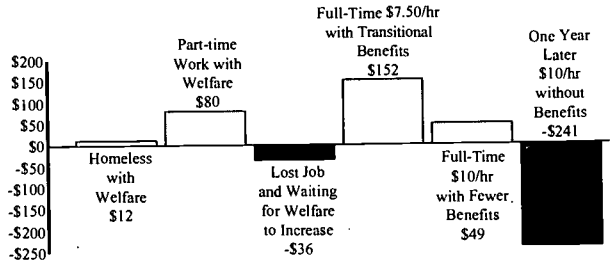
The Dollars and Sense of Welfare

The following report traces a typical welfare family's path to independence. For Sheila, a young, single mother of two with little education, no job, no work experience and no home, the road from welfare to self-sufficiency is daunting. While she can succeed by earning her GED, completing a job-training program and dedicating herself to finding housing and employment, the path to independence is never easy and is rarely direct. Set-backs and delays—in the form of public benefit wait-lists, unpredictable job markets, inconsistent support from family and friends and the constant problem of child care—face young mothers at every turn.

The precise route from homelessness to independence varies as much as the families who attempt it, but on the way all must come to terms with the demoralizing truth that the early years of independence rarely leave a family better off financially than it was while dependent on public assistance. In fact, as earned income slowly climbs, the rapid loss of the public benefits holding poverty at bay often leaves less disposable income at the end of the month. If expenses outgrow income—as is all too often the case—young families must retreat from their new-found independence and return to the state of poverty from which they began.

You will now see the story of Sheila's journey from homelessness to work unfold. Look for the Key included in this report for a description of her sources of income and expenses, as well as program and policy definitions. Are Sheila and her family better off having made the transition to independence? Our challenge is to ensure that the millions of families like Sheila's will be.

Stages in the Transition From Welfare to Work



An increase in earned income reduces a young mother's benefits and often leaves her with less money at the end of the month.

With Nowhere To Go

At age twenty-two, Sheila found herself homeless with no money, no job, no education and two small children to care for. She and her children had been living with her sister, but were crowded out when her sister had another baby. The young family had no choice but to move into a transitional shelter for homeless families in New York City.

After two weeks in the shelter, Sheila enrolled in a job-training program. On-site licensed day care provided a place for her children to stay while she attended class for two hours each day. For the first time, Sheila saw hope for her family to move off of welfare.

At the shelter, Sheila received a check from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), vouchers from the supplementary food program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Food Stamps, and a small apartment search stipend—a total of $602 each month. To pay for the bus to visit her sister on the weekends, Sheila borrowed from friends or worked off-the-books. She stretched her money by relying mainly on canned goods to feed her family, but food was still almost always short by the end of the month. Though she knew she should start saving for the future, it was nearly impossible; after her essential expenses, Sheila was left with $12.

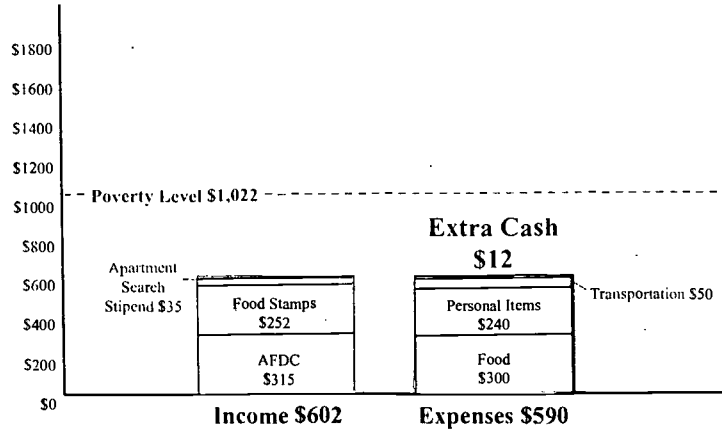
A Step Forward

Sheila successfully completed the job-training program and, after searching for over a month, found a part-time job as a cashier at minimum wage. Determined to raise her children in a home of their own, she started to put away $25 each month, while continuing to borrow a little from relatives to make ends meet. Finally, after nine months on the waiting list, she moved her family out of the shelter and into public housing. Though she knew it would be difficult for her children to get used to yet another day care, Sheila spent her first few weekends looking for a licensed center close to her apartment to save transportation costs.

