

# Beyond Shelter



## The Skid Row Families Demonstration Project

Evaluation Report  
Permanent Housing Outcomes

November 2009



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## Executive Summary

The Skid Row Families Demonstration Project is a nonprofit-government collaboration intended to address escalating family homelessness in L.A.'s Skid Row. This evaluation report describes permanent housing outcomes measured through 12 months in housing.

### DEFINING BASELINE CHARACTERISTICS OF ENROLLEES

- **Demographics:** The families were predominantly single-parent households (86%) headed by females. Nearly one quarter of households were headed by transition-age youth (18-25). About three in ten families had four or more children.
- **Income:** The average household income was \$754, including food stamps, with the majority of families (77%) dependent on CalWORKs. Income was in part a function of work histories, with only 49% of parents having worked in any capacity two years before program entry.
- **Housing Histories:** Only 46.5% of enrollees had ever held a lease in their name (Note: N=127). Twenty-eight percent had never lived in one residence continuously for more than 12 months, including 13% of all enrollees who possessed less than 6 months past housing tenure. Nearly one quarter of families had been evicted in the past from rental housing.
- **Homeless Histories:** At program intake, families had already been homeless for 8.5 months on average. Nearly 1 in 2 families had experienced a prior homeless episode, with 18% having experienced two or more prior episodes.
- **Special Needs:** 37% of families had at least one adult with one or more serious health issues. Approximately 40% of parents reported past domestic violence victimization. About 20% of heads of household had serious mental health issues or diagnoses, with the majority having previously untreated and/or undiagnosed problems.

### KEY FINDINGS

- **Housing Achievement:** 80% of enrollees (241 out of 300) achieved permanent housing. At least 60 families (25% of housed cohort) moved into permanent housing with their own lease agreements for the first time in their lives.
- **Ending Homelessness:** The program ended just over 180 years of homelessness for 241 households. Homelessness was ended for 595 minor children, including 235 children ages 0-5.
- **Housing Retention:** The overall housing retention rate was 97% (234 out of 241), as measured at case closure. Of the 18 families who lost or had to leave their original housing, 11 were successfully rehoused and retained their housing at follow up.
- **Housing Tenure:** 76% of families (184 out of 241) had verifiable housing retention of at least 12 months, with many of the remaining households nearing that important milestone.

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HOUSED AND NON-HOUSED FAMILIES

- There were few statistically significant differences between housed and non-housed families.
- The similarities between the two groups suggests the absence of a program selection effect, meaning that the program showed better outcomes with those families who possessed fewer barriers and challenges to being successful in the program.

# **SRFDP Evaluation Report Permanent Housing Outcomes October 2009**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The Skid Row Families Demonstration Project (SRFDP) (January 2007-December 2009) is a nonprofit-government collaboration intended to address the growing ranks of family homelessness in Los Angeles' Skid Row neighborhood, a dangerous and unhealthy environment for families with young children. Complementary to other efforts to combat this problem, most notably the Board of Supervisors' "Zero Tolerance" policy and the Homeless CalWORKs Families Project, the Demonstration Project is an L.A. County-funded initiative designed to holistically address the crisis intervention, permanent housing, and longer-term service needs of homeless families encountered in Skid Row.

Beyond Shelter, a nonprofit homeless services agency, has served as the lead provider for the project, with primary responsibility for program design and implementation, including a full range of interim and permanent housing and support services activities. Partnering with the agency in the collaboration have been the L.A. County Departments of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Public Social Services (DPSS), Mental Health (DMH), Health Services (DHS), and Public Health (DPH), and the Housing Authorities, City of Los Angeles (HACLA) and County of Los Angeles (HACoLA). The Chief Executive Office (CEO) of L.A. County has provided oversight for the project, while DCFS has served as project coordinator.

As a demonstration project, the SRFDP was designed to test an innovative model of services integration involving multiple public agencies and a nonprofit agency, as well as test a flexible and individualized housing-based intervention for a high-risk and/or chronically homeless families population.

Beyond Shelter's Institute for Research, Training, & Technical Assistance, with initial consultation from the USC School of Social Work, has been responsible for evaluating the program. This evaluation report covers permanent housing outcomes to date, specifically describing short-term and intermediate outcomes measured through 12 months in housing. A prior report, *Year One Report* (April 2008), described the needs and characteristics of the 300 families enrolled in the program and summarized initial program implementation. A final report, expected to be released in January 2010, will describe program outcomes in non-housing domains, including household income, employment, domestic violence, and substance abuse, as well as provide a picture of housing outcomes beyond 12 months.

### **Evaluation Methodology and Organization of This Report**

The program evaluation was designed to measure changes in housing status and stability through data collection at multiple waves, beginning with program intake and enrollment and concluding with case closure. Information was collected by intake workers and case managers as part of the normal services delivery process, using assessment instruments developed by Beyond Shelter. Heads of household were not compensated for their participation, and parents were free to ignore or refuse to answer any questions asked of them, particularly during the lengthy intake process.

The evaluation design called for every family to be interviewed and/or assessed at program intake, within the first 30 days in permanent housing, and at case closure, typically twelve months into permanent housing. While every effort was made to include all families, some information on a minority of families is missing, particularly as regards their baseline characteristics. Family refusal to answer questions or staff oversight in conducting intake interviews led to incomplete data collection for these households. The number of respondents for various questions and/or outcomes is listed parenthetically throughout the report (i.e., N = x).

