

Council on Children & Families

A Research Brief on Child Well-being

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A PLACE TO CALL HOME

A touchstone held for all children in New York state is to be raised in families that provide safe, stable and nurturing environments (1). This type of environment is essential for healthy growth; yet, a portion of children and families experience homelessness. Between 2008 and 2011, the number of homeless families seeking emergency shelter increased, with a rise of 9.3 percent observed in New York City and an increase of 15.8 percent in the rest of state (2). *Principle contributors to residential instability and family homelessness are extreme poverty, a lack of affordable housing, overcrowded housing and a need to escape domestic violence* (3-6).

When children are separated from their homes, they often are also separated from other family members, their peers, teachers and others who may provide them with a sense of support and stability. The disruption of homelessness can leave children at an increased risk of severe emotional distress, exposure to violence, inadequate healthcare and poor academic outcomes (3-11). With respect to healthcare, homeless children are at greater risk for asthma, exposure to lead poisoning and poor nutrition. In terms of their cognitive development, homeless children are more likely than their low-income housed peers to score poorly on tests and repeat a grade in school (10). The unique outcomes attributable to homelessness are difficult to distinguish since they occur in conjunction with other poverty related factors. Yet, the increased school mobility and greater isolation experienced among homelessness children sets them apart from their low income residentially stable peers, impacting their social, emotional and educational well-being (3-11).

It has been shown that a strong continuum of care allows children and their families to access the type of homeless prevention services (e.g., emergency rent subsidies) and housing services they need in a timely

Contributors of residential instability

- **Extreme poverty:**
One in ten children in New York lived in extreme poverty – 50% below the federal poverty level (12).
- **Lack of affordable housing:**
About four in ten New Yorkers report housing costs that are 30% or more of their income (12).
- **Overcrowded housing:**
About one in six children live in overcrowded households – with more than one person per room (12).
- **Domestic violence:**
Approximately one child (1.2) was served for every adult who was provided housing from domestic violence residential or transitional housing programs (13).

fashion. This increases the likelihood that families and individuals can transition from one form of residential support to another, as needed. Furthermore, access to aftercare services and permanent housing reduce the likelihood families experience chronic homelessness (3).

Homeless families

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) published the final rule on the definition of homelessness. Based on this rule, individuals may be considered homeless if they are:

- Individuals and families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes a subset for individuals who reside in an emergency shelter or a place not meant for human habitation and who are exiting an institution where they temporarily resided;
- Individuals and families who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence;
- Unaccompanied youth and families with children and youth who are defined as homeless under other federal statutes who do not otherwise qualify as homeless under this definition; and
- Individuals and families who are fleeing or are attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a family member. (14).

Each year data on homeless individuals are gathered through the HUD Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs report (15). This report is based on data collected at a point-in-time (a given night during the last week in January) that reflect unduplicated counts of homeless persons. Based on the HUD 2010 Continuum of Care report:

- Statewide, 70 percent of the individuals using emergency shelters and transitional housing were persons in households with adults *and* children (15);
 - Studies of homeless families in shelters indicate these families are most often headed by single mothers (3-6, 16).
 - Among homeless families in New York City, about one in three families (34.7%) were placed in permanent housing (17).
 - Studies suggest that families exiting shelters are more likely to secure an apartment and maintain stable housing and less likely to be readmitted to a shelter if they receive subsidized housing (18).
- About one in five (21%) of the sheltered individuals in the state were victims of domestic violence (15).
 - It is estimated that 30 to 50 percent of family homelessness is directly related to domestic violence (19-21).
 - During 2010, the ratio of children to adults who were served in domestic violence residential programs was 1.2 to 1; the ratio was 1.8 to 1 in domestic violence transitional housing programs (13).
 - 46 percent of those seeking housing at domestic violence shelters were denied access due to a lack of bed availability (13)

- The average length of stay in the New York City area was longer than similar programs in the rest of the state (13).¹