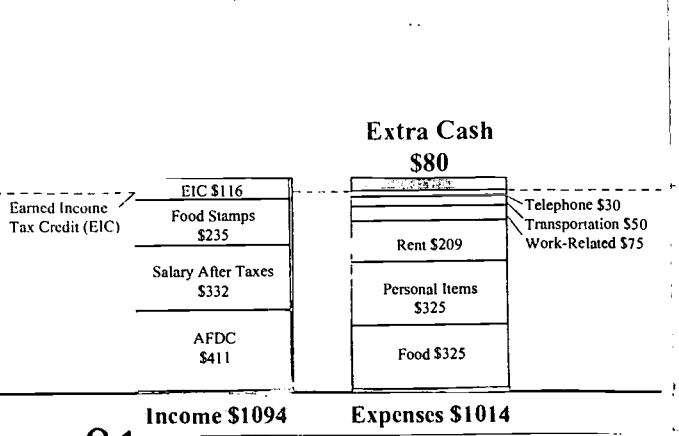
Sheila's work earnings combined with public assistance brought her family's monthly income to just over $1000—the poverty level for a family of three. She had to allow $60 each month for second-hand furniture and household items for her new apartment, driving up her personal items expenses to $325.

At the end of the month, Sheila was left with $80 for emergency money and the high school equivalency classes she knew she needed to secure financial stability for her family.

Homelessness leaves Sheila with $12 of disposable income.



Part time work at $4.25 an hour leaves Sheila with $80 of disposable income.



KEY

Sheila's Sources of Income

AFDC: *Aid to Families with Dependent Children*—often referred to simply as "welfare"—provides families with a monthly check based on family-size and income.

Apartment Search Stipend: Homeless heads-of-household receive an *Apartment Search Stipend* to cover transportation and other expenses incurred while they look for permanent housing.

EIC: The *Earned Income Tax Credit* refunds a portion of the taxes taken out of each paycheck for working families earning less than a minimum income. Although the EIC refund is received at the end of the financial year, its monthly equivalent has been included in Income.

Food Stamps: *Food Stamps*, the primary form of hunger relief in the United States, are vouchers that may be exchanged for groceries.

WIC: The *Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children* provides eligible mothers in advanced stages of pregnancy or with children under the age of five vouchers for dairy products, eggs, infant formula and cereal. Because WIC vouchers do not have a definite cash value, the following charts, rather than include a rough value in Income, discount products purchased with WIC vouchers from Food Expenses.

Salary After Taxes: The amount of an employee's paycheck remaining after federal and state taxes and Social Security have been removed is the employee's *Salary After Taxes*.

Sheila's Expenses

Food: In New York City, a low-income mother, child, and infant spend an average of $325 on food in addition to goods purchased with WIC vouchers.

Transportation: The same family spends an average of $50 each month for bus and train tokens.

Personal Items: Personal Items include clothing, household and drug-store items (garbage bags, laundry detergent, toiletries, non-prescription medication), and supplies for children (diapers and school materials).

Work-Related Costs: A working person incurs expenses for clothing, haircuts, additional transportation, lunches and union dues.

Day Care Fees: While heads-of-household receive transitional benefits that cover most of their day care needs, they still pay a monthly fee for day care based on income and family-size.

Programs and Policies

Public Housing: The New York City Housing Authority owns and manages housing units reserved for low-income families and individuals. Residents pay 30% of their adjusted income for rent, which includes utilities.

Section 8: Families who receive vouchers from this federal housing subsidy program pay 30% of their adjusted income for housing.

Transitional Benefits: Families moving from welfare to employment continue to receive transitional benefits—day care subsidies and Medicaid—for up to one year after their AFDC case is closed.

