

## HOMELESSNESS

According to national estimates, families with children are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population.<sup>1</sup> Nationwide, there are varying estimates on the number of homeless youth (defined as individuals under the age of eighteen who lack parental, foster, or institutional care). The principal causes of homelessness among families are poverty among families and children and the shrinking supply of affordable housing. In addition, domestic violence contributes to homelessness among families.<sup>2</sup> Many homeless youth leave home after years of physical and sexual abuse, strained relationships, chemical addiction of a family members, and parental neglect. Some youth may become homeless when their families suffer from financial crisis involving lack of affordable housing, lack of employment, and separation from families due to shelter policies. In addition, youth who have been in foster care are more likely to become homeless at an earlier age and remain homeless for a longer period of time.

Homelessness is a devastating experience for families with children, disrupting virtually every aspect of family life. Homelessness severely impacts the physical and mental health of homeless children and their caregivers. Compared with housed poor children, homeless children experience worse health; more developmental delays; more anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems; and lower educational achievement.<sup>3</sup> In addition, homeless children face barriers to enrolling and attending school, including transportation problems, residency requirements, inability to obtain previous school records, and lack of clothing and school supplies. Parents of homeless families also suffer from higher rates of depressive disorders and chronic health conditions.<sup>4</sup> Homelessness frequently breaks up families as a result of restrictive shelter policies or because parents leave their children with relatives and friends to avoid having them be homeless.

Homeless youth face many challenges on the streets. Because of their age, homeless youth have few legal means by which they can earn enough money to meet basic needs. Many homeless adolescents find that exchanging sex for food, clothing, and shelter is their only chance of survival on the streets. In turn, homeless youth are at great risk of contracting AIDS or HIV-related illnesses. Homeless adolescents often suffer from severe anxiety and depression, poor health and nutrition, and low self-esteem. They have difficulties attending school and completing their education, which reduces their chances of supporting themselves both financially and emotionally.<sup>5</sup>

### Data Sources

In the absence of accurate counts of the number of homeless children in families or the number of homeless youth in the City, this section will provide data from two major programs in the City which

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<sup>1</sup> Shinn, Marybeth and Beth Weitzman. "Homeless Families Are Different." In Homelessness in America, D.C.: National Coalition for the Homeless, 1996

<sup>2</sup> Homeless Families With Children (National Coalition for the Homeless Fact Sheet #7, obtained on-line, July 15, 1998, <http://nch.ari.net/families.html>

<sup>3</sup> Shinn, Marybeth and Beth Weitzman. "Homeless Families Are Different." In Homelessness in America, D.C.: National Coalition for the Homeless, 1996. State or county level estimates not available.

<sup>4</sup> Bassuk, et.al. "The Characteristics and Needs of Sheltered Homeless and Low-Income Housed Mothers," Journal of the American Medical Association, 276 (August 28, 1996) 8: 640;646; Homeless Families With Children (National Coalition for the Homeless Fact Sheet #7, obtained on-line, July 15, 1998, <http://nch.ari.net/families.html>

<sup>5</sup> Homeless Youth, Fact Sheet #11, obtained on-line, July 15, 1998, <http://nch.ari.net/youth.html>

were designed to serve families who are homeless or at-risk for homelessness. Data from these programs include information about the families' demographics and some of the social issues affecting families utilizing these services. The two programs covered in this section are:

- Connecting Point (The Family Housing Crisis Center), the City's designated centralized intake into family shelters; and
- The San Francisco Department of Human Services's family shelter programs, specifically information about four of the largest family shelters. (Data on all operating family shelters, public and private, was not available.)

**Connecting Point Program**

Connecting Point (The Family Housing Crisis Center) was established in August 1995 to assist families in San Francisco who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless. The Center is funded by the San Francisco Department of Human Services and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and serves as the City's designated centralized intake into all available public and private family shelters in the City. The program also provides other services such as crisis counseling, eviction prevention counseling, free food and clothing, and referrals to health and social services.

In 1996/97, Connecting Point's Housing Crisis Hotline received calls from 902 families, a slight increase compared to its first year of operation in 1995/96. There were 1,552 children in these families, half of whom (777) were age 5 or younger.

