



# BEYOND SHELTER

Housing – A Basic Human Right

## ***The Housing First Program for Homeless Families: Empirical Evidence of Long-term Efficacy to End and Prevent Family Homelessness***

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### ***Policy Brief 1***

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Los Angeles, California

June 2005

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Funded by the Seaver Institute.

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## Policy Brief 1: The Seaver Institute Study

# Beyond Shelter's

## "Housing First" Program for Homeless Families

The Institute for Research, Training & Technical Assistance at Beyond Shelter  
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### ABSTRACT

In August 2003, funded by the Seaver Institute, The Institute for Research, Training and Technical Assistance at Beyond Shelter began an ambitious research project to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of the agency's Housing First Program for Homeless Families (Housing First Program). Two hundred previously homeless families who had successfully completed the Housing First Program in the years spanning 1997 through 2001 were contacted over a 16-month period. Trained Beyond Shelter staff members interviewed each family, collecting information from them describing their present-day circumstances. Analyses of this data indicate that Beyond Shelter's Housing First Program greatly enhanced these families' chances to maintain residential stability; during the 2 to 7 years since completing the Housing First Program, 89.5 percent remained consistently housed without any repeated episodes of homelessness. Additional indicators of program effectiveness reported here, as well as other indicators to be disseminated in future publications, offer consistent and abundant support for the efficacy of the "housing first" approach for ending and preventing family homelessness. This *Policy Brief*, the first in a series, describes how the study was conducted and presents initial findings from this program evaluation.

### The Housing First Program for Homeless Families at Beyond Shelter

Over 60 collaborating agencies – including emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, transitional housing programs, and substance abuse treatment facilities – refer homeless families to Beyond Shelter to enroll in the Housing First Program for Homeless Families. After an in-depth screening for housing and social services needs is conducted, families who voluntarily agree to work with Beyond Shelter after their move into permanent housing are enrolled. As quickly as possible, Housing Specialists at Beyond Shelter help each family find and move into permanent, affordable housing in residential neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles County. Housing Specialists work closely with each family to overcome barriers to permanent housing including evictions and bad credit. Specialists help negotiate leases and facilitate access to move-in funds and housing subsidies when available. After the family has been assisted in moving into an apartment of their choice, Beyond Shelter Case Managers provide individualized, time-limited (six months to one year) and intensive home-based, case management services to help the parent or parents stabilize their lives and the lives of their children.

The study population included 1,600 families who completed the Housing First Program from 1997 through 2001. This group is comprised of all previously homeless families who were helped to move into permanent housing and voluntarily agreed to receive a minimum of six months of intensive case management services from trained Beyond Shelter staff after their move.

### DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

After randomly selecting 712 case files from the study population, researchers attempted to contact all of the 712 families<sup>1</sup> in order to generate a sample of 200 families. Generating the sample and gathering data from each family took place simultaneously over a 16-month period, beginning in August 2003 and concluding in November 2004 after 200 families participated in the study, 37

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<sup>1</sup>At enrollment, a standard *Release and Exchange of Confidential Information* form is presented for the parent(s) to discuss and sign, and then included in the case file. The parent(s) also provided contact names and telephone numbers (which may include those of relatives, friends and employers) to facilitate ongoing and future communication.

declined, and one head of household was reported to be deceased.

Staff utilized a semi-structured survey instrument previously pilot tested for reliability and validity to gather data from each family. The survey instrument was designed to solicit information to enable an assessment of progress toward meeting family and individual-level long-term outcome indicators for homeless mothers and children. These indicators were adapted from a logic model developed and promulgated by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, as summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Outcome Indicators**

Family Member(s)	Long-term Outcome
Family Unit	Increase residential stability
Parent/s	Increase employment, vocational and educational skills
Parent/s	Participate in treatment, training and/or support programs
Parent/s	Maintain improved life management skills
Parent/s (if relevant)	Maintain ongoing sobriety/recovery established a minimum of 6 months before moving into permanent housing
Child	Maintain regular school attendance
Child	Improve health and health care; maintain regular check-ups and inoculations

Parents who agreed to participate in the study spoke or met with a trained staff member at Beyond Shelter. Each interview took an average of 90 minutes to complete; when appropriate, a Spanish-speaking staff member conducted the interview. Most interviews took place over the telephone. A few parents scheduled appointments at Beyond Shelter's main office and in one case a home visit was made to facilitate study participation. At least half of the data collection interviews were held during evening hours to avoid biases introduced by excluding working parents.

