

PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST: ENDING FAMILY HOMELESSNESS IN ILLINOIS



A STATE-WIDE SURVEY OF FAMILY HOMELESSNESS IN ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 21, 2001



It Takes a Home to Raise a Child

A CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT AND REDUCE FAMILY HOMELESSNESS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recent economic recession and resulting layoffs compounded by a severe lack of affordable housing, lack of living wage jobs, and an increase in foreclosures, has caused increasing hardship for families in Illinois, including homelessness.

This December 2001 study of seventeen agencies that serve homeless families in fifteen counties throughout Illinois and the eight warming centers (emergency shelters) in Chicago gathered information regarding family homelessness in Illinois. The agencies surveyed indicate an increase in family homelessness over the past year and specifically over the past two months.

These results, and other recent research regarding the acute shortage of affordable housing in Illinois points towards the increasing need for Illinois to invest in homelessness prevention initiatives and the development of affordable housing for the benefit of thousands of families and children.

KEY FINDINGS:

FAMILY HOMELESSNESS IN ILLINOIS

- 80% of agencies surveyed report an increase in family homelessness in the past one year
- 78% of programs surveyed report an increase in family homelessness in the past two months
- The agencies surveyed indicated that 9% of families in their programs are Latino

FAMILIES, WORK & THE INABILITY TO AFFORD HOUSING

- 57% of those working and living in shelters earn a wage between \$5.16 - \$7.15 an hour
- 36% of agencies surveyed report that up to 20% of heads of households of families served are working; 24% reported that between 20 - 40% are working; 20% report that between 40 - 60% are working

CHILDREN AND HOMELESSNESS

- 61% of agencies surveyed report that children served by their agencies miss school due to becoming homeless
- 58% of agencies report that children served by their agencies change schools due to becoming homeless

LIFE AFTER SHELTER

- Only 16% of agencies surveyed outside of the City of Chicago report that families were able to move from shelter into market rate housing

LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

- Agencies surveyed throughout Illinois reported the lack of affordable housing as the primary reason for family homelessness

PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST: ENDING FAMILY HOMELESSNESS IN ILLINOIS

In fiscal year 2001, 7,131 families, including over 15,000 children were served in State funded shelters in Illinois. Families, primarily women with children comprise 40% of the homeless population, and are the fastest growing segment.

FAMILY HOMELESSNESS IS INCREASING IN ILLINOIS

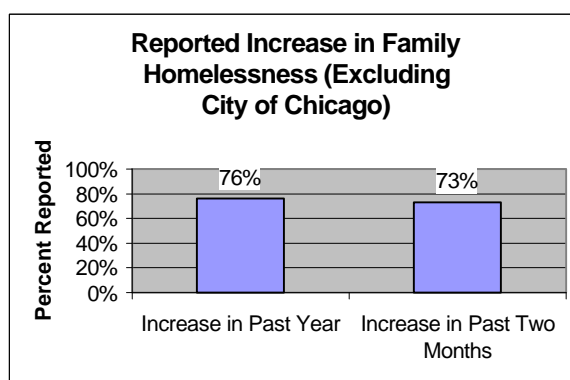
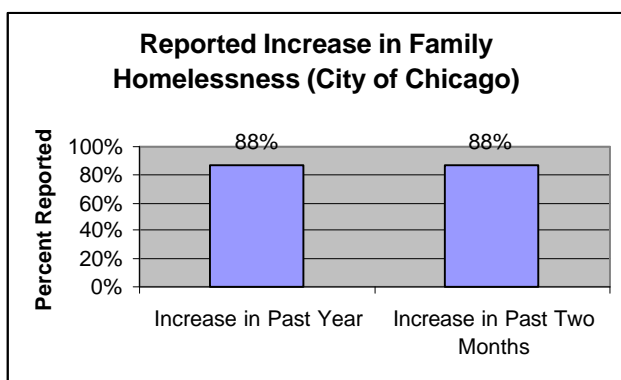
76% of respondents outside Chicago reported that they have seen an increase in family homelessness in the past year. 73% reported an increase in the past two months.

88% of the warming centers in Chicago reported that family homelessness had increased in the past year, and the same percent stated that it has increased in the past two months.