The analyses of data collected compare families' housing histories with their outcomes during program implementation. In interpreting the results, the reader must bear in mind that the findings cannot demonstrate cause and effect, due to the nature of the study design and the lack of a comparison, much less a control, group. However, to contextualize and shed light on the observed housing outcomes, the baseline characteristics of the families who achieved permanent housing are compared to the same characteristics of the households who did not achieve permanent housing. This comparison helps to answer the question about how and in what ways "program stayers" differed from "program leavers." These analyses show that these two groups did not differ substantially and thus household characteristics alone likely do not account for differences in reported outcomes.

The report is divided into the following six sections:

1. Description of the SRFDP Program Model
2. Summary of Baseline Housing Access and Retention Barriers of Enrolled Families
3. Presentation of General Housing Outcomes for the Program As a Whole
4. Discussion of Housing Outcomes Among High-Risk Subgroups
5. Comparison of Housed and Non-Housed Families
6. Reflections on Child Well-Being After Housing

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## **SECTION II:**

### **THE PROGRAM MODEL**

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In an effort to enforce the “Zero Tolerance” policy for families in Skid Row adopted by the L.A. County Board of Supervisors in 2006, staff from a variety of L.A. County Departments were assigned to Skid Row to work in teams to identify, and then assess and provide resources and referrals to, homeless families encountered in the area. For the Skid Row Families Demonstration Project, hereafter referred to as the Demonstration Project, families encountered in Skid Row were assessed by members of the Skid Row Assessment Team (SRAT) consisting of staff from DPSS, DCFS, DMH, and DPH. Families deemed eligible were then referred to Beyond Shelter for further screening and assessment and program enrollment.

After program intake by Beyond Shelter, families were enrolled into the Crisis Intervention Program – Program Phase I, which included crisis intervention services and temporary housing located outside Skid Row. The Crisis Intervention Program was intended to address families’ crisis needs and then once stabilized, refer them in a timely manner to the Housing First Program – Program Phase II. As a rapid rehousing model, the Housing First Program is predicated on moving homeless families into permanent housing as quickly as possible and then providing them, through home visitation, the case management services that are traditionally provided in transitional housing programs.

Unlike traditional models, the Housing First approach does not require families to meet certain program expectations or goals (e.g., mandatory savings plans, parenting classes, or job attainment) before being assisted into permanent housing; instead, the model focuses on actively engaging homeless families in the steps necessary to develop and implement permanent housing plans. As an adaptation of this model, the current program was intentionally designed by Beyond Shelter as a “high tolerance” demonstration project intended to engage families who are typically refused services by other homeless programs due to presenting issues or family makeup, or who refuse to participate in services when offered. Dysfunctional behavior and/or noncompliance with program activities would not necessarily result in termination of services.

Although efforts were made in the original program design to process families through the two program components as quickly as possible, a variety of outside factors and extenuating circumstances prevented the majority of families from moving quickly through the various steps required for a successful move into permanent, affordable housing. Through improved communication and collaboration with project partners, however, many of these issues were successfully resolved at the end of the first year of program operation. The Year One Evaluation Report provides a detailed discussion of these challenges.

Once families become housed in the community at-large with their own lease agreements, case managers work intensively and proactively with parents and children to assist them to stabilize in their housing and to link them with community-based resources and services. Home visitation services are offered for the first 6 months, tailored in frequency and intensity to individual need, followed by 6 months of monitoring and support, primarily through phone contact.

# SECTION III:

## BASELINE HOUSING BARRIERS OF ENROLLEES

During the intake process for the Demonstration Project, heads of household were asked a series of closed and open-ended questions about their histories in various domains, including housing, employment, and family violence, as well as current status regarding family composition, income, and physical and mental health. The results are presented in Table 1.

<b>Table 1. Baseline Housing Barriers &amp; Characteristics of Participating Families*</b>	
<b>Characteristic at Program Intake (Sample Size)</b>	<b>Indicator (Number of Families)</b>
Single-Parent Household (N = 252)**	85.7% (216)
Transition Age Youth, 18-25 (N = 294)	23.1% (68)
Receiving CalWORKs (N = 295)	76.6% (226)
Worked in Last 2 Years (N = 295)	49.2% (145)
Average Income (N = 283)	\$754 (includes food stamps)
Household with 4 or More Children (N = 288)	29.2% (84)
Average Length of Current Homelessness (N = 290)	8.32 Months
Previously Homeless As a Family (N = 295)	47% (139)
Two or More Prior Homeless Episodes (N = 295)	18.3% (54)
Housing Tenure In One Place Beyond 24 Months (N = 244)	58.0% (141)
Ever Held a Lease (N = 127)	46.5% (59)
Ever Been Evicted (N = 268)	24.3% (65)
Past Domestic Violence Victimization (N = 295)	39.0% (115)
Adult with Physical or Mental Disability (N = 295)	23.1% (68)
Adult with Chronic Health Condition (N = 295)	24.8% (73)

\* Some numbers in this report vary slightly from those reported in the Year One Evaluation Report due to additional data added from a small number of families excluded from prior calculations.

\*\* The number of households represented in each category (i.e., N =) varies based on the completeness of information provided by families at program intake and/or staff ability to collect such information.

The 300 families enrolled in the Demonstration Project exhibited multiple risk factors for housing instability and homelessness. Taken together, these factors provide a portrait of the myriad factors that potentially precipitated or directly caused families to lose their housing and become homeless. They also represent the complex array of challenges that confronted Beyond Shelter in terms of, first, rehousing these families, and second, ensuring that they remain housed.

Consisting of predominantly single-parent households dependent on CalWORKs, the very low monthly incomes of the target population presented a formidable barrier to assisting these families to access and sustain permanent housing. Limited and/or sporadic work histories prior to program enrollment would appear to contribute to the high rate of welfare receipt reported at intake. Only about one in two parents had worked – in any capacity and for any length of time – two years prior to program entry.