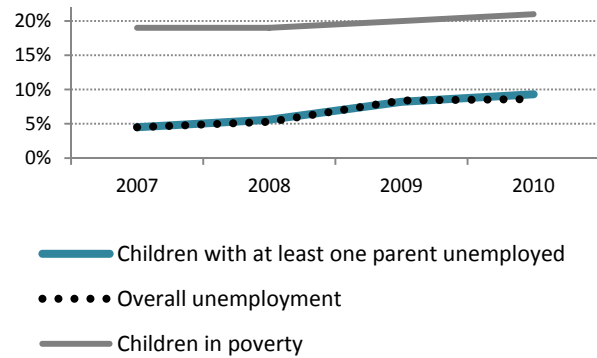
	New York City	Rest of State
Domestic Violence Shelters	76	32
Safe dwellings	84	26
Domestic Violence Programs	N/A	24

Data source: New York State Office of Children and Family Services Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2010 Annual Report to the Governor and Legislature

Two factors related to family economic insecurity and housing are parent unemployment and housing foreclosures (16).

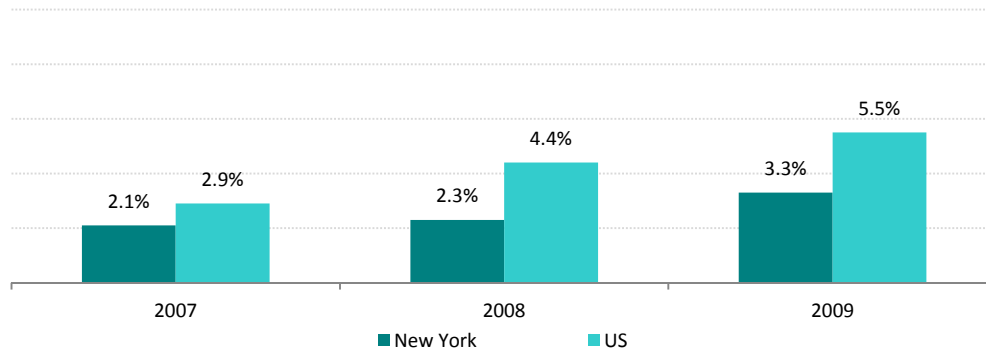
- The percent of children with at least one unemployed parent more than doubled from 2007 to 2010, increasing 5 percentage points, from four to nine percent (12). This pattern was similar for the overall unemployment rate and tended to follow changes in child poverty (Figure 1).
- Between 2007 and 2009, the percent of children in New York impacted by foreclosures increased 1.2 percentage points, representing a 57 percent change (Figure 2). This was considerably lower than the national percentage change (12).

Figure 1. Patterns in unemployment and child poverty



Data Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Data Center; U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey 2007 to 2009

Figure 2. Children impacted by foreclosure



Data source: Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Data Center; U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2007 to 2009

¹ This reflects length of stay for all individuals; information on lengths of stay for women with children is not available.

Homeless students

Schools play an important role in providing children with a level of consistency and safety. The school environment is predictable, provides children access to caring adults who instill a sense of security, and is a sanctuary free of stress where children are able to enjoy their friends.