MANY HOMELESS FAMILIES CAN NOT ACCESS HOUSING OR SHELTER

44% of agencies surveyed outside of the City of Chicago and 88% of respondents in the City of Chicago had to turn families away due to lack of space and/or resources. On average, in the past two months, in agencies outside of the City of Chicago, 50 families per agency were turned away or referred to another program.

Throughout the State, only 23% of families who were turned away from shelters due to lack of space were able to find shelter or housing. Three-Fourths of respondents did not know what happened to those families who were turned away.





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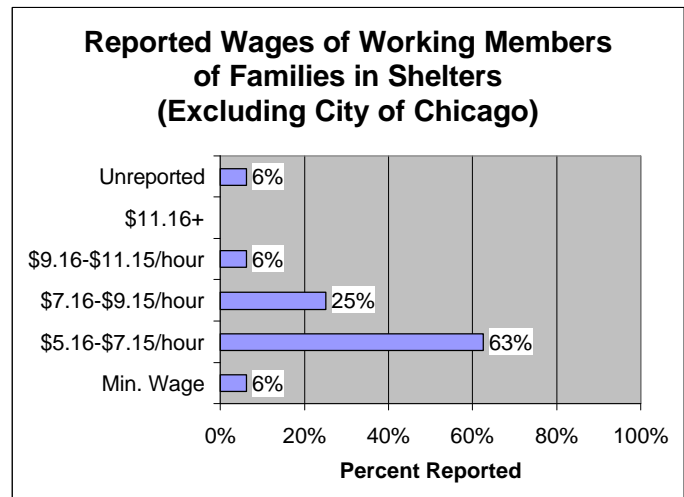
FAMILIES, WORK & THE INABILITY TO AFFORD HOUSING

Working families in Illinois are finding it increasingly difficult to afford housing. 100% of agencies surveyed indicated that they sheltered some families with a working head of household.

WORKING FAMILIES ARE HOMELESS

36% of agencies surveyed report that up to 20% of homeless families in their programs are working. 24% of those surveyed report that between 20 to 40% of families have a head of household who is employed. 57% of those working and living in the shelters surveyed earn a wage between \$5.16 and \$7.15 an hour.

Out of Reach 2001: America's Growing Wage-Rent Disparity, a report by the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLHC) indicates that in Illinois, a worker needs to earn \$14.93/hour to afford a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent (FMR). In major cities in Illinois, at the wages that heads of households in shelters are working, they would have to work 116 hours a week to afford market rate housing. During the strong economic boom of 2000 and early 2001, housing costs increased by 16.68% in Illinois, placing our state in the top five for housing cost increases. Last year in the five Illinois counties of Clinton, Jersey, Madison, Monroe and St. Clair, housing costs increased by more than 20%. In Cook, DuPage, Kane, Lake, McHenry and Will Counties a family has to work 133 hours at minimum wage to afford a two-bedroom home.



High housing costs prohibit families from saving for emergencies--often families turn to programs that offer one-time assistance to prevent evictions.

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS: Tina & Roy

Roy delivers pizzas. Until a recent lay-off Tina was a part-time dishwasher. They have two adolescent children in school. Although they were working, Tina and Roy's combined income was not sufficient to afford rent. They were lucky to be able to live in the Southern Illinois Coalition for the Homeless (SICH) transitional housing program and pay 30% of their income towards housing. Minimum wage income is not sufficient to support a family in the Southern Illinois housing market, where average rent is \$400.00 to \$500.00 for a three-bedroom apartment. After nine months on a waiting list, Tina, Roy and their two children were finally able to find and move into a Section-8 subsidized apartment.

The growing disparity between wages and housing costs makes it impossible for many workers to provide a safe, stable home where their families can thrive.

CHILDREN AND

HOMELESSNESS

Although family shelters in Illinois house children of all ages, the majority (80%) of agencies surveyed report serving children under 10 years of age. When children become homeless, they may have to change schools and/or miss school days. Such mobility and instability negatively affects the child's academic and social development. Furthermore, homelessness amongst children can cause extended physical, mental, and emotional health problems.