Poverty Level: A household earning below the federal poverty level is considered poor. The poverty level for a family of three is $1022 per month.

And Back Again

With her family just two months out of homelessness and just one misfortune away from returning, Sheila lost her job. Though she immediately lost most of her income—her salary and Earned Income Credit (EIC)—she had to wait 4 1/2 months for her AFDC and Food Stamp payments to increase to the level she received before she started working. Sheila traded Food Stamps for cash in the underground economy and sold many of her hard-earned clothes and dishes to pay off most of her rent. If she didn't pay the rest within three months she would become homeless again.

Crossing The Threshold

Sheila spent the next two months searching frantically for work. Finally, she found a full-time job as a receptionist earning $7.50 an hour—$15,600 a year. Her AFDC case was closed immediately, but she was still eligible for Food Stamps, EIC, WIC vouchers and the Medicaid and day care provided by her one year of transitional benefits. At the end of each month, Sheila was left with $152 to cover back-rent, an occasional movie on the weekends and any emergency that came up.

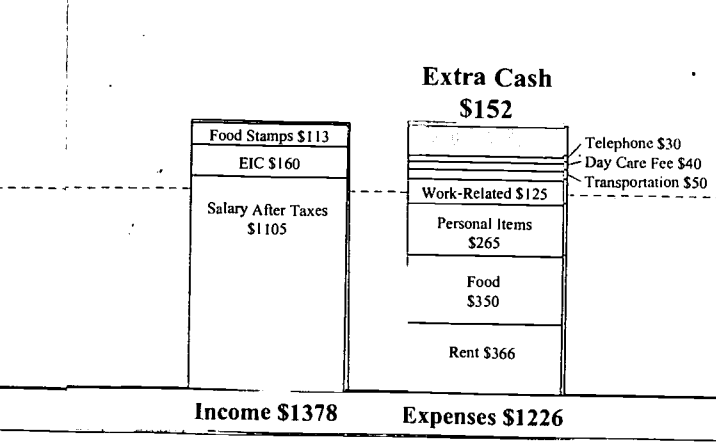
A Raise

Just weeks before her one year anniversary as a receptionist, Sheila received a raise to just over $10 an hour, about $21,000 a year. Thrilled at having finally succeeded in making the move out of poverty and into the good life, she moved her family into a Section 8-subsidized apartment in a better neighborhood. Soon, however, Sheila's EIC was reduced by $100, her rent and day care fees increased, and she was no longer eligible for Food Stamps. At the end of the month, she was left with $100 less than before she received the raise.

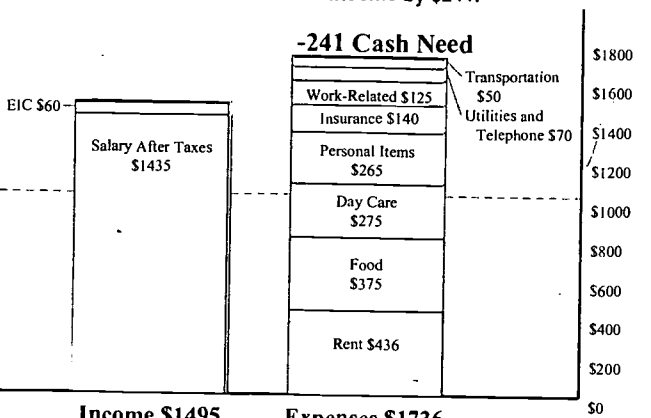
When Work Is Not Enough

Almost one year to the day that her AFDC case was closed, Sheila's transitional benefits came to an end. The addition of day care bills and health insurance premiums to her expenses forced her to spend more than she earned. Sheila had to rely on city clinics for health care, and to leave her children with neighbors during the day. Without continued transitional benefits, Sheila saw little financial incentive to keep working. *Common sense dictates that a continuum of support—in the form of moderated public assistance and creative tax credits—is essential to keeping working-poor families like Sheila's out of poverty, and encouraging others to make the transition from welfare to work.*

Full-time work at $7.50 an hour leaves Sheila with $152 of disposable income.