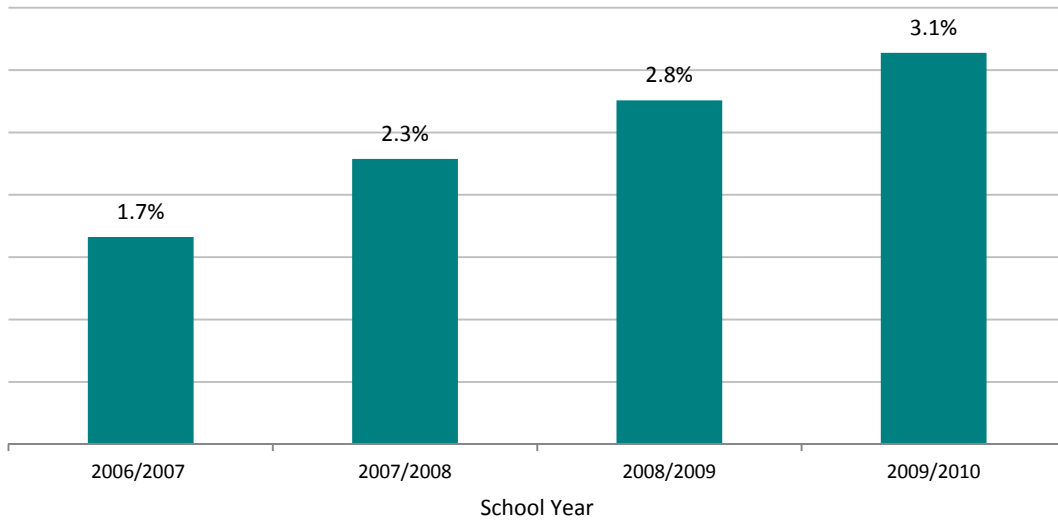
Given the important role school plays in the lives of children, and particularly children who are homeless, the U.S. Department of Education requires local schools to count the number of children who are homeless. This requirement was established through the McKinney-Vento Act, which implemented the Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program. The program was put in place to: (1) identify homeless children; (2) remove barriers to school enrollment and attendance (e.g., expedited enrollment, transportation to school); and (3) provide services that promote opportunities for school success (e.g., tutoring, provision of school supplies and clothing, referrals to physical and mental health and physical health referrals and services) (22). It was also put in place to increase educational stability for children experiencing homelessness.

The McKinney Vento definition of homelessness uses broader parameters than those outlined in the HUD definition, incorporating the concept of residential instability where families may have doubled-up and stayed with other family members or friends. As defined in Subtitle B of Title VII of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, students are considered homeless if they lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and include:

- children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;
- children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and migratory children, as defined in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (23).

Figure 3 depicts the rate of reported homeless students in New York state, as defined by McKinney-Vento. While school districts are required to record the number of children who meet the definition of homelessness as established in the McKinney-Vento Act, it is difficult to accurately capture this information since many students and their families hesitate to come forward and identify themselves as homeless. Based on data available, the percent of students reported as homeless during the 2006/2007 school year was 1.7 percent (N=46,232) and this almost doubled to 3.2 percent (N=86,715) during the 2009/2010 school year (24).