Nearly one quarter of households were headed by transition-age youth (ages 18-25). Twenty-nine of these 68 youth (43%) were 21 years of age or younger at the point of program intake and enrollment. A lack of rental history, low income, and poor or no work history are some of the common barriers to independent housing for such young parents.

Serious health issues among heads of household also affected a significant number of families. Over 23% of parents self-identified as having a somatic and/or psychiatric disorder. Based on Beyond Shelter's interactions and work over an extended period of time with enrolled families, the agency believes this statistic is actually an undercount of the actual prevalence of severe mental health conditions. This suspicion will be discussed in more detail later.

Close to one in four heads of household stated that they themselves, or another adult in the family, had a chronic health condition. Of particular note, only 27 of the 68 parents who self-identified as having a disability also identified themselves as having a chronic health condition. Collectively, this means that a total of 109 families (37% of interviewees, N = 295) had at least one adult with one or more serious health issues. Similar to this finding, 52% of adults (147 out of 283) self-identified or presented as having one or more special needs, defined as any of the following:

- third-trimester pregnancy
- newborn child
- physical, mental, or developmental disability
- serious health condition not classified as a disability
- active substance abuse
- family with 5 or more children
- emancipated foster youth
- open DCFS case or recent history with DCFS (within the last year)
- single father with children
- less than 6 months recovery from substance abuse

The special needs of enrollees, including serious physical and mental health issues, point to the enormous challenges participating families faced in overcoming their homelessness, which had already averaged nearly 8.5 months at program intake.

In addition to their homeless episode reported at intake, nearly half of enrolled families had experienced prior homelessness. Of this subgroup, 39% had experienced at least two previous episodes, comprising nearly 20% of all enrolled households. Past homelessness suggests a historical pattern of housing instability for many enrollees. In fact, 42% of families reported limited housing tenure as adults with their children, never having lived in one apartment or house continuously for more than two years. These figures on recurrent housing disruptions speak to why family homelessness is best understood as part of a continuum of residential instability.<sup>1 2</sup>

Among all families, 28% had never lived in one place continuously for more than one year. This subgroup included a significant number of families who had never lived in one place for more than 6 months, totaling 13% of all enrollees. Parent age, as one might expect, does not fully explain unstable residential histories: the average age of parents with 6 months or less of reported housing tenure was 29 years at program intake, and 32 years for households with no more than 12 months of past stability. The average age for all heads of household was only slightly higher at 33 years.

Many families had never held a lease in their own name. This was the case for at least 68 families, or 54% of all households (N = 127) who responded to questions about their leasing histories. Interestingly, despite their lack of leasing experience, these 68 families were actually more likely to report having lived continuously in one permanent residence for 12 months or more than to report past housing tenure of less than 12 months. This finding suggests that among the 177 families who at intake had reported prior housing tenure of more than one year, many parents had not actually been the leaseholders in those residences; rather, they were doubled or tripled up with friends and/or family for extended periods of time.

Lack of leasing experience is a major barrier to accessing permanent housing, on top of other socio-economic barriers the families in the Demonstration Project collectively faced. This factor has been found in some studies to differentiate homeless from never-homeless welfare recipients.<sup>3</sup>

An inability to maintain independent housing is another important housing barrier. One quarter of enrolled families had trouble maintaining rental units, as demonstrated by their eviction histories.

Finally, some families presented other housing barriers unique to their particular circumstances. Nearly 30% of households had 4 or more children. Larger, poor families typically have greater difficulty obtaining permanent housing due to the higher move-in and monthly leasing costs associated with larger rental units. In addition, nearly 4 in 10 parents had experienced past domestic violence victimization. Research has conclusively shown that family violence is a common precipitating factor of housing disruptions and homelessness among poor women.<sup>4 5</sup> The difficulty of breaking the cycle of violence also presents a formidable barrier to maintaining housing, once women who have experienced abuse, however recent, are rehoused.

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<sup>1</sup> Shinn, M.B., Rog, D., & Culhane, D. (2004). Background Research on Family Homelessness. Washington, DC: United States Interagency Council on Homelessness.

<sup>2</sup> Rog, D. & Buckner, J. (2007). Homeless Families and Children. In *Toward Understanding Homelessness: The 2007 National Symposium on Homelessness Research*. Washington, DC: U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Health and Human Services.

<sup>3</sup> Shinn, M. B., Weitzman, B.C., Stojanovic, D., Knickman, J.R., Jimenez, L., Duchon, L., James, S., & Krantz, D.H. (1998). Predictors of Homelessness Among Families in New York City: From Shelter Request to Housing Stability. *American Journal of Public Health*, 88(11), 1651-1657.

<sup>4</sup> Browne, A. & Bassuk, S. Intimate Violence in the Lives of Homeless and Poor Housed Women: Prevalence and Patterns in an Ethnically Diverse Sample. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 67(2), 261-278, April 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Responding to the Needs of Low Income and Homeless Women Who Are Survivors of Family Violence. *Journal of American Medical Association*, 53(2), 57-64, Spring 1998.

## SECTION IV:

### GENERAL HOUSING OUTCOMES OF THE PROGRAM

For the Demonstration Project, a successful short-term housing outcome was defined as achieving affordable, permanent housing in the community at-large. Furthermore, success was defined as having one's own lease agreement. A successful intermediate housing outcome was operationalized as verifiable housing retention at the time of case closure, typically 12 months after housing placement.

