

Task Force on Housing and Services for Families

Research Initiative 2004

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Background: In July 2003, the Task Force for Housing and Services for Families published a paper titled “*Supportive and Service-Enriched Housing for Families*,” which called for the development of 2,000 units of supportive and service-enriched family housing over five years. As the Task Force met to develop and refine the recommendations contained in that paper, the following recurring questions arose about the need for family supportive and service-enriched housing¹ among sheltered homeless families and single adults:

- What portion of the current shelter population requires ongoing family supports post housing placement?
- Of those that require ongoing supports, what portion could be served through linkages to off-site, community-based providers? What portion will need more intensive on-site supports?
- What risk factors are associated with homeless families’ ongoing need for both on-site and off-site services?

In recent years, various stakeholders, including consumers, service providers, policy makers and researchers have offered differing perspectives on these issues. Some have maintained that only a portion of homeless families need ongoing services post-housing placement, that, of those that need services, only a subset need intensive on-site services, and that service need can be defined based on known risk factors. Others have cautioned that determining which families truly need ongoing supports is difficult and that public investments in supportive and service-enriched housing resources could be squandered if families that do not need the ongoing supports are inappropriately referred. Still others have maintained that family homelessness can be most economically and effectively addressed through rental subsidies and other affordable housing strategies alone and that family supportive housing is costly and unnecessary. One 1998 study found that the receipt of subsidized housing was the primary predictor of residential stability after shelter for formerly homeless families and that individual characteristics played a largely insignificant role in predicting housing stability.²

Recognizing that there is little instructive data available in the literature to help determine what, if any, portion of homeless families need ongoing supports post housing placement and what risk factors are associated with that need, the Research Committee of the Council on Homeless Policies and Services (CHPS), a founding member of the Task Force on Housing and Services for Families, designed a survey that would provide preliminary answers to these questions.

¹ “*Supportive and Service-Enriched Housing for Families*” describes supportive housing as permanent, affordable housing linked to flexible, easily accessible social services and service-enriched housing as “a range of housing models that offer fewer services (than supportive housing) for families with less intensive service needs.”

² Shinn B, Weitzman BC, Stojanovic D, Knickman J, Jimenez L, Duchon L, James S, Krantz DH. Predictors of homelessness among families in New York City: from shelter request to housing stability. *Am J Public Health*. 1998;88:1651-1657.

Methodology:

The respondents to this survey were shelter directors at CHPS' member agencies. Recognizing that a significant number of "single" adult shelter residents are, in fact, parents and that shelter providers have reported a lack of family supportive housing as a barrier to family reunification among unaccompanied homeless adults, the survey was conducted in both Tier II and single adult facilities. To ensure maximum relevancy in each system, two distinct but similar survey instruments were used. Adult shelter directors were asked to complete the survey only for those clients who have expressed interest in reuniting with a child or children upon discharge. Tier II shelter directors were asked to complete the survey only for families that had been determined eligible for shelter.³ The CHPS Research Committee disseminated ninety-two (92) surveys. Of these, fifty-two (52) were returned. Of the fifty-two (52) returned surveys, 55% or nineteen (19) were completed by directors of adult shelters and thirty-three (33) were completed by directors of Tier II shelters. Collectively, the completed surveys offer assessments for 1593 families currently living in New York City's Tier II shelter system and 628 unaccompanied homeless adults living in New York City's singles shelter system.

The survey asked respondents to indicate the number of families' for whom each of three post-shelter permanent housing options best suits families' service needs. Respondents assigned each family to one of three housing options: housing without services, housing with linkages to off-site community services, or housing with on-site services. The survey asked shelter directors to provide this assessment of housing need based on the best professional judgment of program staff not based on which housing situations were actually available to each client.