Figure 3. Percent of enrolled students reported as homeless

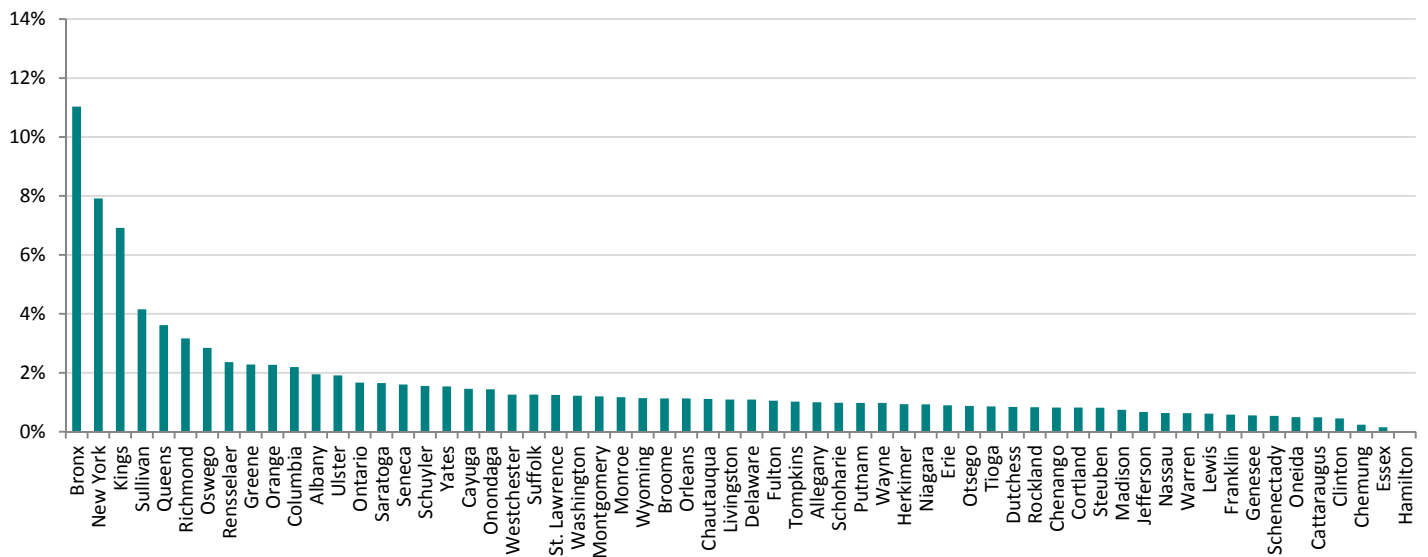


Data source: 2006-2007 to 2009-2010 data from the New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students & 2007-2008 to 2009-2010 New York State Education Department School Report Card

When looking at homeless children by region, a higher percentage of New York City students are reported as homeless (6.8%) than other locations of the state (1.2%).

- The borough with the highest percentage of homeless children reported is the Bronx (11%; N=22,946).
- Reports of student homelessness in other boroughs ranges from 3.2 to 7.9 percent (Richmond, 3.2%; Queens, 3.6%; Kings, 6.9%; New York, 7.9%).

Figure 4. Percent of enrolled school children who are reported homeless by county

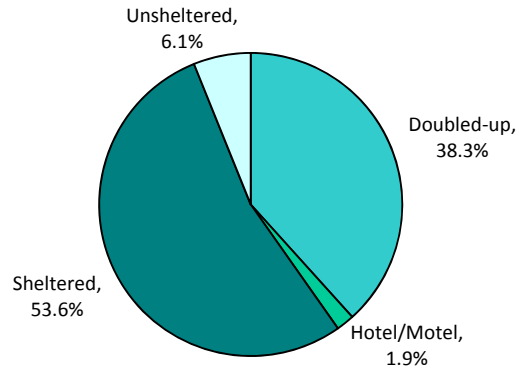


Data source: 2009/2010 data from the New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students

Of those students identified as being homeless,

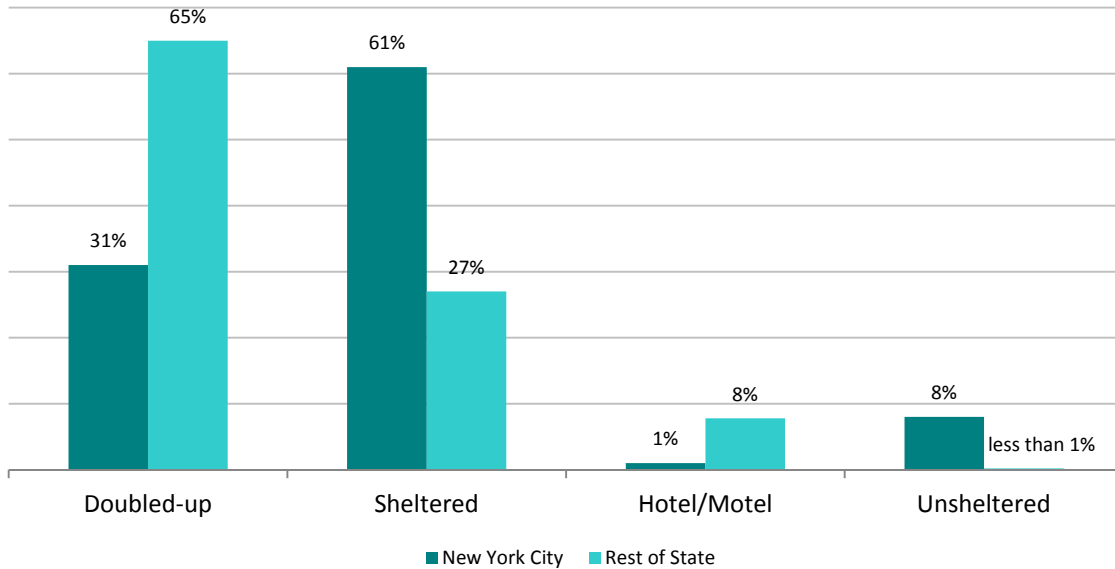
- About 6 percent of students across the state were exposed to unsheltered circumstances – the most severe homeless situation (e.g., living in a car, on the street).
- About half were living in shelters (Figure 5).
- When living arrangements are examined by region, students in New York City have considerably different living arrangements from their peers living in other regions of the state. Specifically, students in New York City are more likely to live in shelters or be unsheltered compared to other students (Figure 6).