### Sample Description

Families in this sample do not appear to be uniformly better off than or different from those excluded from the study; comparative statistics describing all 712 Housing First Program graduates (the 200 families in this study sample and the 512 families excluded from this study) will be provided when a comprehensive case file review is completed. The characteristics of the families in this sample are comparable to those reported in numerous publications investigating current and previously homeless families in cities throughout the U.S. Relevant sample characteristics of families in this study are noted in Table 2.

**Table 2: Sample Characteristics**

Race/Ethnicity: African-American	64.5 percent
Caucasian	8.0 percent
Hispanic/Latino	21.5 percent
Other	2.5 percent
Family Type: Single-parent	92.5 percent
Family Type: Single-parent, female-headed	97.0 percent
Age, Head of Household (2003 or 2004)	38.5 years (sd=8.5)
Number of children ≤ 18 years old	2.1 (sd=1.3)
Parental Substance Abuse History	27.0 percent
Domestic Violence History (disclosed/known)	40.5 percent
Estimated Annual Median Family Income	\$12,000 (sd=\$9,900)

Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a data base was constructed and univariate and bivariate statistical analyses calculated. A copy of the survey instrument is available upon request.

### FINDINGS

The circumstances of the 200 previously homeless families two to seven years after they were helped to move into permanent housing by Beyond Shelter's Housing First Program for Homeless Families generate consistent and strong support of the long-term efficacy and success of the "housing first"

approach for ending and preventing family homelessness.

***Previously Homeless Families Achieved & Maintained Long-Term Residential Stability***

Nearly nine in ten (89.5 percent) of the 200 previously homeless families in this study achieved and continuously maintained residential stability for the duration of the two to seven years that had elapsed since the family received services from the Housing First Program. Alternatively, this was three to eight years after each family had been helped to move into permanent housing by Beyond Shelter's Housing First Program.

Slightly more than half of these families (55 percent) lived in the same residence that they first moved into with help from Beyond Shelter. Movers relocated an average of 1.37 times, most commonly due to the owner's sale of the building and a desire for a larger home.

***One in Ten Families Became Homeless Again***

Since graduating from the Housing First Program, 10.5 percent (n=21) of these families experienced at least one subsequent homeless episode. Of these 21 families, most (90.5 percent) reported one additional episode, and only 2 of the 200 families previously served (1 percent of all families in this study) had two or more additional episodes of homelessness. Half of these 21 families reported that they became homeless again due to actions of a landlord, including a change in building ownership, eviction and lease non-renewal<sup>2</sup>. Substance abuse relapse or escaping from an abusive relationship led to another episode for an additional 20 percent of families. Respectively, another 15 percent of families each reported an inability to pay the rent or inferior housing quality as the cause of another homeless episode after graduating from the Housing First Program.

***Average Estimated Annual Family Income of \$12,000: Families Remain Poor***

Median monthly income was \$1,000, ranging from \$20 to \$6,000. Assuming most optimistically that monthly incomes were regular and uninterrupted, estimated annual family median income was \$12,000 (sd=\$9,900). By comparison, the federal poverty threshold for a family of three with two dependent children was \$14,824 in 2003 and \$15,219 in 2004; for a family of four with three dependent children, the federal poverty threshold was \$18,725 in 2003 and \$19,223 in 2004. The federal poverty thresholds are annual dollar amounts assumed to represent the least amount of income needed by families of different sizes and compositions to enable them to purchase minimum necessities for themselves and their children. Families with incomes below their corresponding poverty threshold are classified as "poor," although this status does not automatically entitle them to assistance.