Age of Children	Percent Reported
0 to 5	44%
6 to 10	44%
11 to 15	6%
16 to 18	6%

Reported Age of Children in Shelters
(Excluding City of Chicago)

HOMELESSNESS: AN ACADEMIC HANDICAP FOR CHILDREN

61% of agencies surveyed report that homeless children in their shelters miss school days. Of those, 82% reported that on average homeless children miss between 1 to 5 days of school due to becoming homeless.

58% of agencies surveyed report that children in their shelters change schools due to becoming homeless. Of those, on average 33% of children in shelters outside the City of Chicago and 49% in the City of Chicago change schools due to becoming homeless. Upon becoming homeless, many children change schools due to lack of knowledge of education rights, transportation issues, school choice, and/or resistance from school districts.



INCREASED MOBILITY HARMS CHILDREN

Extensive research indicates that children who change schools have lower test scores and do less well academically. According to Dr. Joy Rogers of the Loyola University Department of Education, "Lack of continuity is widely recognized within the field of education as jeopardizing a child's school success it takes a child four to six months to recover academically from a change in school such school changes can destroy a child's academic progress."

McHENRY COUNTY: Shannon

One night Shannon's mother came into her room carrying her little brother. "We have to leave" her mother said, and with the clothes on their backs they fled their home. Three months later they were finally able to get into a McHenry County domestic violence shelter. Like many homeless children, Shannon had to change schools. Last fall, Shannon started high school and was lucky to be able to attend a school where she had friends. Two days later, however, a woman came into Shannon's second period class and in front of all her classmates told Shannon to pack up her things and come with her: she was in the wrong school. Shannon was devastated. Luckily, Shannon's mother had heard of the education rights guaranteed children under Illinois and Federal law: and Shannon was able to return to school with her friends.

LIFE AFTER SHELTERS

Upon becoming homeless, many families turn to warming centers, emergency and/or transitional centers for an immediate place to stay. Due to lack of resources, many families are turned away from such programs. Those who are able to get in find it difficult to move from shelter into independent housing.

DIFFICULTY FINDING HOUSING

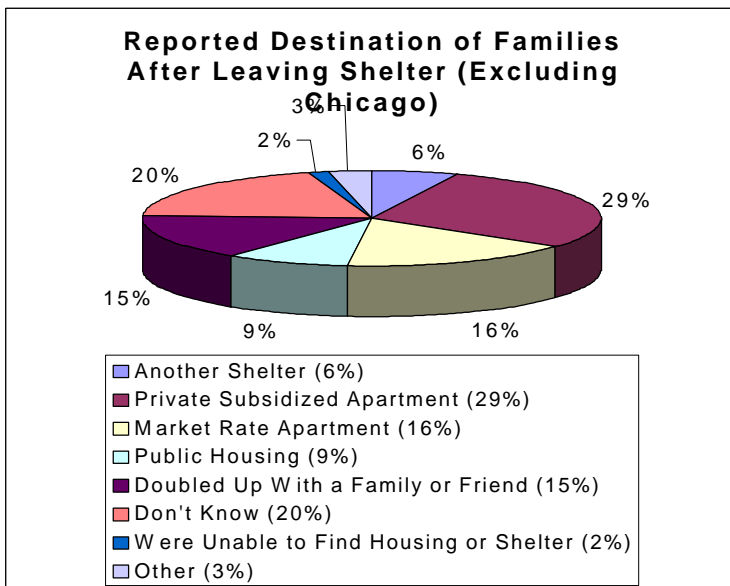
Only 5% of agencies in the City of Chicago and 16% in the rest of the State report that families were able to move from shelter to independent market rate housing. Generally, families moved to another shelter, doubled up with a family or friend, or moved to a subsidized housing unit.

In their 2001 publication, *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities*, The U.S.

Conference of Mayors report that requests for assisted housing by low-income families and individuals increased in 86% of U.S. cities. Furthermore the report indicated that applicants must wait an average of 16 months for public housing, 20 months for Section 8 certificates, and 22 months for Section 8 vouchers. According to the Statewide Housing Action Coalition (SHAC) in Illinois there are only 230,000 assisted units available to the more than one million families that need housing assistance.

COOK COUNTY: The Bernal Family
 Jose Bernal, 40, who has lived in Chicago for 20 years, feels as many immigrants do--he'll stay put unless the economy really worsens. He shares the home he has owned for 1 year with two other families and shares his mattress with his two youngest children. He boils water on the stove for heat now that he works in a factory for less than half the \$11 an hour he used to earn.