The survey then asked shelter directors to answer a series of questions related to risk factors present for families assigned to each permanent housing option. Risk factor questions are listed below:

- *How many of these families have a head of household with a serious mental illness?*
- *How many of these families have one or more children with a serious emotional disturbance?*
- *How many of these families have a head of household currently using substances?*
- *How many of these families have a head of household at significant risk of relapse?*
- *How many of these families have a head of household and/or child(ren) with a diagnosis of HIV/AIDS?*
- *How many of these families have a head of household and/or child(ren) w/a serious physical health problem other than HIV/AIDS?*
- *How many of these families are survivors of domestic violence?*
- *How many of these families have an active ACS case or prior ACS involvement?*
- *How many of these families will be reunifying with a minor child(ren) after leaving shelter?(Tier II surveys only)*
- *How many of these families require ongoing assistance with money management?*
- *How many of these heads of household are seeking work and have been unemployed for 18 months or more?*

³ At any given time, a portion of Tier II shelter residents are conditionally placed i.e. they are placed pending an eligibility determination by the New York City Department of Homeless Services. This survey only sought data regarding families that had been determined eligible for shelter.

The survey instruments provided Leichert scale responses for each question, prompting respondents to circle the appropriate response (i.e. *all, most, some, or none*) to the questions listed above. The Research Committee calculated risk prevalence by utilizing a weighted scale with a risk factor of one (1) assigned to the lowest risk response (i.e. “none” - risk factor affects no families) and a risk factor of four (4) assigned to the highest risk response (i.e. “all” - risk factor affects all families.)

Findings

As expected, clear differences emerged between shelter provider assessments of the need for on-site services and off-site services among families living in Tier II shelters and unaccompanied adults interested in reuniting with minor children living in the single adult system. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the portion of each population assessed as having no need for ongoing services, as having a need for off-site services, and as having a need for on-site services.

Table 1 - Level of Service Need	
Families Residing in Tier II Shelters (n=1593)	Unaccompanied Homeless Adults Reuniting with Minor Children (n=628)
29% do not require ongoing supportive services to maintain stable family housing.	15% do not require ongoing supportive services to maintain stable family housing.
54% require ongoing, off-site supportive services.	43% require ongoing, off-site supportive services.
16% require ongoing, on-site supportive services.	42% require ongoing, on-site supportive services.

The findings of this survey indicate that shelter providers assess the majority of both groups (70% of families residing Tier II shelters and 85% of unaccompanied adults) in need of some level of ongoing supportive services to maintain stable family housing. Providers assessed 16% of families living in Tier II shelters and 42% of unaccompanied adults reuniting with minor children as needing on-site services, likely to be the most intensive and most costly model of care. The findings also suggest a distinction between shelter providers’ assessment of the level of ongoing support needed for each population, with families residing in family shelters assessed as significantly more likely to require off-site services (54%) than on-site services (16%) compared to unaccompanied homeless adults reuniting with minor children for whom provider assessments were evenly divided (43% assessed as requiring off-site services and 42% as requiring on-site services).

Table 2 offers a breakdown of providers’ overall assessment of risk prevalence by level of ongoing service need for families residing in Tier II shelters and homeless unaccompanied adults reuniting with minor children. The data indicates that providers in both systems offered similar risk assessments across service categories. For example, Tier II providers assessed a risk level of 1.6 for families not requiring ongoing supportive services to maintain stable family housing, compared to single adult shelter providers who assessed a risk level of 1.7 for families not requiring ongoing supports. Similarities in risk assessments also appear between both populations in each of the other two service categories (i.e. requiring ongoing off-site supports and requiring ongoing on-site supports).

Survey findings indicate that both Tier II and single adult shelter providers assessed families that do require ongoing supportive services in order to maintain stable family housing as having a greater prevalence of risk factors than families not in need of ongoing services. This finding supports the notion that providers are able to distinguish families with ongoing service needs from families that could maintain stable housing without services and that need for ongoing services is positively correlated with known risk factors. Providers in both systems assessed the same prevalence of risk factors for families requiring on-site and off-site services.