After one year, without transitional benefits, Sheila's expenses exceed her income by $241.



A Trail of Tears

For a young single mother with two small children, little education or work experience and, above all, no home, securing a life free from violence is usually an insurmountable struggle. A recent study shows that seventy percent of homeless mothers were physically, emotionally or sexually abused as children. Of those mothers abused as children, seventy-five percent experienced similar abuse as adults. In fact, homeless mothers are over twenty times more likely to have been abused as children and two and a half times more likely to be abused as adults than non-homeless women.

The alternatives to living in a violent relationship as an adult—single parenting, severe poverty or homelessness and ostracism from the community—leave many women feeling that they have little choice but to endure. Homeless mothers, many of whom lack family support, financial assets and self-esteem have even fewer resources for escaping violence. While participation in education and job training programs paves the way toward independence, the threat of retribution from abusive partners presents yet one more obstacle.

Just as their homelessness impedes their efforts to break out of the cycle of violence, so do their experiences of violence hinder their attempts to overcome homelessness. Despite the odds, homeless women do aspire to live independently and to make better lives for themselves and their children. To do so, they must first find the keys that will unlock them from the intertwined cycles of poverty and violence. Can shelters make the difference?

An Unsteady Foundation

Tamara first encountered violence as a small child. Her father, an alcoholic, frequently yelled at and hit her mother. Like seventy percent of men who abuse their wives, Tamara's father also abused his children. When Tamara's mother decided to divorce her husband, she was left with nothing. She and Tamara relied on public assistance to make ends meet and even had to spend time in a homeless shelter on more than one occasion.

At fourteen, Tamara started dating Ricky. He was older, seemingly independent and appeared to be the one thing she could count on. Tamara believed that he was different than her father and that their relationship would be different than her parents'. He was sometimes controlling and volatile, but Tamara accepted his behavior as she had seen her friends and relatives do. For her, this was the cost of affection and survival. At sixteen, Tamara found out she was pregnant. She moved in with Ricky and dropped out of school.

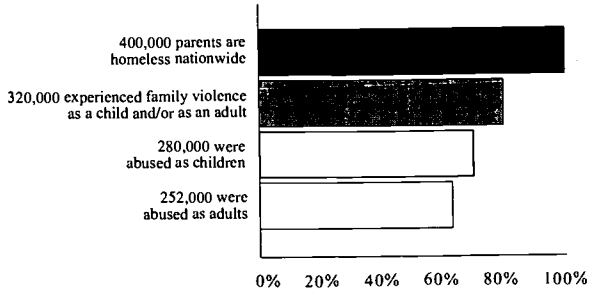
The Cycle Begins Again

Although Ricky set aside an allowance for Tamara, she needed extra money to buy things for the baby. She decided to start looking for a job. At first, Ricky reacted with verbal abuse, but once Tamara found work, the abuse escalated. Eventually, the visible bruises, the threats and tactics such as turning off her alarm clock and harassing her at work prevented Tamara from securing any permanent employment. Her attempts to complete her education also were forestalled by Ricky. He fought with her constantly so that she could not study and beat her up on days she was scheduled to take tests. Despite her desire to contribute to the family, Tamara found herself growing increasingly dependent on Ricky for financial support.

"I thought I could live my life different than my mother's. Ricky seemed different than my father. When things started going downhill it was too late and I looked around and had nowhere to turn. Thank God that I have a second chance."

Tamara's Story

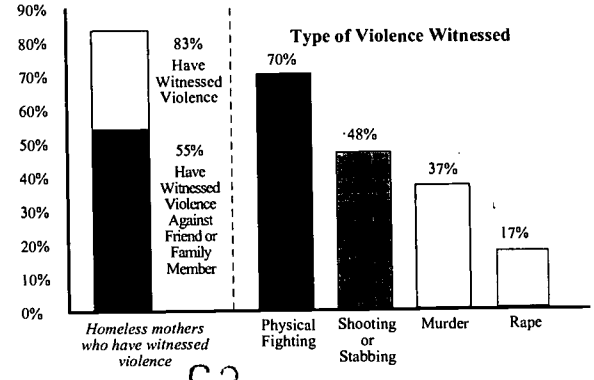
Experiences of Violence Among Homeless Parents*



Of those parents abused by family members as children, three quarters were revictimized in their adult relationships.