(Story by Ofelia Casillas, Tribune Staff Reporter, originally published in the Chicago Tribune)



Illinois statistics mirror national statistics. The chart on the left indicates the difficulty that many Illinois families faced in obtaining independent housing after staying at a shelter.

LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Agencies surveyed throughout Illinois reported the lack of affordable housing as the primary reason for family homelessness. Lack of emergency homelessness prevention assistance, the loss of employment, the lack of living wage jobs and domestic violence were other top causes.

75% of the City of Chicago warming centers reported they sheltered families who had been displaced from public housing in Chicago.



MANY ILLINOIS RESIDENTS CANNOT AFFORD HOUSING

Throughout the United States, 15 million low-income households pay too much for their housing, live in substandard housing, or are homeless. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) study, *Out of Reach 2001: America's Growing Wage-Rent Disparity*, **Illinois ranks in the top ten least affordable states in the nation.**

THE CHANGING ECONOMY

46,000 workers filed for unemployment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor) in Illinois as a result of industry layoffs, in the second quarter of 2001 (April - June). This is a 65% increase from the second quarter of 2000. As layoffs continue, many low-income workers and families struggling to transition from welfare to work are being affected. Already, homeless shelters surveyed statewide are reporting an increase in homelessness in the past two months.

INCREASING FORECLOSURES

Another contributing factor to homelessness and the depleting stock of affordable housing in Illinois is the drastic increase in home foreclosures throughout the state. A foreclosed home may directly contribute to a family's homelessness. In some cases, a family who has lost their home to foreclosure may be able to access an affordable rental unit; however, this diminishes the already limited stock of affordable housing in a community. Since 1993 foreclosure rates have increased by 74% in Macon County, 83% in Cook County, and 120% in Sangamon County.

THE SMITH FAMILY

Robert and Ellen Smith and their four children were financially secure and paying their mortgage in full and on time for years. However, last year, Robert, the primary breadwinner, unexpectedly fell ill and was hospitalized for over one month. Though Ellen Smith held a part time job, her wages were barely enough to sustain the many other household expenses. After several months in recovery and his return to part-time employment, Robert's doctors assured him that he soon would be able to return to full-time work. By this point, however, the Smith family had fallen over \$3,000 behind in their mortgage payments and were unable to make their payments current.

SUMMARY:

The survey results indicate that family homelessness has increased in Illinois in the past year, and more specifically in the past two months. Throughout the State, many families could not access shelter and were turned away. For those who could--even after using shelters, very few families were able to move into permanent affordable housing.

Homelessness has tremendous negative affects on the educational and social development of children. Increased mobility and missing school days caused by homelessness places children at greater risk of fairing poorly on test scores, getting poor grades, and dropping out of school.

The agency's surveyed listed the following as top priorities in ending homelessness in their areas:

- Affordable Housing
- Emergency homelessness prevention assistance
- Living wage jobs and job training

It is imperative that Illinois prioritize and invest in programs that prevent homelessness, and spur the development of affordable rental housing.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

The lack of affordable housing has reached critical levels in Illinois. A slowing economy and State budget cuts primarily affecting programs for the poor only exacerbate an already critical situation. Illinois needs to expand programs that assist families who are at risk of homelessness. This would not only ensure the stability of families and their children's development, but it is also a cost-effective investment.

RECOMMENDATION #1: INCREASE FUNDING FOR HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

The Illinois Family Homelessness Prevention Program, established in May of 1999, has thus far prevented over 5,000 Illinois families from becoming homeless with primarily rent and utility assistance. Many families at risk can be prevented from becoming homeless by a one-time grant to address an immediate crisis that may result in an eviction. The Homelessness Prevention fund spends an average of \$450 to prevent a family from becoming homeless. The Illinois Department of Human Services spends an average of \$3,400 to shelter a family of three for two months in a state-funded shelter.

Illinois should invest \$5 million into the Homelessness Prevention Program for FY 2003.

