



Forwarding Housing Solutions for Families at the Intersection of Homelessness and Child Welfare Involvement

Background. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2015 Annual Homeless Assessment Report, 206,286 people in families, including 127,787 children under the age of 18, were homeless on a single night in 2015.¹ For some of these families, lack of adequate housing contributed directly to the decision to open child welfare cases, place the child(ren) in out-of-home care, or delay reunification of children with parents. Reports indicate that the rate of homelessness among children with out of home placement ranges from 30% to 49%.¹

Few events are more traumatic for children. Research concludes they are at higher risk for impaired neurodevelopment, psychiatric problems, poverty, future homelessness and future criminal justice involvement. Consider:

- One nationwide study of runaway youths indicates more than 30% had been in foster care in the year before they took to the streets.
- Some experts estimate that 40-45 percent of those leaving foster care become homeless within a year.

Several other reputable analyses amplify the long-term consequences of these figures, showing anywhere from 30% to 50% of homeless adults identified themselves as once being in foster care. This means many parents, struggling to find stability in housing for themselves and their children, are likely to have been homeless and in foster care themselves when young. *In order to meet the goal of ending family homelessness, we must break this cycle because it perpetuates circumstances greatly contributing to future housing instability and other trauma for these families.*

Supportive Housing Can Break the Cycle. Several local and national initiatives are giving us hope that supportive housing achieves better outcomes for families involved with child welfare systems. Supportive housing not only increases families' housing stability, but can improve outcomes in multiple domains such as education, employment and health care access. Families are strengthened with holistic, trauma-informed services focused on substance use, mental illness, parenting and other needs. The result is an end to the intergenerational cycle of child neglect and homelessness, and a new generation of young people living more stable, productive lives.

CSH believes supportive housing can change the trajectory for vulnerable families and developed the Keeping Families Together (KFT) model to test if safe, affordable supportive housing addressing the needs of parents and their children would help them stay together and thrive.*

Data from the KFT evaluation conducted by Metis Associates shows that supportive housing can stabilize vulnerable families so that they become safe and healthy environments for children. Child welfare involvement among KFT families declined significantly during this pilot and most families had no new abuse or neglect cases. Average school attendance improved steadily among KFT's school-age children.² A national demonstration effort led by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) called "Partnerships to Demonstrate the Effectiveness of Supportive Housing for Families in the Child Welfare System"³ is currently examining supportive housing for child welfare-involved families in California, Connecticut, Florida, Iowa, and Tennessee, where preliminary results are encouraging. Additional KFT-type initiatives not associated with this demonstration have begun in New Jersey, New Mexico, and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

¹ Courtney, 2010; Zlotnick, Kronstadt and Klee, 1998

² <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2015-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

³ http://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Report_KFTFindingsreport.pdf



CSH One Roof Campaign. CSH is embarking on an ambitious campaign that will elevate the visibility of families who are at the intersection of homelessness and child welfare involvement and aim to ensure that no child is placed in foster care due to the families housing instability. Through One Roof, CSH will engage local, county, state and national partners to promote an improved, integrated policy and systems integration response for this population, replicate supportive housing tailored to their unique needs, and increase investment in housing solutions for at-risk children and their families. Through this effort CSH will break the intergenerational cycle of homelessness and child welfare involvement and ensure improved outcomes and long term success for children

One Roof will:

1. Work to significantly expand supportive housing for families involved in multiple systems, particularly those at risk of separation due to neglect exacerbated by homelessness or housing instability.
2. Strengthen collaboration between the child welfare and housing systems to improve family outcomes.
3. Increase and sustain capacity to provide and coordinate housing based services to ensure long-term success for vulnerable children and families, and lay the foundation to prevent homelessness in the future.

Key Strategies

In order to achieve these goals, CSH will use a three-pronged approach that relies on robust public communication and engagement, programmatic implementation, and aggressive advocacy to secure and align resources.

- Communication – Publicly elevate the need and the raise awareness about the promise and potential of supportive housing for vulnerable families.
- Programmatic – Provide technical assistance and support to build the capacity of communities to launch supportive housing targeted to families at-risk of intergenerational homelessness and child welfare involvement.
- Systems Change and Advocacy – Secure private, public and philanthropic support and obtain federal, state and local commitments for resources and systems change that promotes and facilitates cooperation and collaboration between the housing and child welfare systems.

Measuring Success

One Roof will measure its success based on the number of stakeholders committed to its mission along with the creation of new supportive housing for families at the intersection of homelessness and child welfare involvement. CSH anticipates that One Roof will also have positive long-term outcomes and measurable impacts on families. Ultimately changing the life trajectory for children: breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty, homelessness, and child welfare involvement. Two years after families moved into supportive housing through KFT, 92% of the families remained housed, open child welfare cases decreased by 61%, and children's foster care days decreased by 77%.³ CSH hopes to achieve similar results for families through One Roof. Below are some proposed metrics that CSH could use to help measure success on a national and community level:

- ✓ Increase housing stability among families.
- ✓ Decrease in the number of encounters with the child welfare system.
- ✓ Increase in the number of children who safely remain with their parents.
- ✓ Decrease in the number of days that a child spends in foster care.
- ✓ Increase in the number of children who reunify with their families.
- ✓ Improved health and well-being of parents and children.
- ✓ Improved educational outcomes; addressing chronic absenteeism and increasing school attendance.

³ <http://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/KFT-CWSHRC.pdf>