Nine in ten families in this study achieved and maintained long-term residential stability since graduating from the Housing First Program two to seven years earlier, an accomplishment for families who, for the most part, have been unable to escape poverty. Most families appear to have effectively and efficiently managed their limited finances in the ensuing years, a feat likely enhanced by the financial management training they received from the Housing First Program at Beyond Shelter and further supported by the existence of a savings account among 20 percent of the families in this study.

***Families without Housing Assistance At Increased Risk***

Monthly rents for all families in this study ranged from \$0 to \$2,100, with a median of \$252 and a mean rent of \$368 (sd=\$323). Nearly three-quarters (72.5 percent) of families received housing subsidies; their monthly rents were significantly less costly than monthly rents for families who did not receive subsidies (t=15.63; p<.000). Families without housing subsidies allocated a far greater proportion of monthly income toward rent, in excess of recommended affordable housing standards. Monthly rent payments are presented in Table 3.

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<sup>2</sup>The parent was asked to state the reason for a repeat episode of homelessness; landlord/manager corroboration and/or alternative explanations were not available.

**Table 3: Median Monthly Rent Payments, in dollars**

<b>Monthly Rent Payments</b>	<b>Median Rent (Standard Deviation)</b>	<b>Median Monthly Income</b>	<b>Rent/ Income Ratio</b>
All previously homeless families (n=200)	\$252 (\$323)	\$1,000	25.2%
Only families receiving Section 8 Vouchers (n=146)	\$180 (\$186)	\$ 907	19.8%
Only unsubsidized families (n=49)	\$691 (\$347)	\$1,550	44.6%

Nearly three in ten (27.4 percent) families reported having trouble paying rent on time at least once since completing the Housing First Program for Homeless Families at Beyond Shelter. Section 8 recipient families were significantly less likely to report trouble paying rent on time compared to families without housing subsidies ( $r=-.295$ ;  $p \leq .01$ ): fully 50 percent of families without housing subsidies reported having trouble paying rent on time versus 19.7 percent of families with housing subsidies reporting the same problem.

Among those who had experienced trouble paying rent on time, 10.6 percent were never late paying monthly rent. About a third (36.2 percent) reported paying rent late once, while 19.1 percent had paid late twice, and 21.1 percent paid late three times or more.

### ***Section 8 Housing Assistance Predictor of Housing Stability***

Among the 10.5 percent (n=21) of the families in this study who experienced another episode of homelessness after completing the Housing First Program, half were receiving Section 8 housing assistance (and half were not). Families holding Section 8 housing assistance were significantly less likely to become homeless again compared to families who did not have Section 8 housing assistance ( $\chi^2=6.213$ ;  $p<.013$ ).

Subsequent homeless episodes for this very small number of families in this study predominately appear related to difficulties that these families experienced finding and retaining affordable housing. Poor families in similar straits might benefit from new models of intervention tailored to help them retain their current housing, rather than current interventions that often assume that personal problems are to blame.

A housing problem was typically reported as the reason for a subsequent homeless episode by families with housing subsidies: building ownership changed, the apartment failed a Section 8 inspection, or the family could not find an apartment that accepted Section 8 vouchers when their current residence became unavailable. Only two families identified a personal problem as a causal factor in repeat homelessness: in one, a parent with a history of substance abuse relapsed and in another the parent took the children and left an abusive relationship, becoming homeless again.

In families without housing subsidies, a housing problem was also typically the reason for a subsequent homeless episode, with income-related characteristics: a parent lost her job in one family, another was unable to afford the rent, and three reported that they were evicted<sup>3</sup>. Similar to families with housing subsidies who subsequently became homeless after graduating from the Housing First Program, only two families without housing subsidies identified a personal problem as a causal factor in repeat homelessness: a substance abuse relapse and leaving an abusive relationship.

### ***Unanticipated Wage Reductions, Too Many Expenses Led to Late Rent Payments***

A third of the families who reported having a problem paying rent on time identified unanticipated reductions in income (nearly exclusively in wage-generated income) as the cause. In two-thirds of these families, a lost job or unemployment was noted or, for one family, the parent stopped working due to pregnancy. Additional reasons included reduced work hours, seasonal employment, and, for one family, government benefit reductions.