<b>Table 2. Permanent Housing Outcomes and Indicators</b>		
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Permanent Housing Achievement	241 of 300 enrolled participants	80.3%
Permanent Housing Retention (Original unit)	223 out of 241 housed families	92.5%
Housing Tenure of (at least) 12 Months	184 out of 241 housed families	76.3%
Families Rehoused After Losing or Leaving First Housing	11 out of 18 families	61.1%
Permanent Housing Retention (Second unit)	11 out of 11 families	100%
Overall Housing Retention At Case Closure	234 out of 241 households	97.1%

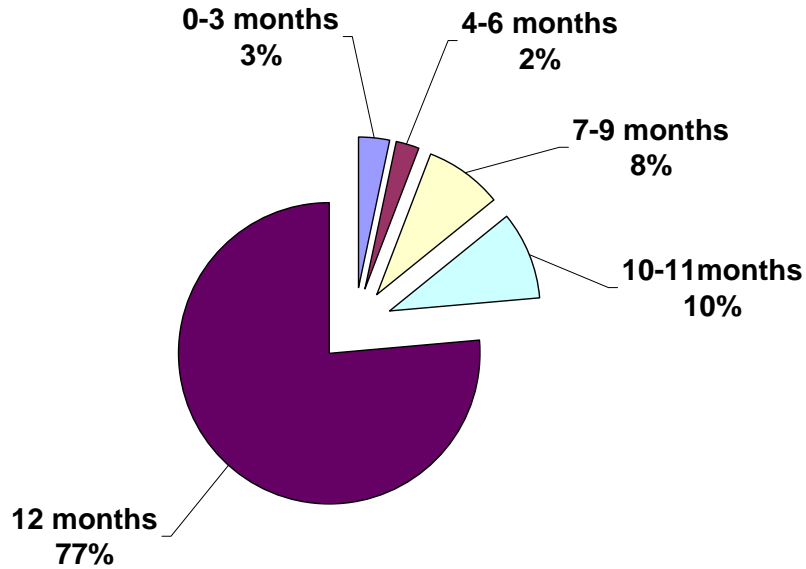
Slightly more than 80% of enrolled families achieved permanent housing through the assistance of Beyond Shelter. The vast majority of these families utilized tenant-based Section 8 vouchers - 88% of housed families in all. Collectively, the Demonstration Project ended 2,164 months of homelessness or just over 180 years, as measured at program intake, for these 241 households. Homelessness was ended for 595 minor children, including 235 children ages 0-5.

At the time of case closure, nearly 93% of families had retained their original housing. Eighteen families lost or had to leave their first apartment for various reasons, including eviction, conflicts with property owners, domestic violence, and foreclosure. Only four of these families, however, were evicted. Eleven of the 18 families were rehoused, and all 11 had retained their housing at follow-up. Including these second units, housing retention for all families was 97%.

As of June 30, 2009, the point of measurement for this report, nearly 77% of families (N = 184) had been in permanent housing for a minimum of 12 months. Most of the remaining families were well

on their way to achieving this milestone, as illustrated in Figure 1. Twenty three families (10%) had remained stably housed for either 10 or 11 months. The other 34 families had been in permanent housing for 9 months or less.

**Figure 1. Breakdown of Permanent Housing Tenure by Time and Household**



**NOTE:** The findings on housing tenure are based on *known* housing retention. While Beyond Shelter provided most families with six months of home-based case management services, and another six months of follow-up and monitoring, a minority of cases were closed, often by family request, prior to the 12-month point in permanent housing. In these cases, Beyond Shelter was not able to document housing retention beyond the point of case closure. Therefore, some of the households reflected in the pie chart as possessing less than 12 months of housing tenure may in fact have been stable in permanent housing for 12 months, and longer in many cases, as of June 30, 2009. The chart, however, only reflects verifiable housing status at the end of June.

Given that 23% (N = 55) of the 241 housed families had eviction histories and 49% (N = 117) had experienced prior homelessness, the ability of these families to maintain housing in the face of unstable residential histories and various ongoing personal challenges is noteworthy.

It is expected that the final evaluation report for the Demonstration Project will report on longer term housing retention (i.e., 12-24 months) using data on Section 8 recipients provided by HACLA. While Beyond Shelter has necessarily lost contact with housed families after case closure, HACLA has maintained contact with the majority of these families through their ongoing participation in the Section 8 Program.

<b>Table 3. Housing Destinations of Families</b>				
Indicators	Permanent Housing with Section 8 Voucher	Permanent Housing with Shallow Subsidy	Affordable Housing Property or Market Rate	Back to Homelessness
Number	212	22	7	66*
Percent	87.9% (212 out of 241)	9.1% (22 out of 241)	2.9% (7 out of 241)	27.4% (66 out of 300)

\*This number includes the 59 families who never achieved permanent housing in addition to the 7 households who lost their original permanent housing and were not rehoused before their cases were closed.

The preponderance of families (88%) achieved permanent housing through the use of a tenant-based Section 8 voucher. Another 9% of households moved into permanent housing with the assistance of a “shallow subsidy” issued through the Demonstration Project. In total, 97% of all housed families received tenant-based rental assistance of some kind. The almost universal need for such assistance is not surprising given the meager incomes of families.

The shallow subsidies varied in duration and amount by household, but generally were no more than \$600 per month and lasted no more than one year. The families who received these subsidies generally were ineligible for Section 8, due to undocumented status, past criminal convictions, fraud, evictions from prior Section 8 housing, and/or outstanding debt owed to a public housing authority. Due to the short-term and shallow nature of the rental subsidy, most of these families were housed in subsidized housing (e.g., tax credit projects), with the goal of increasing their income before the subsidy expired.