Figure 5. Living arrangements of students reported as homeless



Data source: 2009/2010 data from the New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students

Figure 6. Living arrangements of students reported as homeless by region



Data source: New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students

Runaway/unaccompanied homeless youth

Youth who are homeless on their own (i.e., not with parents) are often referred to as unaccompanied homeless youth and frequently have run away from home. Typically, these youth are not living at home with parents due to family conflicts and/or abuse or their parents have pushed them out of the house and refused to take them back. These youth tend to have complex living situations with multiple problems, often have poor relationships with parents, and are at high risk for continual transience (25).

Runaway or unaccompanied homeless youth experience challenges, such as school failure, substance abuse, and sexual or physical abuse (26-30). They also are more likely to have disproportionate rates of mental health problems such as depression and suicidal ideation or to be involved with the juvenile justice system (27-31).

The information available on runaway or unaccompanied homeless youth is fragmented since these individuals tend to receive assistance from a variety of programs. Additionally, different criteria are used to define homeless youth, further complicating data collection.

- Based on the HUD 2010 continuum of care report, less than one percent (0.60%) of individuals in the New York survey was identified as unaccompanied homeless youth (15). This reflects a count of youth under 18 who were not accompanied by parents and using emergency shelter services on a given night in January. These data are collected during the last seven days in January. It should be noted that this number is influenced by the number of beds available (i.e., supply) and may not reflect the demand for those beds.

Another source of information on the status of homeless and runaway youth is provided through the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), which administers short-term crisis programs and long-term transitional living programs. Currently, 27 counties in the state have runaway and homeless youth (RHY) programs.

- In 2010, a total of 12,841² youth received services from the RHY programs with 61 percent requiring short- and long-term *residential* services (54% and 7% respectively). The remainder of youth (39%) received non-residential services (e.g., counseling, case management, referrals and advocacy).
- Of those youth receiving residential services, about one in three (34%) had been in the care of a local department of social service or voluntary agency during the 30 days prior to their admission to the RHY program.

Information regarding runaway and homeless youth is also captured through the New York State Missing Children Register, which gathers information from all 62 counties.