Another 56 percent of families had problems paying rent on time when their expenses exceeded their

<sup>3</sup> Detailed explanations for evictions were not collected from the parent and information from previous landlords/managers was not available to evaluate if tenant behaviors may have precipitated any of these outcomes.

incomes. Eighty percent of these families did not have enough money to pay their bills that month, rent had been increased, or they could not afford the rent. Another 7 percent were trying to save money; the remaining four percent had existing debt obligations.

Notably, only one of the families who reported having a problem paying rent on time said that this happened due to stress – a mere 2 percent of those who reported such a problem. In light of the monthly incomes of these families, the fact that so many have managed to pay rent, have paid their rent on time, and have done so consistently for two to seven years, is in and of itself a remarkable accomplishment. Although beyond the current limitations of the data in this study, it is plausible that the financial management training that all of these families received from the Housing First Program facilitated regular rental payments during the ensuing years following the family's graduation from the Housing First Program.

### ***Most Previously Homeless Parents Work or Attend School***

At the time of the interview, 58.6 percent of parents were working, and 59 percent of these parents worked full-time. Another 24.5 percent were attending school, and 71.4 percent of these parents were enrolled full-time.

### ***Barriers to Work Exist For Some Previously Homeless Parents***

Among parents not working (41 percent—including those enrolled in and attending school), 73.2 percent wanted to but were unable to work. Some were too ill or disabled to work, while others were actively seeking employment. A few had recently been laid off, and the remaining parents were unable to find affordable child care to enable them to work.

### ***Family Incomes Include Wages and Government Benefits***

Earnings from wages were either the sole or contributing source of income for 56.0 percent of families; 30.5 percent of wage-earning families also received food stamps. Among all previously homeless families, 48.2 percent received food stamps and 10.2 percent received the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

Some families received income from sources requiring an established relationship to the labor market: unemployment insurance, disability insurance and worker's compensation. Six percent of families received unemployment insurance, 13.2 percent received disability insurance, and 2.0 percent received worker's compensation. Child support payments were received by 15.2 percent of families. Financial support from cash benefits, including Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and General Assistance (GA), were received by 38.1 percent of families.

### ***Parents Actively Participate in Treatment, Training & Support Programs***

A sizable proportion (39.6 percent) of parents reported that they had participated in a job training or job readiness program since completing the Housing First Program. Furthermore, 86.5 percent of parents used a computer at least 12 times in the previous year.

### ***Parents Successfully Use Money Management Skills***

Nearly every parent – 98.0 percent – reported successfully managing the family budget on their own. The remaining parents (n=4) stated that they were successfully managing this important task with help from another person.

### ***Scant Reoccurrences of Domestic Violence***

Families with known histories of domestic violence comprised 41.0 percent of the study sample; these circumstances and all contact with the perpetrator had ended at least four months prior to the family's move into permanent housing. Domestic violence reoccurred for 12.3 percent of families with this history – 6 percent of the entire sample – and no recurrences were transpiring at data collection. Providing permanent housing and individualized, time-limited and intensive home-based case management services appears to have “armed” most single-parent, female-headed families to avoid future encounters with domestic violence, a finding worthy of further investigation.

### ***Sobriety/Abstinence Maintained by 93 Percent of Parents***

Slightly more than a quarter – 27 percent – of the 200 previously homeless families had histories of

substance abuse as well as an established minimum of six months of sobriety/abstinence prior to moving into permanent housing. Although only 2 percent of those with substance abuse histories participated in a recovery group or program after graduating from the Housing First Program, fully 92.6 percent of the parents with documented substance abuse histories reported that they had continuously maintained their sobriety/abstinence two to seven years later, when interviewed for this study.

For these families, providing permanent housing and individualized, time-limited and intensive home-based case management services appears to have been remarkably effective in enhancing their abilities to consistently maintain sobriety/abstinence two to seven years later. A separate study of these families based on comprehensive case file review will be released with corroborating evidence of this assertion. Initial findings show that many of these families had extensive, chronic poly-substance abuse histories, 56 percent experienced at least one additional episode of homelessness prior to the homeless episode that led them to Beyond Shelter, and at least 33 percent could be termed “chronically homeless.”