Only seven families in the Demonstration Project achieved permanent housing without a direct subsidy. However, most of these seven cases moved into affordable buildings with subsidized units. Two to three mothers opted to move in with family, and one mother was able to rent a market-rate unit on her own. Moving in with family was deemed a positive outcome because there was sufficient room in each of the houses to comfortably accommodate the families and the arrangement was considered permanent and stable.

Nineteen families were able to convert the community apartments Beyond Shelter had been using as short-term housing/emergency shelter into their permanent housing. Once the families received their rental subsidies, control of the lease was transferred from Beyond Shelter to the heads of household. While most families who had been staying temporarily in these master-leased apartments – there were 146 in total – preferred to relocate to alternative permanent housing once they had obtained their Section 8 vouchers, “transitioning in place” provided the 19 families who remained with housing continuity. Minimizing housing disruptions for families is one reason why many shelter programs around the country are moving towards transition-in-place models.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The Sound Families Initiative, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is a good example of this burgeoning practice. During the evolution of this now completed three-year initiative in the Pacific Northwest, transitional housing providers increasingly moved towards a housing first, transition-in-place model. See [www.soundfamilies.org](http://www.soundfamilies.org) for more information.

Every one of the 241 families who obtained permanent housing held their own lease agreements, except for the two or three families who moved in with family. Given the multiplicity of housing barriers faced by the cohort of housed families, including the 25% of households (N = 60) who had never previously held their own lease agreement, this is a very positive program outcome.

**Table 4. Impact of Section 8 Subsidies on Permanent Housing Attainment, Stability, & Affordability**

# of Families Issued Section 8 Vouchers	# Who Achieved Permanent Housing	# Who Retained Original Housing	Overall Housing Retention Rate	Average Monthly Rent* (N = 206)	Average Subsidy Portion* (N = 205)	Average Family Portion* (N = 210)	Average Family Income at Time of Move-In* (N = 201)
223	212	200	99%	\$1458.03	\$1270.82	\$213.92	\$868.84

\* The number of responses represented in each category differs based on the information made available to Beyond Shelter from family self-report, copies of housing authority breakdown letters, or other documentation from the housing authority made available to Beyond Shelter.

In the Demonstration Project, 88% of families (212 of 241) achieved permanent housing through the use of Section 8 vouchers. The overwhelming majority of these vouchers came from the Housing Authority City of Los Angeles (HACLA). Most families preferred to remain in the City of Los Angeles, a familiar environment for participating households, rather than utilize a rental subsidy issued through the Housing Authority County of Los Angeles (HACoLA). As the Year One Evaluation Report demonstrated, 53% of families enrolled in the program originated from the First and Second Supervisorial Districts.

The data presented in Table 4 clearly illustrate the significant, positive impact voucher receipt had on family housing achievement. Of the 223 households issued a Section 8 voucher during the program, or who entered the Demonstration Project with a voucher in hand, 212 achieved permanent housing with the assistance of Beyond Shelter’s Housing Relocation Specialists. This translates into a 95% utilization rate. Compared to the conventional Section 8 Program, the success rate for families participating in the Demonstration Project was more than double the previously estimated utilization rate for non-homeless voucher holders.<sup>7</sup> As estimated by HACLA in 2007, 32% of families who submit Section 8 applications to the conventional program eventually obtain permanent housing.<sup>8</sup>

The low success rate of non-homeless voucher holders points to the important role Housing Specialists play in assisting homeless families in, first, successfully completing the lengthy and in-

<sup>7</sup> Note that the calculation of an overall success rate should factor in the percentage of applicants from the Demonstration Project who applied to the Section 8 Program but were denied a voucher. Unfortunately, this information was not able for this report. However, the vast majority of applications submitted by Beyond Shelter on behalf of families were successful. Therefore, the overall success rate is not that much lower than the stated 95% figure.

<sup>8</sup> Shelter Partnership. (2007). An Evaluation of the Housing Authority City of Los Angeles Section 8 Homeless Housing Choice Voucher Program. Los Angeles: Shelter Partnership.

depth application process, and second, navigating the tight, expensive rental market in Los Angeles. Prior research has documented the efficacy of providing comprehensive housing counseling services to homeless families and other high-risk homeless populations participating in the Federal Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) Program.<sup>9 10 11 12</sup>

Beyond Shelter's Housing Specialists enabled families participating in the Demonstration Project to successfully complete the application process, receive their vouchers, and locate landlords willing to participate in the program. In the past, the limited number of such landlords has been identified by homeless services agencies in Los Angeles as the principal obstacle to voucher utilization by individuals and/or families participating in HACLA's Homeless Section 8 Program.<sup>13</sup> It is also one reason why each year the vouchers of many non-homeless Section 8 recipients are unable to be used, expire, and are returned to HACLA.

Housing retention among voucher holders was also very high. Ninety four percent of such families had maintained their original apartments or houses at the time of case closure, typically twelve months in housing. Only twelve families were displaced from their first placement, and only one due to eviction. The other eleven maintained their vouchers but had to leave their original housing due to conflicts with property owners (N = 6), domestic violence (N = 2), a sharp reduction in the rental subsidy of one mother whose children were detained by DCFS, foreclosure (N = 1), and inhabitability caused by a flood (N = 1). Of these eleven households, nine were relocated to alternative permanent housing, and had retained such housing at case closure. The overall housing retention rate for Section 8 recipients, therefore, was 99%.

The Section 8 subsidy also had a profound beneficial impact on household rent burden. While the average monthly rent for voucher holders in the Demonstration Project was over \$1450, family rent obligation averaged just under \$215 per month, with HACLA or HACoLA paying the balance. Tenants were responsible for 14.7% of housing costs. As a share of household income, families paid 24.6% of their income, on average, in rent each month.

