



# Beyond Shelter



## Pew Partnership for Civic Change Program Evaluation

### **Beyond Shelter's Housing First Program for Homeless Families**

*The Institute for Research, Training, and Technical Assistance at Beyond Shelter  
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In 1999, Beyond Shelter's **Housing First Program for Homeless Families** was designated one of 19 innovative programs nationwide to be included in a two-year national evaluation initiative of the Pew Partnership for Civic Change – *Wanted: Solutions for America* (2000-2001). Funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, conducted in partnership with Rutgers University's Center for Urban Policy Research and local universities, the research initiative identified effective and successful solutions to serious societal issues. For the evaluation, the School of Social Work at the University of Southern California and Rutgers worked closely with Beyond Shelter's Institute for Research, Training and Technical Assistance. Information about 97 families enrolled in the **Housing First Program** over a two-year period generated detailed, scientifically valid evidence of the Program's outcomes. Following an overview of the Program's basic methodology, the evaluation is described and the study's implications for ending and preventing homelessness among families with children is assessed.

Beyond Shelter pioneered the "housing first" approach to ending family homelessness in 1988 in response to increasing numbers of homeless families in Los Angeles County. The "housing first" methodology moves homeless families with children – including those who are vulnerable and at-risk – into permanent, affordable, rental housing *as quickly as possible*. After this relocation, "housing first" provides individualized, intensive, home-based case management to help stabilize formerly homeless families, enhancing each family's residential, economic, social and psychological well-being. In Beyond Shelter's **Housing First Program**, such services are time-limited (six months to one year), while families are connected to mainstream services and programs (as needed) for longer-term support.

Beyond Shelter's **Housing First Program** is premised on the belief that vulnerable and at-risk homeless families are often more responsive to interventions and social services support *after they are in their own housing*, rather than while living in temporary housing situations. The "housing first" methodology facilitates the move into permanent housing for homeless families, *then engages the newly housed family in a progressive set of time-limited individualized case management activities and interventions that help the family transition to stability*. The "housing first" methodology, when applied to homeless families, offers a cost-effective alternative to longer stays in emergency shelters and/or transitional housing.

While assisting homeless families back into permanent housing and helping them stabilize, case managers in Beyond Shelter's **Housing First Program** individualize a structured plan of action for parents and children. This has proven to be particularly effective in serving alienated, dysfunctional and troubled families, many of whom could be termed "chronically homeless." Home-based case management, combined with housing relocation services, facilitates long-term stability for such families. Case managers provide a responsive and caring support system after the move to permanent housing and then help each family expand their own "social safety net." This methodology has improved long-term outcomes for previously homeless families considered at risk of another episode of homelessness. Since 1988, more than 3,000 homeless families have participated in the **Housing First Program** operated by Beyond Shelter.

The basic "housing first" methodology introduced by Beyond Shelter has been adapted over the years by organizations throughout the United States, facilitated by regular dissemination of program information through Beyond Shelter's Institute for Research, Training, and Technical Assistance. The "housing first" methodology is most often integrated into systems of emergency shelter and/or transitional housing, significantly decreasing the utilization of short-term emergency shelters and temporary transitional housing programs. Simultaneously, it speeds up successful reconnections to mainstream resources and services that help homeless families rebuild their lives in permanent housing, rejoin the community and enhance their economic and social well-being.

The rigorously designed research protocol of the Pew study described here will enable replications by other organizations and encourage their contributions to the growing knowledge base about "housing first" for homeless families.

## Research Design

The study investigated short- and long-term outcomes for 97 families with children enrolled in the **Housing First Program**. Measures were developed from two models: (1) the Program Logic Model for Homeless Mothers and Children developed and widely used by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and (2) a model to measure self-sufficiency in nonprofit housing programs developed by Rachel Bratt and Langley Keyes in the Department of Urban and Environmental Policy at Tufts University. Data was collected on families at two points: (1) within the first month in permanent housing, and (2) at the end of six months of sustained permanent housing. Three behavioral scales were used to operationalize the SAMHSA model to measure depression and its symptoms, self-esteem and problem-solving.

## Demographics

Eighty-seven percent of homeless families studied were headed by single mothers with an average of three children. The average age of the parent was 30. Most of the families were either African American (60%) or Latino/a (25%). Fifty-nine percent of the families had a history of domestic violence, and one-quarter had a history of substance abuse. A majority of the families were homeless for eight to 12 months prior to enrolling in the **Housing First Program**.