Table 2 - Overall Level of Risk	
Families Residing in Tier II Shelters (n=1593)	Unaccompanied Homeless Adults Reunifying with Minor Children (n=628)
An overall risk factor of 1.6 was registered for families that <u>do not require ongoing supportive services</u> to maintain stable family housing.	An overall risk factor of 1.7 was registered for families that <u>do not require ongoing supportive services</u> to maintain stable family housing.
An overall risk factor of 2.1 was registered for families that require ongoing, <u>off-site</u> supportive services.	An overall risk factor of 2.2 was registered for families that require ongoing, <u>off-site</u> supportive services.
An overall risk factor of 2.1 was registered for families that require ongoing, <u>on-site</u> supportive services.	An overall risk factor of 2.2 was registered for families that require ongoing, <u>on-site</u> supportive services.

The survey found some notable distinctions among risk factors associated with the need for different levels of ongoing supports for each population. Table 3 provides provider assessments of the most prevalent risk factors for each population and service category. Table 4 provides a summary of all survey data including prevalence of each risk factor for both populations and each service category. Notably, across all but one service category, both Tier II and single adult shelter providers assessed the need for ongoing assistance with money management as the most prevalent risk factor for families⁴. Tier II provider assessments indicated that for families that do not require ongoing supports post housing placement, chronic unemployment was the most prevalent risk factor and the need for ongoing assistance with money management was the second most prevalent risk factor.

⁴ It should be noted that the vast majority of homeless people fall below the federal poverty level and that difficulties managing a household budget could be caused or exacerbated when family income is insufficient to cover necessary monthly expenses.

Table 3: Most Prevalent Risk Factors

Families Residing in Tier II Shelters (n=1593)	Unaccompanied Homeless Adults Reunifying with Minor Children (n=628)
<p>For the 29% of families assessed as not requiring ongoing supportive services to maintain stable family housing, the most prevalent risk factors were:</p> <p>#1: Head of household is seeking work and have been unemployed for 18+ months (<i>Risk Prevalence=2.2</i>)</p> <p>#2: Family requires ongoing assistance with money management (<i>Risk Prevalence=2.1</i>)</p> <p>#3: Family has an active ACS case or prior ACS involvement (<i>Risk Prevalence=1.9</i>)</p>	<p>For the 15% of families assessed as not requiring ongoing supportive services to maintain stable family housing, the most prevalent risk factors were:</p> <p>#1: Families require ongoing assistance with money management (<i>Risk Prevalence=2.7</i>)</p> <p>#2: Household member has a serious physical health problem; Families have an active ACS case; #2 (tied for #2) Head of Household is seeking work is seeking work and has been unemployed for 18+ months. (<i>Risk Prevalence=2</i>)</p>
<p>For the 54% of families that require ongoing, off-site supportive services, the most prevalent risk factors were:</p> <p>#1: Families require ongoing assistance with money management (<i>Risk Prevalence=2.6</i>)</p> <p>#2: Head of household is seeking work and has been unemployed for 18+ months (<i>Risk Prevalence=2.6</i>)</p> <p>#3 Family has an active ACS case or prior ACS involvement (<i>Risk Prevalence=2.3</i>)</p>	<p>For the 43% of families that require ongoing, off-site supportive services, the most prevalent risk factors were:</p> <p>#1: Families require ongoing assistance with money management (<i>Risk Prevalence=2.7</i>)</p> <p>#2: Head of Household is at significant risk of relapse (<i>Risk Prevalence=2.5</i>)</p> <p>#3: Families have an active ACS case or prior ACS involvement (<i>Risk Prevalence=2.4</i>)</p>
<p>For the 16% of families in need of on-site supportive services, the most prevalent risk factors were:</p> <p>#1: Families require ongoing assistance with money management (<i>Risk Prevalence=2.8</i>)</p> <p># 2: Heads of household are seeking work and have been unemployed for 18+ months; #2 (tied for #2: Families have an active ACS case or prior ACS involvement (<i>Risk Prevalence=2.4</i>)</p>	<p>For the 42% of families in need of on-site supportive services, the most prevalent risk factors were:</p> <p>#1: Families require ongoing assistance with money management (<i>Risk Prevalence=3</i>)</p> <p>#2: Families have an active ACS case or prior ACS involvement; Head of household has a serious mental illness (<i>Risk Prevalence=2.7</i>)</p>

Conclusions

The findings of this survey, which are summarized below, offer important preliminary insight into the need for supportive and service-enriched housing among homeless households residing in New York City's Tier II and single adult shelter systems.