Given the very low incomes of these families, majority of whom remained heavily dependent on CalWORKs, these households likely would not otherwise have been able to afford adequate, safe, and decent housing in Los Angeles. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, a two-bedroom Fair Market Rent apartment in the Los Angeles area costs \$1,361. To pay no more than 30% of income on rent and utilities, a household would have to earn \$4,537 monthly or \$54,440 annually.<sup>14</sup>

The Section 8 Program also had a positive impact on housing retention for voucher holders relative to their counterparts who received shallow subsidies. Bivariate analysis revealed a significant relationship between household subsidy type and housing retention ( $p < .001$ ). Families who received

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<sup>9</sup> Rog, D.J., McCombs-Thornton, K.L., Gilbert-Mongelli, A.M., Brito, M.C., & Holupka, C.S. (1995). Op cit. Implementation of the Homeless Families Program: 2. Characteristics, strengths, and needs of participant families. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 65, 514-528.

<sup>10</sup> Marr, M. (2005). Mitigating Apprehension about Section 8 Vouchers: The Positive Role of Housing Specialists in Search and Placement. *Housing Policy Debate*, 16(1), 85-111.

<sup>11</sup> Teater, B. (2009). A Place to Call "Home": Exploring the Experiences of Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program Recipients in Their Efforts to Find Housing. *Families in Society*, 90(3), 271-278.

<sup>12</sup> Dixon, L., Krauss, N., Myers, P., & Lehman, A. (1994). Clinical and treatment correlates of access to Section 8 certificates for homeless mentally ill persons. *Hospital and Community Psychiatry*, 45(12), 1196-1200.

<sup>13</sup> Shelter Partnership. (2007). An Evaluation of the Housing Authority City of Los Angeles Section 8 Homeless Housing Choice Voucher Program. Los Angeles: Shelter Partnership.

<sup>14</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition. (2009). Out of Reach 2009. Washington, DC: National Low Income Housing Coalition.

a Section 8 subsidy were less likely to be evicted from or to vacate their original units for a reason other than eviction (e.g., domestic violence or conflict with property owner) than families who received a shallow subsidy. While housing retention was high among both groups, families as a whole in the latter group demonstrated greater challenges to maintaining their housing. The reasons for this outcome are unclear, though a combination of much higher rent burden and behavioral issues may help to explain this relationship.

<b>Table 5. Family Satisfaction with Housing and Neighborhood</b>			
	Yes	No	Somewhat
Housing Large Enough to Meet Your Needs (N = 116)	89.7% (104 families)	10.3% (12 families)	N/A
Happy with Your Neighborhood (N = 115)	76.5% (88 families)	20.0% (23 families)	3.5% (4 families)
Feel Safe in Your Neighborhood (N = 113)	81.4% (92 families)	14.2% (16 families)	4.4% (5 families)
Would Move to a New Neighborhood If You Could (N = 113)	61.9% (70 families)	38.1% (43 families)	N/A

Within the first month after families moved into permanent housing, case managers interviewed a non-random sample of heads of household to ascertain an array of information about the family, including their feelings about their respective residences and neighborhoods. Nine in ten families reported that their apartment or house was large enough to meet their needs, which is significant in light of the widespread problem in Los Angeles of overcrowding among impoverished families.

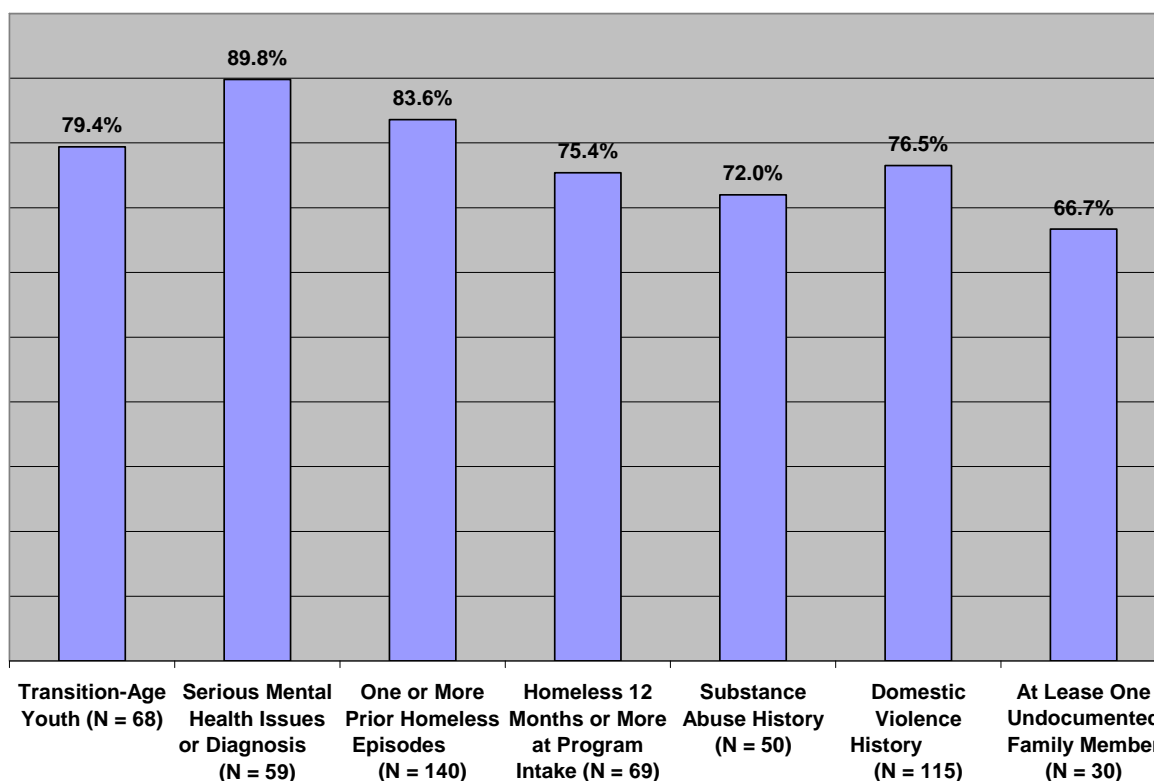
Over three quarters of respondents were pleased with their new neighborhood, while one in five were not pleased. Over 80% of parents reported that they felt safe in their new surroundings, an important finding given the traumatic histories of many families. Sixty-two percent of families, however, said that they would move to a new neighborhood if they could. While staff can only speculate as to the reason(s) for this paradox, program supervisors indicated how normal it is for many households, poor and moderate income alike, to dream of living in other neighborhoods, no matter how safe or well liked their current environments are.