## Findings

Results indicate that the **Housing First Program** successfully relocated vulnerable and high-risk families into permanent housing and assisted them in stabilizing after their move to permanent housing. After residential stability was sustained for six months, outcome measures for families had either increased or remained constant. This confirms the notion that, through the acquisition of permanent, affordable housing and the provision of home-based case management, homeless families, particularly those who are vulnerable and at-risk, will stabilize their living patterns and attain improved social and economic well-being. Additionally:

- ◆ 91% of families had paid their rent on time for three consecutive months after moving into permanent housing.
- ◆ 70% of families with a history of domestic violence entered the Program living violence free. Six months later, 97% reported living violence free.
- ◆ Parents were more likely to have attended a child development class and participated in employment and training activities, such as ESL, GED, and computer classes.
- ◆ Parents who were employed full time for two or more weeks upon moving into permanent housing remained employed full time six months later. Parents who were working full time for three or more months at the time of their move were still employed full time six months later.
- ◆ Scores on the depression scale, tested in paired samples, indicated a 20% reduction in symptoms of depression.

## Why It Matters

Despite a booming economy, homelessness did not disappear in the 1990s. Data indicate that on any day, at least 800,000 people are homeless in the United States, including about 200,000 children in homeless families.<sup>1</sup> During a typical year, between 900,000 and 1.4 million children are homeless with their families.<sup>2</sup> Thirty-four to 37 percent of the national homeless population is comprised of families with children.<sup>3</sup>

The “housing first” methodology presents an alternative to traditional homeless services for families, which often fail to address their permanent housing and long-term needs. Without dedicated housing relocation services, many homeless families are unable to overcome barriers to obtaining affordable housing (which include poor credit and eviction histories), often resulting in a state of chronic homelessness for themselves and their children. The methodology provides a responsive support system to help homeless families develop stable living patterns and connections to the community once they are in permanent and affordable rental housing.

## Dissemination of Housing First Research

The Pew Partnership’s Solutions for America is a national initiative to document and disseminate research findings and information about the types of programs and solutions that are working to solve tough challenges in communities across the country. The initiative has translated complex evaluation research into actionable strategies needed to build stronger communities. The research collected through the Pew Partnership initiative will serve as a tool to further advance the “housing first” approach as a method for ending and preventing family homelessness nationwide and promoting systemic change.

Beyond Shelter’s Institute for Research, Training & Technical Assistance works closely with government agencies, national advocacy organizations, and service providers to promote adaptation of the basic “housing first” methodology. The Institute disseminates information through regional and national technical assistance workshops, presentations, direct consulting, and the development and distribution of publications and manuals.

## How does the Housing First Program work in Los Angeles?

Homeless families are referred to Beyond Shelter by more than 50 collaborative agencies, including emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, domestic violence shelters, residential drug treatment programs, social service agencies, and homeless drop-in centers. Approximately 300 homeless families are relocated into permanent housing each year.

The **Housing First Program** is implemented through three primary stages:

**Screening, Assessment and Planning:** The “housing first” methodology relies on an in-depth screening and assessment. At Beyond Shelter, each family is assisted to develop a Family Action Plan that builds upon their strengths and addresses their needs.

**Provision of Housing Resources:** After the completion of screening and assessment, the next phase involves assisting homeless families in moving to permanent, affordable housing in a residential neighborhood. This is accomplished by helping them overcome various barriers to obtaining rental housing, including assistance in obtaining rental subsidies, when possible. Direct marketing to property owners helps to increase the housing options for homeless families. City and county housing authorities may also participate in this process.

**Provision of Home-Based Case Management:** Beyond Shelter’s **Housing First Program** includes the provision of six months to one year of individualized, home-based case management after the move, to help families improve coping and household management skills, reorient to stable living patterns, and link with local services and resources. Some families may receive periodic monitoring and support after “graduating” from the Program, as they continue to progress.