Findings suggest:

- shelter providers assess the provision of ongoing services post housing placement as necessary for maintenance of stable family housing for the majority of shelter residents;
- shelter providers assess families residing in Tier II shelters as significantly more likely to require off-site services (54%) than on-site services (16%);
- shelter providers assess virtually equal need for on-site services (42%) and off-site services (43%) among unaccompanied homeless adults reuniting with minor children;
- shelter providers assess the need for ongoing assistance with money management as the most prevalent risk factor for residents in both Tier II and single adult shelters;
- shelter providers assess current or past ACS involvement as a prevalent risk factor among both Tier II and single adult shelter residents;
- shelter providers assess chronic unemployment as a prevalent risk factor among Tier II shelter residents;
- shelter providers assess serious mental illness and risk of substance relapse as prevalent risk factors among single adult shelter residents;
- shelter providers distinguished families with ongoing service needs from families that could maintain stable housing without services; and
- need for ongoing services post-housing placement is positively correlated with known risk factors.

The CHPS Research Committee notes that client reluctance to disclose sensitive information about ACS involvement, substance use, HIV status and other risk factors included in this survey and limited resources available within the shelter system to diagnose disabilities are likely to have resulted in underreporting of some risk factors. Furthermore, the Committee notes that the sample for this survey was not randomized and the data analysis did not test for statistical significance. The Committee, therefore, recommends that future research be subjected to a more rigorous methodology and investigate the following questions, which were beyond the scope of this survey:

- Is there a correlation between the risk factors identified in this survey and shelter recidivism?
- Can accurate models for predicting shelter recidivism be developed?
- Does the provision of ongoing, housing-based supportive services reduce shelter recidivism rates?
- Does the provision of ongoing, housing-based supportive services reduce rates of other negative outcomes including foster care placement, domestic violence, and chronic unemployment among formerly homeless families?
- Do factors including service intensity and provision of on-site vs. off-site services impact rates of shelter recidivism and other negative outcomes?
- Is supportive and service-enriched family housing cost effective?

Table 4: Summary of Survey Data

	<u>TIER II</u>	No Ongoing Supports	Off-Site Supports	On-Site Supports	<u>SINGLE ADULT</u>	No Ongoing Supports	Off-Site Supports	On-Site Supports
ESTIMATED LEVEL OF NEED: % represented in sample		29%	54%	16%		15%	43%	42%
BY RISK								
Families have a head of household with serious mental illness		1.3	1.9	2.3		1.6	2.2	2.7
Families have one or more children with a serious emotional disturbance		1.5	1.9	2.1		1	2.2	2
Families have a head of household currently using substances		1.5	2.1	1.9		1.9	2.3	2.4
Families have a head of household at significant risk of relapse		1.5	2.1	2		1.3	2.5	2.4
Families have a head of household and/or children with a diagnosis of HIV/AIDS		1.1	1.3	1.3		1.3	1.5	1.5
Families have a head of household and/or children with a serious physical health problem other than HIV/AIDS		1.5	1.8	2.1		2	2.1	1.7
Families are survivors of domestic violence		1.8	2.2	2.3		1.6	1.8	1.7
Families have an active ACS case or prior ACS involvement		1.9	2.3	2.4		2	2.4	2.7
Families will be reunifying with a minor child after leaving shelter		1.7	1.8	1.8		not asked	not asked	not asked
Families will require ongoing assistance with money management		2.1	3	2.8		2.7	2.7	3
Heads of households are seeking work and have been unemployed for 18 months or more		2.2	2.6	2.4		2	2.3	2
		18.1	23	23.4		17.4	22	22.1
Average Level of Risk		1.6	2.1	2.1		1.7	2.2	2.2