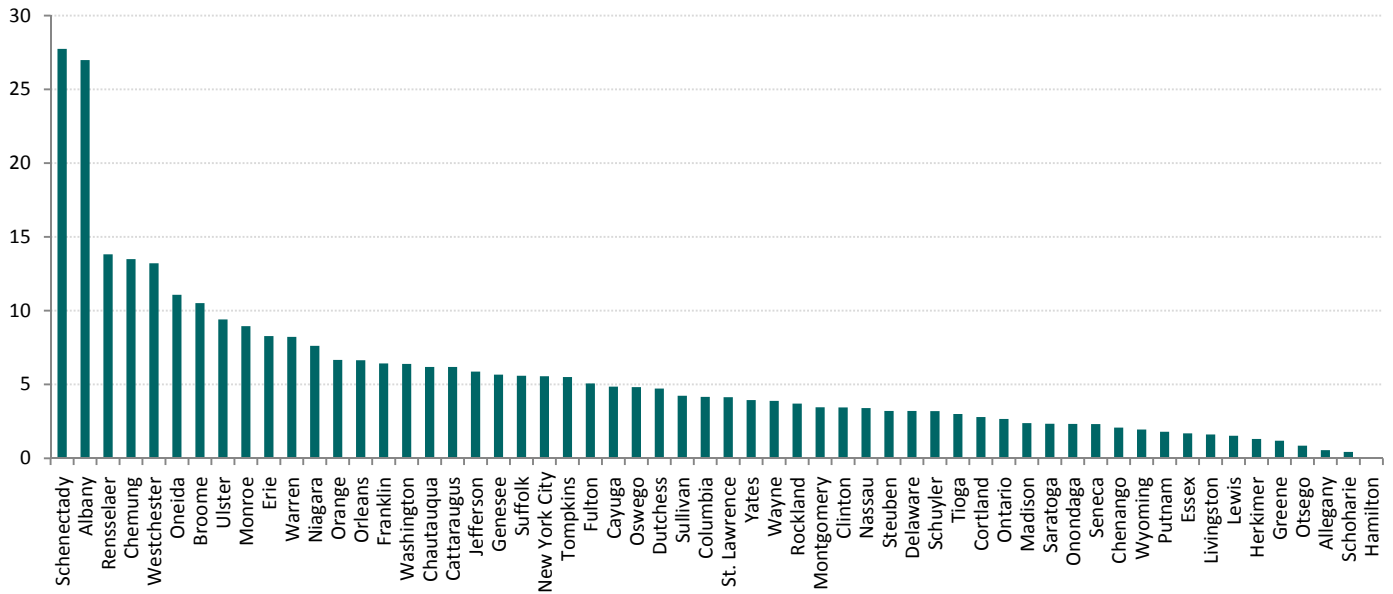
- In 2010, a statewide runaway rate of youth ages 6 through 17 years was 6.5 per 1,000 representing 19,026³ reports of children and youth who were identified as runaways (33).
- Figure 7 provides data on the rate of runaway youth by county. The three counties in the Capital District – Schenectady, Albany, and Rensselaer had the highest rates of runaway reports (27.7, 27.0, and 13.8 per 1,000 respectively) and it has been noted that these counties differ from other counties in the state since they have large numbers of repeat cases involving

² This is a duplicated count since young people may have left and returned to a particular program for additional services over the course of the year.

³ These may include duplicate cases of children who runaway more than once during the reporting period.

children who ran away from foster care placements or other facilities (e.g., group homes) that are located in these counties (33).

Figure 7. Rate of reported runaway youth per 1,000 youth ages 6 to 17 years



Data source: New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services Office of Public Safety; New York State Missing and Exploited Children Clearinghouse 2010 Annual Report.

Young adults who may be at risk of requiring residential services are those leaving foster care.

- In 2011, 11.6 percent had emancipation (i.e., aging out of foster care) listed as the reason for discharge. This reflects approximately 1,350 young adults who may need to assume responsibility for their housing (32).
- Nationally, it is estimated that 25 percent of emancipated foster care youth experience homelessness for at least one night after leaving foster care (12).

Benefit of a Coordinated Continuum of Care

A strong continuum of care allows children and their families to access the type of housing services they need in a timely fashion and increases the likelihood that families and individuals can transition from one form of residential support to another, as needed. Figure 8 details the number of beds that are available within each sector of care for individuals in families (34).

A Continuum of Care is a local or regional system for helping people who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness by providing housing and services appropriate to the whole range of homeless needs in the community, from homeless prevention to emergency shelter to permanent housing.

Figure 8. Number of beds available to persons in families by type of housing



- ^a 188 emergency shelter beds for persons in families are under development
^b 1,44 transitional housing beds for persons in families are under development
^c 2,214 permanent supportive housing beds for families are under development

Data source: New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal New York State Consolidated Plan: Federal Fiscal Years 2011-2015 & Annual Action Plan Accessed October, 2011 at: <http://nysdhcr.gov/Publications/ConsolidatedPlan/ConsolidatedPlan2011.pdf>

An adequate variety of housing options within the continuum of care for persons in homeless families, when properly coordinated, can increase residential stability within a shorter period of time and protect families from chronic homelessness. Housing experts note that a coordinated approach as intended with the federal Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH Act of 2009), when modeled at the community level, decreases family stressors and increases the likelihood families can be permanently housed. It also may alleviate the portion of children who are separated from families and admitted to child welfare due to a lack of adequate housing. Furthermore, it is recognized that the partnership mix developed at the community level requires coordination of services that extend beyond housing resources given the higher degree of social and psychological isolation that accompanies homelessness (35-37).

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