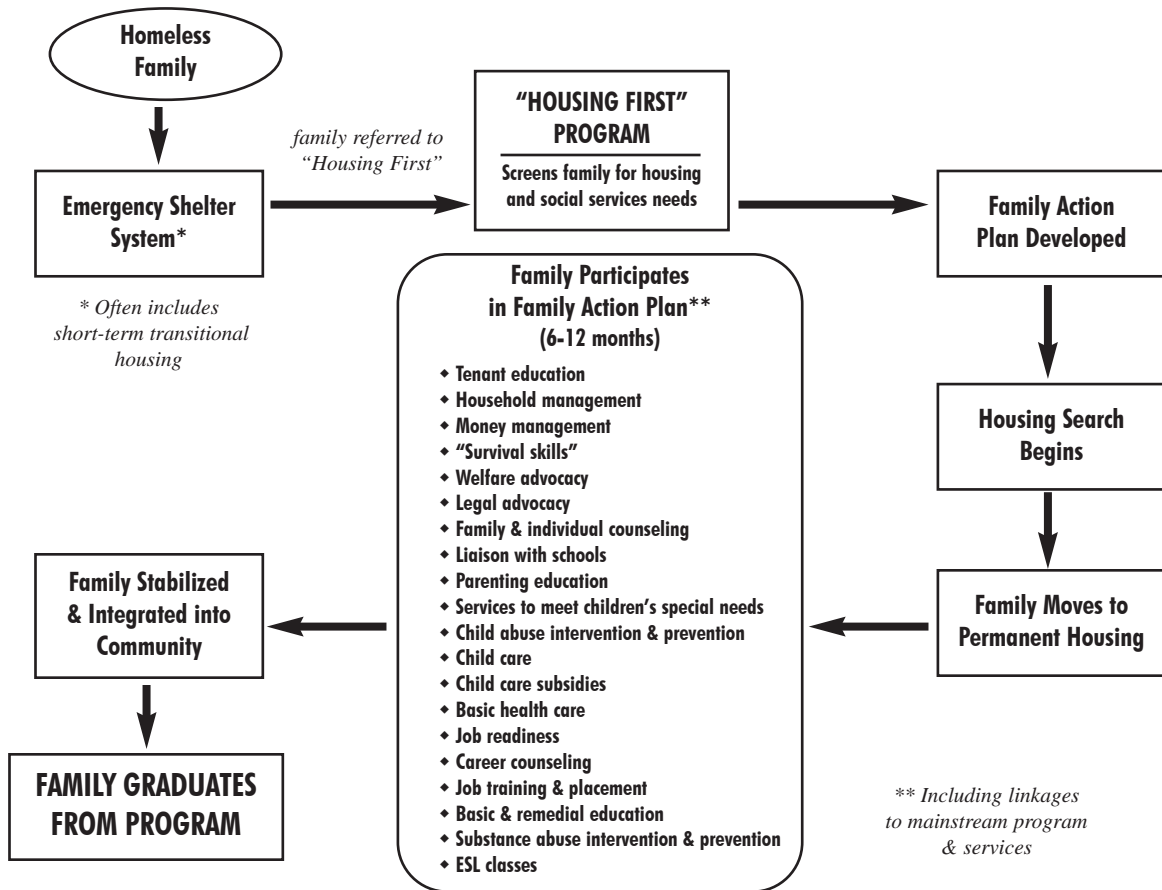
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<sup>1</sup> Burt, M., et. al. (2001). What will it take to end homelessness? Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Who is homeless in Los Angeles? *Just the facts*. Los Angeles, CA: Institute for the Study of Homelessness and Poverty.

## Sample "Housing First" Program



### Recognition for the Housing First Program

**Community Excellence Award** – Interagency Council on Homelessness (1992)

**Nonprofit Sector Award** – National Alliance to End Homelessness (1996)

**One of "25 U.S. Best Practices"** – United Nations Conference, Habitat II, Istanbul, Turkey (1996)

**One of "100 International Best Practices"** – United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, Nairobi, Kenya (1996)

## About Beyond Shelter

Founded in 1988, the mission of Beyond Shelter is to develop systemic approaches to combat poverty and homelessness among families with children and enhance family economic security and well-being. Beyond Shelter accomplishes its goals through responsive service delivery, people-centered community development, and the creation of knowledge for social change. The agency's programs in Southern California serve as a "laboratory" for the development of innovative methodologies. Beyond Shelter's Institute for Research, Training and Technical Assistance conducts workshops, trainings, and private consulting for governmental and community-based agencies nationwide. The Institute also publishes specialized manuals on the agency's key initiatives.

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