**The overwhelming majority of these homeless parents are women.*

Violence Witnessed by Homeless Mothers



Trapped in a Cycle of Violence and Homelessness

Nationally,
at least one in four women are victims of family violence at some point in their lives.

Children who have witnessed violence in the home are five times more likely to commit or suffer acts of violence when they are adults.*

At least seventy percent of men who batter their partners also sexually or physically abuse their children.**

For homeless women,
that number is four out of five--200% higher.

*Mayor's Commission to Combat Family Violence. (City of New York. October 1997).
**Debra Kalmuss, "The intergenerational transmission of marital aggression," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 46 (1984) p. 16.

A Downward Spiral

The next year, Tamara had a second child and Ricky was laid off. Tamara applied for public assistance to help make ends meet. She worked hard to hold things together as Ricky became more unpredictable and depressed. Soon he began to lash out at the children too. The oldest child ended up in foster care for a while but Tamara struggled to get him back.

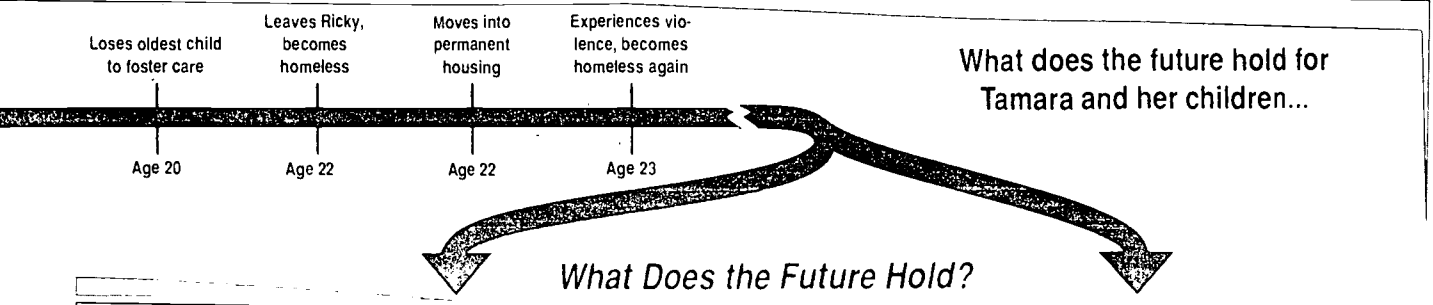
At her wits end, Tamara did not know where to turn. She still loved Ricky and felt that it was better for her children to grow up with their father and avoid the financial hardships that she had known growing up. In addition, the years living with Ricky had isolated her from most of her family and friends. She had nowhere to go if she left.

After one particularly violent episode when Ricky also threatened the children, Tamara decided to move out. She and her children lived with her mother briefly but were forced to leave when the landlord found out. They became homeless.

Nowhere to Turn

Tamara and her children moved to a shelter. Ricky continued to harass them. He waited for Tamara to pick up the children from school and followed her back to the shelter. He threatened to kidnap the children if Tamara did not come back to him. Tamara anxiously looked for permanent housing in a neighborhood away from Ricky. When an apartment finally became available she moved in as quickly as possible

Her new community, however, offered Tamara and her children little reprieve from violence. They heard gun shots and saw muggings, stabbings and fights. Tamara was afraid to go outside or to allow the children outside. Her fear of her neighborhood, her fear of Ricky and and her lack of employable skills prevented her from securing a job. After a few months of trying to make it on her own, Tamara was exhausted. Eventually she moved back in with her mother and even returned to Ricky for a short period of time. Unable to satisfactorily and safely relocate her family, Tamara found herself homeless for a second time. Would this shelter be one more step toward an inevitable future or would it provide a constructive alternative?



What Does the Future Hold?