### ***Community Resources Utilized***

After graduating from the Housing First Program, 28.4 percent of families subsequently contacted Beyond Shelter. The top five reasons for this contact included, in order of importance, employment assistance, housing assistance (finding a new apartment; move-in funds), rental assistance (i.e., obtaining Section 8 housing assistance; eviction-prevention funds), Christmas presents, furniture/household items, and/or transportation assistance.

### ***Children’s School Enrollment and Attendance High***

Among families with at least one school-aged child, 97.8 percent were enrolled in school, and 97.1 percent of these children regularly attended school during the preceding academic year. Of the 2.9 percent who did not attend school regularly, one was home-schooled, another suffered a chronic illness that precluded attendance, one was getting transferred to another school, and reduced attendance affected two siblings when their family became homeless again.

Nearly half (47.7 percent) of these families reported that their school-aged children were regularly and actively involved in one or more after-school activities or youth programs. Among the remaining 52.3 percent of families, 42.1 percent said that their children had been involved in the past.

Child care was used by 48.4 percent of families and 90.5 percent of these families reported that their arrangements met their needs. Relatively high child care costs were most commonly identified as a problem for those unsatisfied with their current arrangements. Finally, 99.4 percent of families reported that all children under the age of 12 were supervised by a responsible adult at all times.

### ***High Rates of Family Health Care Coverage and Utilization***

Fully 99 percent of the children were up-to-date on immunizations. And, while 93.5 percent of families had health care coverage for at least one family member, children were most likely to have this coverage. Nearly every child – 96.4 percent of the 417 children in these families – was covered.

More than four in five (82.1 percent) previously homeless families had health care coverage for all family members. Most families with health care coverage had Medi-Cal (75 percent) and another 5 percent were covered under California’s Healthy Families Initiative. The remaining 20 percent of families had private health care coverage through employment.

More than nine in ten (91.4 percent) families reported that every family member had a primary care doctor and/or a specific medical facility for ongoing health care. Every family member had received a check-up and/or medical care in the preceding year for 70.4 percent of the families.

These findings are particularly striking in light of the rate of disability and/or chronic illness among these families. In 48.5 percent, at least one family member had a disability and/or chronic illness; in 21.2 percent of families with this situation, more than one family member is disabled and/or suffering from a chronic illness. This finding is consistent with other studies that have reported that helping previously homeless families find and maintain permanent housing is the key element to

preventing reoccurrences of homelessness, even among “high risk” families with complex, on-going difficulties. The existence and consequences of disabilities and chronic illnesses may also contribute to homelessness and are topics worthy of future research endeavors.

***In Their Own Voices: Qualitative Feedback from Previously Homeless Parents***

At the end of each interview, the parent was asked a series of open-ended questions about being homeless and working with Beyond Shelter to move into permanent housing. Selected quotes from these parents are included at the end of this section.

Content analyses of these qualitative responses provide support for the philosophical premise of the Housing First Program. The Housing First Program helps homeless families move into permanent housing as quickly as possible, and, once the family is in permanent housing, provides individualized, time-limited and intensive home-based case management services (6 months to one year; longer if needed) to help the parent or parents rebuild their lives and the lives of their children. Qualitative responses from the families in this study strongly suggest that parents agree with and appreciate this aspect of the Housing First Program.

Parents of previously homeless families in this study identified and ranked the most helpful type of assistance from Beyond Shelter. In order of importance, these included housing (38.5 percent), rental assistance (14.5 percent) and obtaining Section 8 housing subsidies (14.0 percent). When asked to specify what was most important in getting out of homelessness, the top four responses, in order of importance, included: Section 8 housing subsidy (15.6 percent), having permanent housing (9.4 percent), and, tied at 5.7 percent each, rental assistance and case management services.

Parents were also asked to identify what was most helpful to them after they moved into permanent housing. These included, in order of importance: case management services (17.9 percent), “nothing” (9.8 percent), budgeting and money management instruction (8.7 percent), and furniture and household items (5.8 percent).