# SECTION V:

## HOUSING OUTCOMES FOR HIGH-RISK SUBGROUPS

The population served by the Demonstration Project is rather diverse, with households exhibiting a variety of risk factors and challenges, with some facing fewer housing barriers than others but most facing a multitude of barriers. While the housing outcomes for the target population as a whole are quite strong, it is important to analyze housing placement and retention outcomes for various high-risk subgroups, in order to better understand inter-group differences in observed success rates.

**Figure 2. Permanent Housing Achievement for Select High-Risk Subgroups**



NOTE: As indicated parenthetically next to each subgroup, (N = x) represents the total number of enrolled households with a particular characteristic, while the percentages illustrated in the chart represent the portion of such households in each group who achieved permanent housing.

While the housing achievement rate for the Demonstration Project as a whole was 80.3%, the success rate for this outcome among high-risk subgroups varied considerably, as illustrated in Figure 2. The results should be interpreted with caution, however, due to the self-reported nature of the data used to categorize respondents. Note that the data regarding mental health issues and/or actual DSM-IV diagnoses are thought to be more reliable, because the information was pulled from multiple sources, including case management observations of parent behavior and functioning level during program implementation (i.e., suspected mental health disorders), DMH documentation of

mental health concerns in DPSS' PHASE database, and parent self-report of diagnoses and medications used at program intake.

With those caveats in mind, there are some noteworthy differences in outcomes. The two groups with the highest placement rates were families in which the head of household had documented or suspected mental health issues and families that had previously experienced homelessness. The placement rate for families with documented or suspected serious mental health issues is particularly striking, given that Beyond Shelter believes that a number of these households would have been more appropriate for the Homeless CalWORKs Families Project. That Project also serves families encountered in Skid Row as part of a larger catchment area, but, unlike the Demonstration Project, provides slightly longer-term, more specialized services to households with psychiatric disorders after they have been housed.

The two subgroups with the lowest housing placement rates were households with one or more undocumented members and those with self-reported substance abuse histories. The former group in particular had a significantly lower success rate, however, the reasons for this phenomenon are unclear. Somewhat surprising, families with no documented family members were no less likely to achieve permanent housing than families with an undocumented parent but one or more documented children.

Housing retention rates (not pictured in Figure 2) for these high-risk subgroups were high across the board, not surprising considering the very high retention rate for families in the Demonstration Project as a whole. Very few households in these subgroups were unable to maintain their original rental units at follow-up, and most of the families who lost or had to leave those units were rehoused before their cases were closed. Including all units, housing retention rates were as follows: 98.1% for transition-age youth (18-25 years of age); 94.3% for families headed by parents with serious mental health issues and/or diagnoses; 94.9% for multiply homeless families; 94.2% for households who reported being homeless for 12 months or more at program intake; 94.4% for families headed by adults with disclosed substance abuse histories; 95.5% for families with domestic violence histories; and 100.0% for families in which one or more members was undocumented.

<b>Table 6. Current Housing Tenure Compared to Longest Previously Lived in One Apartment or House As An Adult with Your Children</b>					
<b>Previous Housing Tenure</b>	<b>Current Housing Tenure</b>				
	0-3 Months	4-6 Months	7-9 Months	10-11 Months	12 Months
Less than 6 Months	0 families	1 family	2 families	1 family	18 families
6-12 Months	2 families	1 family	2 families	1 family	21 families
<b>Total</b>	2 families	2 families	4 families	2 families	39 families
<b>Number (Percent) of Households with 12 Months Current Tenure in Which Parent Was 18-25 Years of Age at Program Intake</b>					13 families (33.3%)

At program intake, families were asked to provide information on their housing histories, including the longest period of time parents and children had lived together continuously in one place, *irrespective of whether they were paying rent or were leaseholders in those places*. Twenty eight percent (69 households) of the 244 families who originally provided specific answers – as opposed to “Can’t Remember” – to this question had never lived in one permanent situation for more than one year.

As illustrated in the table, 49 of these 69 households achieved permanent housing through the Demonstration Project, and have retained such housing for various lengths of time. Of particular note, 39 families have remained stably housed for a minimum of 12 months. While adult age does explain limited housing tenure reported at program intake for one third of these cases, as transition-age youth would necessarily have less housing experience and tenure than older parents, age does not in itself explain previous housing instability for the other 26 families. Nonetheless, in both cases, these 39 households have achieved a level of housing stability that is significant given their histories and various challenges, including parenting at a very young age.

Another 10 families (not captured in table) who at program intake couldn’t recall prior housing tenure had remained stably housed for anywhere from 10 to 12 months at the time of case closure and/or the writing of this report. Given that recalling one’s housing history is likely a sign of very limited past housing tenure, it’s probable that these households have also met or exceeded prior housing tenure.

