

Community Snapshot

New York City



July 2005

THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS



Progress in Ending Homelessness

On any given night, New York City provides shelter to approximately 8,700 homeless families with 15,000 children. An estimated 97,000 families living in “doubled up” situations and earning less than \$20,000 a year are at risk of becoming homeless. Under the leadership of Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Department of Homeless Services Commissioner Linda Gibbs, preventing family homelessness became a top priority and a critical goal of the city’s five-year plan *United for Solutions Beyond Shelter*. The plan draws on a set of principles that guide homelessness prevention which are:

- Expand affordable housing;
- Leverage community support;
- Prioritize high need neighborhoods;
- Apply a range of interventions;
- Utilize a variety of settings for intervention;
- Identify different points of time for intervention;
- Understand the unique needs of families;
- Increase legal services interventions; and
- Draw on family support networks.

Key Initiatives

The city is developing new strategies and resources to help prevent homelessness among families. A few key initiatives from New York City’s five-year plan stand out:

Expand community-based homelessness prevention programs. City officials use a data-driven approach to design homelessness prevention models that target at-risk families before they become homeless. This data-based system enables the city to evaluate existing prevention programs, understand why programs show results and replicate successful models. One program uses shelter intake data to identify the neighborhoods in the city that produce the highest number of homeless people entering shelter. Prevention programs then target these “hotspots.”

In 2002, the city placed 22 percent of families who entered shelter in permanent housing; in 2003, 28 percent were placed; and in 2004, 33 percent were placed.

Increase communication among city agencies to prevent system-to-shelter discharges. The plan created mechanisms to enable and ensure that homeless agency case workers collaborate with their counterparts at mainstream agencies (e.g., the Department of Corrections, Child Welfare, etc.). Cross agency collaboration helps avoid contradictory decisions and reduce duplicative efforts.

Redirect funds currently used for shelters to supportive or service-enriched housing. City officials review funding streams and evaluate the cost-effectiveness of programs aimed at reducing the shelter counts. The review includes all federal and state money currently dedicated to shelter.

Outcomes

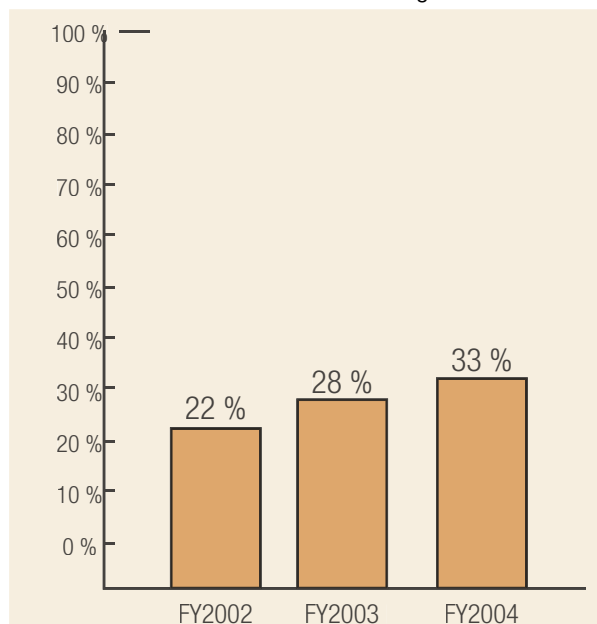
The city is beginning to see positive results. According to data from the city’s Department of Homeless Services, in 2002, the rate of families entering the shelter system dramatically outpaced the rate at which they were leaving; less than 3,000 families left shelter for permanent housing. Two years later, in 2004, the city placed just over 7,000 families in permanent housing, a 133 percent increase.

The percentage of families served by shelters that are later placed into permanent housing is also increasing. In 2002, the city placed 22 percent of families who entered shelter in permanent housing; in 2003, 28 percent were placed; and in 2004, 33 percent were placed (see exhibit 1). In the last two and half years, an unprecedented 15,300 homeless families—with an estimated 29,500 children—left shelter for permanent housing.



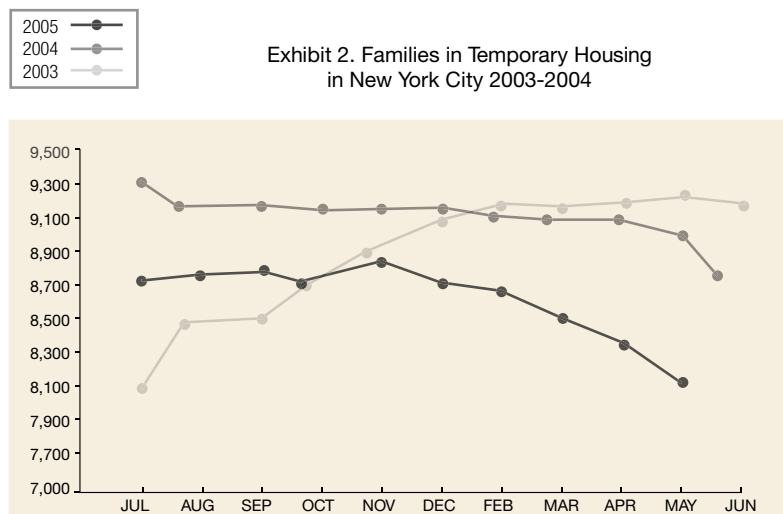
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Exhibit 1. Percent of Families Served Placed in Permanent Housing



Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services

Exhibit 2. Families in Temporary Housing in New York City 2003-2004



Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services

The practice of immediately placing families in permanent housing and the city's data driven prevention efforts contributed to an overall reduction in the number of families living in temporary housing (see exhibit 2). In 2003, the number of families in temporary housing was increasing. By 2004, the city started to see a slight decline in the number of families in temporary housing. This decline continues through 2005; the total number of families entering the shelter system declined by 5 percent, from 9,731 in 2004 to 9,252 in 2005.

Across the country, communities are making progress in ending homelessness. The National Alliance to End Homelessness *Community Snapshot Series* highlights strategies, programs and innovations in these communities. To learn how to end homelessness in ten years, visit www.endhomelessness.org.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a nonprofit organization dedicated to solving the problem of homelessness and preventing its continued growth. Our mission is to mobilize all sectors of society in an alliance to end homelessness.