

Keeping Families Together

Overview



BACKGROUND

CSH designed *Keeping Families Together* collaboratively with several New York City agencies, experts and nonprofit organizations experienced in providing supportive housing for families. With the backing of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 29 units of supportive housing were made available to homeless families at highest risk of having a child removed. CSH ensured that the city agencies worked together to overcome the bureaucratic hurdles that can arise when serving highly vulnerable families involved with multiple public support systems.

Rather than targeting the most “stable” families, *Keeping Families Together* sought out families with the most complicated cases—those at greatest risk. Thanks to this approach, families once on the brink of crisis now have a permanent place to call home, as well as the services and support they need to stay together.

PARTNERS

The New York City Department of Homeless Services. Helped identify and recruit eligible families; prioritized child welfare involvement among all families eligible for supportive housing; built awareness of the project among family shelter providers and families.

The New York City Administration for Children’s Services. Helped identify and recruit families; confirmed eligibility status; helped providers overcome bureaucratic obstacles related to families’ child welfare involvement.

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Provided technical assistance.

The New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development. Coordinated development timeline with recruitment efforts.

The New York City Human Resources Administration. Clarified eligibility application process and eligibility criteria.

Housing partners (CAMBA/Church Avenue Merchants Block Association, Inc., Palladia, Inc., St. John’s LLC, Lantern Corporation, Lower East Side Service Center, Women-in-Need, Inc.) volunteered to families into their supportive housing project, participate in monthly meetings and trainings.

KFT FAMILY PROFILE

All of these families had significant, sometimes intergenerational, histories of child welfare involvement, substance abuse or mental illness, interpersonal violence and trauma and homelessness. Most families were female-headed. *Keeping Families Together* parents had extremely high rates of mental health and substance abuse issues, and most lacked informal support networks like friends and family members on whom they could rely

- Each family had at least one open child welfare case at the start of the pilot.
- 60% of the 105 children born were not living with them at the time of placement
- 40% were living in foster care
- 22% had been freed for adoption.
- Only 10% of heads of household had worked in the three years prior to placement in the pilot.

RESULTS

The pilot asked whether supportive housing with child welfare preventive services can prevent family separation and child removal, increase housing stability and improve the functioning of very vulnerable, high-risk families.

STRONGER FAMILIES

- 61.1% of child welfare cases that were open at time of move-in were favorably resolved
- Families had fewer incidences of repeat maltreatment while living in supportive housing.
- Parents said that being in supportive housing helped them become better parents for their children:

“I didn’t like having my kids in a shelter. I could make do by myself, but since I have kids, I had to do better for them. Now I don’t worry anymore... My daughter comes first now. She is a happy child and I must be doing something right to have a great child.”

STABILITY

- 26 of the 29 families placed in supportive housing units remained housed and intact at the pilot’s end. The remaining three families, all headed by single women, voluntarily moved out of their supportive housing apartments.
- 15 control group families that meet *Keeping Families Together* eligibility but were not placed in supportive housing typically remained in homeless shelters, with an average stay ranging from 15 to 39 months.
- Nearly all the families with a substance abuse problem were reported to be clean and sober at the end of the evaluation period.

WORKING TOWARD A BETTER FUTURE

- School-age children showed steady average increases in school attendance.
- Heads of household reported that being in supportive housing had a positive effect on their ability to maintain relationships with others and rebuild their support systems.
- Some said they had joined religious services in the community and reconnected with family members.
- About 1/3 of families participated in job readiness or employment skill training during the pilot.
- 6 adults were employed at some point during the project period.
- Twelve adults participated in substance abuse programs while living in supportive housing, while seven heads of household received psychiatric treatment to manage their mental illness.

Keeping Families Together had a very successful pilot, demonstrating the ability of supportive housing to provide stability and permanency for highly vulnerable families and improve the safety of their children. Supportive housing can in fact bring families back from the brink of crisis, breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty, homelessness and child neglect.