## SECTION VI:

### COMPARISON OF HOUSED AND NON-HOUSED FAMILIES

One of the implicit goals of the Demonstration Project was to serve alienated, hard-to-engage households who possessed multiple problems and who had been “failed” by, terminated from, and/or refused to participate in other homeless programs and/or systems of care. Retention of such households and placement in permanent housing are considered key indicators of program success.

This section analyzes differences between the 241 families who achieved permanent housing and the 59 who did not and were voluntarily or involuntarily terminated from the program. This line of inquiry is important given the lack of a comparison group for this evaluation. In the current design, non-random, statistically significant differences between successful program participants and unsuccessful participants could account at least in part for observed program performance.

In the table below, statistically significant differences at the 5% level ( $p < .05$ ) between housed and non-housed families are presented in bold.

<b>Table 7. Characteristics of Housed and Non-Housed Families</b>		
<b>Baseline Characteristic*</b>	<b>Housed (N = 241)**</b>	<b>Non-Housed (N = 59)**</b>
Average Age Head of Household (HOH)	33 years	33 years
Transition-Age Youth (18-25 years old)	22.4%	26.4%
HOH with Learning Disability	10.8%	12.7%
HOH with Physical or Mental Disability	22.9%	23.6%
HOH with Chronic Health Condition	25.8%	20.0%
Average Length of Current Homelessness	8.60 Months	5.93 Months
Prior Homelessness	48.8%	41.8%
Average Number of Prior Homeless Episodes	1.55	1.59
Past Involvement of Any Kind with DCFS	28.3%	20.0%
History of Domestic Violence	36.5%	49.1%
High School Diploma or GED	52.7%	56.4%
Worked in Last Two Years	48.1%	52.7%
<b>Receiving CalWORKs</b>	<b>77.5%</b>	<b>58.2%</b>
<b>One or More Undocumented Family Members</b>	<b>9.8%</b>	<b>25.6%</b>
<b>HOH with Serious Mental Health Issues or Diagnosis</b>	<b>21.9%</b>	<b>10.2%</b>

\* Self-reported information by head of household during program intake, except for mental health issues or diagnoses which were documented by DMH prior to program enrollment, documented and/or suspected by Beyond Shelter during program implementation, or self-reported by parent at intake.

\*\* Totals for nearly all characteristics are close to but not out of 241 or 59 – the total number of families in the respective groups – due to missing answers and/or respondents refusing or being unable to answer certain questions.

As the table reveals, housed and non-housed families have similar characteristics, and on most accounts, do not significantly differ. To the extent that this is true, it appears that there was not a program selection effect, meaning that the program showed better outcomes with those families who possessed fewer barriers and challenges to being successful in the program. In fact, the successful outcomes demonstrated by families with serious mental health challenges provides strong evidence to refute the conclusion that “program stayers” were on the whole easier to serve.

That said, however, the two groups did differ significantly in two other, important respects. Families who were not receiving welfare benefits at program enrollment were more likely to be terminated from the program, or to voluntarily leave on their own. The same was true for families who had at least one undocumented member. While the reasons for these outcomes are unclear, the findings do indicate the importance for future programs to identify households with these risk factors and to take measures to ensure that such households are actively engaged and retained in programs.

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## **SECTION VII:**

### **REFLECTIONS ON CHILD WELL-BEING AFTER HOUSING**

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One of the primary goals of the Demonstration Project from the outset was to ensure the safety, well-being, and permanency of children in vulnerable families. While the final evaluation report will chronicle outcomes related to child welfare, it is important here to touch upon anecdotal evidence in this area post housing placement, relying upon the reflections of case managers and program directors.

The majority of families participating in the Demonstration Project entered the program in extreme crisis, which often continued for at least the first three months after enrollment. This crisis state manifested itself through dysfunctional behavior related to pre-existing mental health conditions that were either not previously identified or for which the adult resisted treatment, histories of active or previous substance abuse, child welfare issues (both previous and ongoing), and/or previous and current domestic violence relationships which were often undetected or hidden upon enrollment.

Contributing to their crisis orientation, many families had experienced multiple episodes of homelessness and/or recurrent housing loss prior to program entry. The children in these households had been moved from place to place disrupting the continuity of their education, medical care, and attachments to friends and familiar neighborhoods. As reported by staff, the traumatic effects of instability were often reflected in children's poor grades, failure to become involved in extracurricular activities, and low self esteem. Their parents were also impacted by the psychological toll of homelessness, and often demonstrated behavior characterized by hostility, mistrust, and/or detachment. One parent explained that each day as a homeless person she could only focus on providing food and shelter for her children as well as protection from external danger. The fear of having her children placed into protective custody by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) further heightened anxiety within this family.

Given the challenges of "parenting in public" while battling psychological and environmental stressors, it is not surprising that homeless mothers and fathers are often reported to, and become involved with, child protective services. Prior to achieving permanent housing, a number of families were reported by Beyond Shelter or third parties to DCFS. While the number and outcomes of these reports are unknown at this time – Beyond Shelter did not systemically track this information – to the best of our knowledge, DCFS interventions were dramatically reduced after families achieved permanent housing, and in particular after 6 months in housing.

Although many families struggled to stabilize in their housing initially due to ongoing crises or unresolved issues, once families began to develop more stable living patterns, it was rarely necessary for Beyond Shelter to contact DCFS for child safety reasons. The majority of staff calls to DCFS to report suspected child abuse occurred prior to permanent housing, or during the first several months in housing. The foundation of stable, affordable housing, coupled with intensive support services, helped to foster a safe and healthy environment for at-risk children in the program.

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