<b>Connecting Point Housing Crisis Hotline, Location of Families Who Called, 1995/96 and 1996/97</b>				
<u>Location</u>	1995/96		1996/97	
	#	%	#	%
Family/Friends	341	39%	330	37%
Rented Dwelling	67	8%	182	20%
Hotel/SRO	105	12%	102	11%
Streets/Cars	222	25%	67	7%
Shelter	79	9%	49	5%
Residential Treatment	10	1%	13	1%
Other/Unknown	49	6%	159	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>873</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>902</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Connecting Point Program, Client Telephone Intake Statistics, 1995/96 and 1996/97

In 1996/97, families who called the Hotline were most often (37%) staying with family or friends, 20% were in rented dwellings, and 17% were in hotels or SROs. The number of calls to the Hotline from families who were living in rental dwellings nearly tripled from the first to the second year of the program, while the number of calls from families staying in cars and in the streets declined

substantially. (Information from Connecting Point on the reasons for these changes in the pattern of calls was not available.)

Most of the homeless families seeking assistance were headed by women (89%; 806). Over half (56%; 502) of the primary caregivers were African American, followed by Latinos (16%; 141), and White (15%; 140). The race/ethnic composition of the children and youth within families was similar to the race/ethnicity of primary caregivers.

<b>Connecting Point Housing Crisis Hotline, Race/Ethnicity of Children in Families Who Called, 1995/96 and 1996/97</b>				
Race/Ethnicity	1995/96		1996/97	
	#	%	#	%
African American	774	53%	837	54%
Latino	258	18%	225	14%
Multi-Racial	119	8%	211	14%
White	194	13%	155	10%
Asian/Pacific Islander	82	6%	64	4%
Native American	23	2%	16	1%
Other/Unknown	16	1%	44	3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,466</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1,552</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Connecting Point Program, Client Telephone Intake Statistics, 1995/96 and 1996/97

About one in six persons seeking assistance (16%; 164) disclosed domestic violence in the household, and one-third (32%; 288) reported having previously been homeless.

### **Family Shelters**

After the completing the intake process with Connecting Point, some families are placed in family shelters located throughout the City. Over a two-year period, from July 1995 to June 1997, over 676 families (unduplicated count) were housed in and subsequently exited from at least one of the City's four largest family shelters. Three of these shelters were Compass, Hamilton, and Raphael family shelters. An additional shelter, Richmond Hills, operated until June 1996, when it was transferred to St. Joseph. These four shelters have a combined capacity for 211 beds, which represents 72% of all public and private family shelter beds available in the City.

There were a total of 967 children within these families, or an average of 1.4 children per family. Over half (57%; 555) of children in the shelters were age 5 or younger, with an average age of 6. Three-fourths (74%) of primary caregivers were single and 15% were married.

The educational level of primary caregivers was 39% (262) had not graduated high school, 26% (174) had a high school degree or a GED, 28% (193) had college degrees or some college, and 7% had other or unknown educational backgrounds. Most (74%) primary caregiver had as their source of income AFDC (501), or Food Stamps (58%; 393), and 10% (68) had SSI. Seven percent (48) of primary caregivers were employed.

Almost half (47%; 319) of primary caregivers in family shelters were African American, followed by 26% White (177), and 13% Latino (90). Asian/Pacific Islanders, multi-racial, Native American, and other racial/ethnic groups each represented less than 5% of primary caregivers.

Two-thirds of families (68%) were living in San Francisco (381), Alameda (56), or San Mateo (22) counties before entering the shelter. Among families from San Francisco, over half (54%) were from three neighborhoods in the City, including the Tenderloin (74), Bayview Hunters Point (61), and the Mission (55). (Refer to Appendix for more detailed data.)

The three most common causes of homelessness as identified by the families were being asked to move out (24%; 197 families), substance abuse (14%; 116), and dangerous living environment (12%; 98).

<b>Families in San Francisco Family Shelters,* Self-Identified Causes of Homelessness, July 1995 - June 1997</b>		
<u>Cause of Homelessness</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Asked to Move Out	197	24%
Substance Abuse	116	14%
Dangerous Living Environment	98	12%
Domestic Violence	83	10%
Mental Illness	48	6%
Legal Eviction	43	5%
Loss of Job	39	5%
Divorce/Separation	28	3%
Other	176	21%
<b>Total</b>	<b>828</b>	<b>100%</b>
<p>*Note: Includes Compass, Hamilton, and Rafael family shelters; Richmond Hills through June 1996 and St. Joseph beginning July 1997. Source: San Francisco Department of Human Services, <u>Family Survey Statistics, 7/1/95 to 6/30/97</u></p>		

Other causes of homelessness included domestic violence, mental illness, legal eviction, loss of job, divorce/separation, and “other” reasons.

Families in the shelters had been homeless an average of 2.1 times. One in five (20%; 135) primary caregivers had a history of psychiatric hospitalization or residential psychiatric care. Half (50%) of primary caregivers had a history of substance abuse. One-third (34%) of families (227) were involved with the local child protective services agency (San Francisco Department of Human Services).