

Beyond Shelter's Implementation of the "Housing First" Methodology in Los Angeles

Beyond Shelter was founded in 1988, in response to increasing numbers of homeless families in Los Angeles -- and the need for a more comprehensive approach to serving them. Through the "Housing First" program, primarily high risk, vulnerable, and multi-problem, homeless families with children are (1) assisted in moving into permanent, rental housing in residential neighborhoods, and (2) then provided *intensive case management support through home visitation* for six months to one year after the move to help them achieve improved social and economic well-being.

Beyond Shelter's Los Angeles program is set up to serve the emergency shelter/transitional housing continuum of a large, metropolitan city. More than 60 agencies throughout Los Angeles -- shelters, transitional housing programs, residential drug treatment programs, domestic violence programs, social service agencies, and churches -- refer homeless families to Beyond Shelter for the "next step", after they have provided initial emergency or interim services. Families meet with Intake Workers at the Beyond Shelter offices for screening and enrollment. During that time, the family works with agency staff to develop an individualized Family Action Plan. This plan identifies the family's housing and social service needs and the steps necessary to achieve independence and self-sufficiency.

Families are then assisted in obtaining affordable rental housing in neighborhoods of their choice throughout Los Angeles County. The program provides assistance in negotiating leases, financing the move, accessing subsidies, and overcoming the barriers of poor credit history, prior evictions, and discrimination based on ethnicity, family size and unemployment. In order to access affordable housing for families, Beyond Shelter builds and maintains close working relationships with private sector building managers, non-profit affordable housing providers, local state and federal housing assistance programs. The fact that there exists a support system for their tenants motivates many private landlords to rent to homeless families referred by Beyond Shelter.

Each family enrolled in the "Housing First" Program is assigned a case manager, who provides individualized support for up to one full year as the family carries out its Family Action Plan. Once in their new housing, the formerly homeless family is introduced to their new neighborhood -- its shopping, transportation, and community agencies. Families are supported as they improve their coping skills and reorient to normal living patterns, and are provided assistance with homemaking, nutrition and parenting skills, budget planning and money management. Each family receives their own copies of the *Family Survival Guide* and *Successful Household Money Management*, two Beyond Shelter publications which help program participants learn self-sufficiency skills. Case managers work in partnership with the family on issues such as education and literacy, career development, health, family dynamics, and recreation. Progress is evaluated on a regular basis, weekly or monthly, depending upon the situation.

The **Housing First Program** divided into two distinct departments, which operate both independently and collaboratively. The Social Services Department provides and coordinates delivery of a full range of *transitional* supportive services. The Housing Resources Department operates the only program in Los Angeles County exclusively devoted to helping homeless families relocate to permanent and affordable rental housing.

The home-visitation model

The home-visitation model utilized by Beyond Shelter is the result of more than a decade of experience working with high risk and often chronically homeless families, listening to their needs, and evaluating what does and does not make a difference in their lives. It offers an individualized and structured plan of action to often alienated, dysfunctional and troubled families, while providing at the same time a responsive and caring support system.

The home-visitation model has several key elements:

- In-depth screening and needs assessments of the family as a unit and of the parents and children individually.
- Development of an individualized "Family Action Plan", with clear goals and objectives and the steps or activities necessary to meet them.
- Provision of intensive case management and services integration, after the family moves into permanent housing, through home visitation for six months to one year, including life skills counseling, budgeting and household management, with monitoring and evaluation of progress at regular monthly intervals.
- Provision of home-based parenting education, with ongoing monitoring and evaluation of children, birth to age five, in families considered to be vulnerable and at risk.
- Graduation and closure, with follow-up as necessary.

In addition to a variety of tools developed by Beyond Shelter for needs assessments, case planning, monitoring and evaluation, the Program Logic Model for Homeless Mothers and Children (SAMHSA) and the State of California Family and Youth Development Matrix are utilized for general family and children's needs assessments, and evaluation of progress and outcomes.

The current model has been tested and refined through several national demonstration projects implemented by Beyond Shelter for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Better Homes Fund (now known as the National Center on Family Homelessness). In 1990-1993, Beyond Shelter designed and implemented the *Los Angeles Early Intervention Demonstration Project for Recently Homeless and At-Risk Families* (in collaboration with Para Los Ninos), with an evaluation by a UCLA researcher. In 1992-1995, the home-visitation model was expanded through the HHS *Family Support Center Demonstration Project*, conducted over four years for over 250 homeless families. During 1993-94, Beyond Shelter participated in KIDSTART, a national demonstration of the Better Homes Fund *to support and develop innovative and comprehensive programming for homeless preschoolers*. This carefully evaluated effort provided in-depth and comprehensive services to pre-schoolers in homeless and formerly homeless families, targeted to their special needs. The service model included screening for abuse and/or neglect and medical, developmental and behavioral problems together, with appropriate referrals and follow-up, in-home parenting support and stress management counseling.

Additional federally-funded "demonstration projects" addressing the needs of the target population include a Department of Labor Welfare-to-Work Demonstration Program in which homeless, single-parent heads-of-household (primarily participants in the Housing First Program) were provided home-based case management by a Welfare-to-Work case manager and job readiness, job placement, and job retention services by a Welfare-to-Work Employment Specialist. Job placement and retention services were provided to the primarily female head-of-household *after* the family had been stabilized in permanent housing. The target population consisted of women primarily, with poor reading and writing skills, at least 30 months total of welfare dependency, and many of whom were in recovery.

The "Housing First" Program was also one of 19 programs in the Pew Partnership's national initiative, **"Wanted: Solutions for America."** This rigorous, systematic evaluation effort to document and disseminate what works to build stronger communities is being coordinated by Rutgers University in New Jersey. Dr. Madeline Stoner of the University of Southern California School of Social Work is the local researcher working with Beyond Shelter. A comprehensive client tracking, evaluation and assessment database has been developed and is currently being utilized by program staff. Two models are being utilized in the evaluation – the Program Logic Model for Homeless Mothers and Children, and one measuring family stability and self-sufficiency.

Recognition for the "Housing First" program methodology includes the *Nonprofit Sector Award* from the National Alliance to End Homelessness, Washington, DC (February 1996); one of "25 *Best Practices*" to represent the U.S. at Habitat II, the United Nations Conference held in Istanbul, Turkey (June 1996); and one of "*100 International Best Practices*," by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) in Nairobi, Kenya, for dissemination worldwide (1996).