Inevitable Futures?

Despite her best efforts to make a new and better life for her family than the one she had, Tamara finds herself locked into a cycle of violence and poverty. The second shelter is dirty and noisy. Tamara moves back out as quickly as she can. The continued abuse has affected her and her children in more ways than one. Physical damage and low self-esteem resulting from the abuse have kept her from completing her education and securing employment.

Worse, Tamara begins to see the cycle of violence repeating itself in the lives of her children. They both have short attention spans and the oldest one already acts aggressively. Having grown up as the victims of abuse and witnesses to violence against their mother, Tamara's children are likely to continue the cycle when they become adults.

Constructive Alternatives?

Tamara's second stay in a shelter is unlike her first. Fortunate to be placed in an education and employment-focused homeless facility, Tamara has the opportunity to step back and examine her life. The shelter provides Tamara with healthy alternatives and helps her to realize that her problems run far deeper than finding housing. She seeks domestic violence counseling and slowly builds up the strength to enroll in a GED program and job training program. She also places the children in day care to help them overcome the developmental delays they experienced from frequent moves and unstable childhoods.

Tamara knows that her children are at risk of continuing the cycle of violence and poverty in their own lives, but now she possesses not just the desire to make their lives different; she also possesses the knowledge to do so.

APPENDIX B

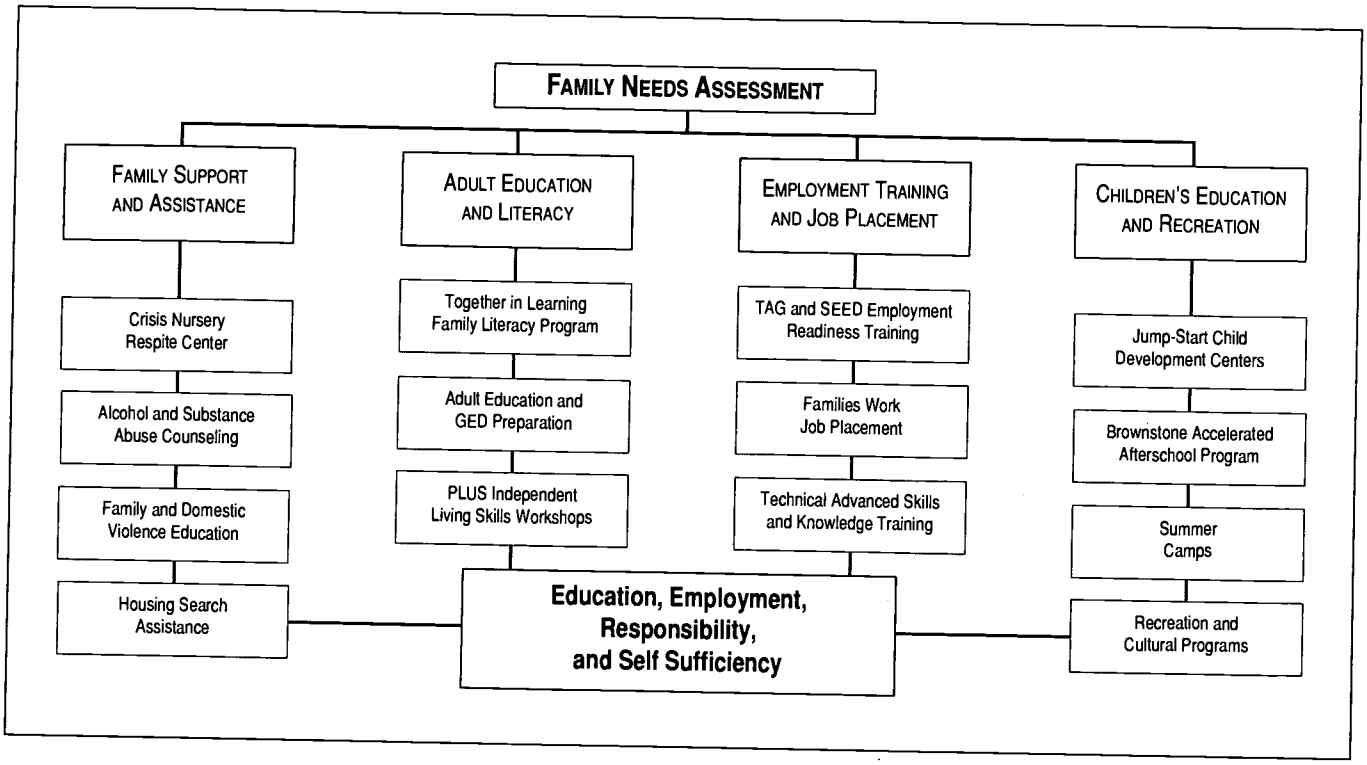
A Bold Initiative:

Residential Educational Training Centers/American Family Inns

While shelters can provide a clean and safe environment for a homeless family, the shelter system should not be simply a way station until permanent housing is secured. To address the needs of these families, shelters also must provide a variety of services and programs that enable families to build sound, independent living skills, complete their education, and obtain job training before moving to permanent housing. Not shelters, but rather Residential Education Training (RET) Centers—or American Family Inns—are required to deliver such a service intervention plan. Through RET Centers, desperately needed services such as health care, counseling, and substance abuse treatment can be economically and efficiently provided. Educational programs such as living skills workshops for adults or after-school accelerated learning programs for children are immediately accessible and responsive to the needs of parents and children. Homes for the Homeless has developed and has continued to refine the RET Center model over the past five years as a response to the changing characteristics of homeless families. The following components provide a flavor of how—at a marginal cost—emergency shelters can be transformed into educational training centers.

American Family Inns have proven to be a successful mechanism to start families on a secure path to independent living. *Approximately ninety-four percent of all families who have participated in the services offered by HFH's RET Centers have maintained their residences once placed in permanent housing.* When compared to New York City's return to shelter rate of fifty percent for formerly homeless families, RET Centers offer a successful solution by addressing the severe complexities of the poverty faced by homeless families.

The dramatic changes in the composition and characteristics of homeless families over the last several years highlight the emerging fact that homelessness is not simply a housing issue. Rather, the trends illustrate that homelessness is merely a symptom of a debilitating poverty affecting a very young and vulnerable population. Policymakers and service providers must meet the challenge of this complex issue with bold initiatives such as the RET Center model. Only then will it be possible to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness which is now plaguing the poor urban family.



THE AMERICAN FAMILY INN/ RET CENTER MODEL

- **Needs Assessment:** A service plan is developed for each family upon entry to the RET Centers, taking into account the unique needs of the family.
- **Health Services:** Families receive complete medical evaluations and preventive services including pre-natal care for pregnant women and immunizations for children.
- **Educational Enhancement:** On-site Alternative High Schools enable adults to complete their GEDs; early childhood development centers provide preschoolers with a jump-start on their education using the 'High Scope' model; after-school accelerated learning programs supplement the education of students and allow them to catch up with their peers; recreation programs including sports teams, theater and dance enhance the children's creativity and socialization skills.
- **Foster Care Prevention:** An innovative crisis nursery provides a safe haven for children at risk of abuse; intensive family counseling and crisis intervention are made available to parents and children which prevent at-risk families from having their children placed in foster care.
- **Substance Abuse Treatment:** On-site substance abuse treatment and counseling encourages family preservation by including children in therapy, unlike many programs which remove children from the family.
- **Independent Living Skills:** PLUS (Practical Living/Useful Skills) workshops address issues such as parenting, domestic violence, child development, self-esteem, housing maintenance, and budgeting to assist families in developing the independent living skills necessary to retain housing.
- **Employment Training:** An apprenticeship and employment training program gives adults the motivation, knowledge, and experience to move from welfare to workfare.
- **Post-Placement Services:** In the PLUS In New Communities (PLUS INC) program, caseworkers visit families for up to one year and offer counseling, client advocacy and linkages to available community resources.

The Cycle of Family Homelessness:
A Reader in Social Policy

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