***Selected Quotes from Previously Homeless Parents in the Seaver Institute Study***

- *There’s a way. Don’t just stay there, in an abusive relationship. Someone’s out there to help you.*
- *Always pay your bills. Always pay your rent. Don’t have credit cards. Pay cash. Learn how to budget your money.*
- *Believe in yourself and pray a lot. Be open. You need to want to change. If you want to change, the help is there.*
- *Just be strong and make it out there.*
- *Get on Section 8 as quickly as possible.*
- *Your kids are depending on you.*
- *Homelessness is not a lifelong thing.*

**STUDY LIMITATIONS**

A number of study limitations require consideration. These include the study design, sample size, sample selection, response rate, and measurement biases.

***Study Design***

Data for this study were gathered directly from a parent in the 200 families by trained staff at Beyond Shelter anywhere from two to seven years after the family graduated from the Housing First Program. This is a relatively weak design for inferring a causal relationship between subsequent outcomes of these families and the influences of the Housing First Program.

***Sample Size***

Logistic and financial issues common in social service agencies necessitated establishing a target

sample size of 200 families rather than conducting full census of the population of 1600 previously homeless families who had graduated from the Housing First Program from 1997 through 2001. Statistical power analysis for a sample size of 200 is sufficiently large to generate a 5 percent margin of error and 90 percent confidence level. The pre-established sample size determined the study's subsequent response rate of 28 percent, sufficient for an agency-based study of this nature.

### ***Sample Selection***

The manner in which the sample was selected influences the degree to which the results of this study accurately represent the entire population of 1600 previously homeless families who graduated from the Housing First Program from 1997 through 2001, as well as the generalizability of study findings to similar families living outside of Los Angeles County. Although it was not randomly selected, the sample was generated by multiple and relatively consistent attempts to contact all 712 families. This outreach took place over an extended period of time (16 months), which enhanced the chances that each family would participate in the study. The existence of a pre-established sample size of 200, however, may have generated a sample that differs in important aspects from the families who did not participate in the study.

In regard to generalizability, characteristics of the families in this sample are comparable to those reported in numerous publications investigating current and previously homeless families in cities throughout the U.S. And, although some families in this study steadfastly participated, they and other families in the sample were poor. Although most families in this study retained permanent housing two to seven years after graduating from the Housing First Program, the findings reported here strongly support generalizability since these families experience the same problems and challenges faced by poor families both housed and homeless in Los Angeles County and the U.S.

### ***Measurement Biases***

Data for this study were collected from a parent in each family in the sample anywhere from two to seven years after the family had graduated from the Housing First Program. Inaccurate or biased responses may have been given; social desirability bias may have limited or inhibited negative responses from some parents because the interview was conducted by a Beyond Shelter staff member.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Seaver Institute Study reported here generated extensive, consistent empirical support for the efficacy of Beyond Shelter's Housing First Program for Homeless Families. Findings also illustrate the success of the "housing first" methodology pioneered by Beyond Shelter in 1988 to end and prevent homelessness among families with children.

Two to seven years after being helped to move into permanent housing and receiving six months of individualized, time-limited and intensive home-based case management services by Beyond Shelter's Housing First Program, the majority of previously homeless mothers with children achieved all of the long-term outcome indicators of program success adapted from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's logic model for homeless families and children. A preponderance of families achieved and maintained long-term residential stability. Sixty percent of the parents of these families were working, and another 24.5 percent were attending school. Nearly 40 percent of parents had participated in job training programs since completing the Housing First Program. Practically every single parent was successfully managing the family budget, and those who could not accomplish this task were receiving help to ensure the family's financial well-being.

Recurrences of domestic violence as well as substance abuse relapses were amazingly low among the significant proportions of previously homeless families with histories of these difficulties in this study. Of the 41 percent with domestic violence histories, only 12.3 experienced another episode since completing the Housing First Program. Among the 27 percent of parents with substance abuse histories, a scant 7.4 percent had relapsed –92.6 percent retained sobriety/abstinence, an extraordinary occurrence for adults with lengthy and poly-substance abuse histories. Nearly every

school-aged child regularly attended school. Just about every child had health care coverage as well as a regular doctor and/or clinic for regular check-ups and well child visits. Immunization rates were 99 percent.

The results reported here confirm the efficacy of Beyond Shelter's Housing First Program for Homeless Families, even when interpreting them with caveats of the study's methodological limitations in mind. Findings show that providing permanent housing to these parents according to the "housing first" methodology enabled them not just to survive but thrive in ways that also enhanced the current and future well-being of their children.

### ***Policy Implications***

A number of policy implications can be drawn from these findings. Several are noted here.

The "housing first" methodology offers an effective alternative to the array of temporary shelters, transitional housing programs and other short-term interventions currently serving homeless families with children. Incorporating the "housing first" methodology into existing policies and programs could help end and prevent family homelessness for a significant proportion of this population, including families with multiple episodes of homelessness, chronic substance abuse and domestic violence histories. This formula is far more likely to succeed, however, if housing subsidies and Section 8 program provisions are included.

To be effective, public policy addressing family homelessness should promote the formation of partnerships and inter-agency collaboration. Partnerships between Public Housing Authorities and "housing first" providers, between service agencies providing different components of the "housing first" model, and between the homeless services system and mainstream systems are necessary to make better, more efficient use of existing resources and to adequately support families once they are permanently housed.

Extended stays in the homeless services system are unnecessary for families to exit homelessness, and may in fact perpetuate institutional dependency and the trauma of homelessness itself. Despite conventional wisdom, homeless families, even those who are lower functioning with very intensive service needs, respond well to service interventions from a stable, permanent housing base. Permanent housing, rather than temporary settings, should be viewed as a central, client-centered setting for service delivery.

Efforts to end homelessness must focus on ways to make existing housing more affordable and accessible. While new development of affordable housing is a necessary and complementary strategy, current initiatives cannot rely on future stock. In general and in tight rental markets in particular, homeless families are at a competitive disadvantage due to their housing barriers (poor credit, eviction histories, etc.). With their ability to build relationships with landlords and property managers, to negotiate leases and mediate problems, and to assist families to access financial resources to obtain and sustain residential units, housing specialists provide an indispensable bridge between homeless families and permanent, stable housing.

Among the families in this study, rather than personal problems, housing problems more commonly precipitate episodes of family homelessness. Families seeking assistance to prevent an episode of homelessness are likely to need help with a housing problem, often one exacerbated by income-related issues. Crisis intervention and short-term case management services provided to housed families (including previously homeless ones) can prevent homelessness.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Susan D. Einbinder, Ph.D.**, received her B.A. from Barnard College and her M.S. and Ph.D. from Columbia University. Her interdisciplinary research studies and publications investigate policies, programs and services affecting the social and economic well-being of families with children, including poverty measurement, welfare reform, housing policies, and inter-professional collaboration. Dr. Einbinder was on the faculty of the University of Southern California's School of Social Work from 1993 through 2002. Since then, she has conducted agency-based research at Hathaway Children and Family Services in Sylmar, California, and served as a Senior Policy Advisor to Child and Family Futures, a nonprofit strategic management firm in Irvine, California. She served as Research Director at Beyond Shelter from 2004-2005.

**Tanya Tull, DSSc.**, is President/CEO of Beyond Shelter, which she founded in 1988, as an evolution of earlier work in the field. In addition to the development and implementation of demonstration programs for the Federal Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Labor, she has also designed and implemented numerous foundation-funded research projects over the years. With a B. A. from Scripps College, Claremont, CA, a Life Teaching Credential from UCLA School of Education, and an Honorary Doctorate in Social Science from Whittier College, she is also a Senior Fellow (2005-2006) at the UCLA School of Public Affairs.

## Beyond Shelter

Founded in 1988, the mission of Beyond Shelter is to develop systemic approaches to combat poverty and homelessness among family 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 demonstration, research and evaluation, with information disseminated through the Institute for Research, Training and Technical Assistance.

### BEYOND SHELTER

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