RECOMMENDATION #2: PREVENT MORTGAGE FORECLOSURES

With layoffs affecting thousands of Illinois workers, and home foreclosure rates increasing in the last few years, Illinois needs to create and fund programs to assist homeowner's who are at risk of foreclosures due to a temporary crisis such as a layoff. HB 500, the Homeowner Stabilization Program, can provide much stability by preventing mortgage foreclosures and keeping families in their homes. HB 500 would provide homeowners who are behind on their mortgages with financial counseling and assistance in doing a workout plan with a lender. If necessary the program would make available a low-interest loan for qualified applicants.

The Illinois legislature should pass and fund HB 500, the Homeowner Stabilization Program at \$5 million.

RECOMMENDATION #3: STATE FUNDED RENTAL SUBSIDIES FOR THE WORKING POOR

Lack of affordable housing is a primary reason that families become homeless in Illinois. An affordable rent (30% of one's income) for someone earning minimum wage is \$257, well below the average fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Illinois. Furthermore, waiting lists for federally subsidized programs such as public housing or Section 8 are often several years long or completely closed. Working poor families often struggle with housing costs and have difficulty maintaining stability. Research on welfare-to-work programs in Minnesota, Atlanta, Columbus, and California showed that families who received subsidized housing were more likely to maintain employment, work more hours, and have greater earnings.

The Illinois Legislature should create and invest in the Rental Housing Support Program which would create a state-funded rental subsidy program which would make rent affordable to families at 30% or below area median income (around \$19,000 in Illinois). Based on the Chicago Low-Income Housing Trust Fund, this program would provide project-based rental subsidies directly to landlords who want to make a certain portion of a building's units affordable to very low-income families. It would also provide operating subsidies for new construction or substantial rehabilitation of family-sized affordable housing units.

METHODOLOGY:

This survey was designed and coordinated by the It Takes A Home to Raise a Child (ITAH) statewide housing campaign. ITAH is a network of approximately 100 organizations throughout Illinois dedicated to the reduction and prevention of family

homelessness in Illinois. Outside the City of Chicago, the survey was distributed to seventeen agencies representing fifteen counties that serve homeless families. Data from Winnebago County was received from the City of Rockford Human Services Department, the agency that collects data for homeless services in the greater Rockford area. In the City of Chicago, the survey was distributed to the eight warming centers, emergency overnight shelters that are the first stop for families who have become homeless.

Survey recipients were selected based on agency type and geographic location to capture a statewide representation. The surveys were self-administered by agency staff based on data collected for agency records. Even though great effort was made to ensure high validity of the survey through its administration, the possibility exists that some questions were interpreted differently by some participants than by others. The survey was administered in December of 2001.

Though this sample does not represent all agencies that serve homeless families throughout the State of Illinois, nor cover every county of the State, we believe that the collective results display a reliable picture of family homelessness in Illinois.

REGIONAL CONTACTS ON HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING IN ILLINOIS:

Chicago:

The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless 312/435-4548

Statewide

The Statewide Housing Action Coalition (SHAC) 312/939-6074

Matthew Hanafee, The Illinois Coalition to End Homelessness 847/742-4227

Suburban Cook County

Lynda Schueler, West Suburban PADS 708/488-1724

Mike Wasserberg, South Suburban PADS 708/754-4357

Northern Illinois:

Jennifer Jaeger, City of Rockford Human Services 815/987-5782

Jared Pruit, Shelter Care Ministries 815/964-5520

Southern Illinois:

Sharon Hess, Southern Illinois Coalition for the Homeless 618/993-0094

CENTRAL ILLINOIS

Cathy Curran, Helping Hands of Springfield 217/522-0048

AGENCIES SURVEYED:

PARTICIPATING AGENCIES AND COUNTIES OUTSIDE THE CITY OF CHICAGO:

AGENCY:

COUNTY:

BCMW	Centralia--Marion, Washington
Center for Women in Transition	Champaign
West Suburban PADS	Cook
South Suburban PADS	Cook
Du Page PADS	Du Page
Hesed House	Kane
Catholic Charities	Kankakee
Staben House	Lake
Provena St. Therese	Lake
Waukegan Housing Authority	Lake
Home of the Sparrow	McHenry, Cook
Catholic Charities	Northwest Cook
SWAN	Richland
Anna Bixby Women's Center	Saline County
Holy Angels	St. Clair County
Southern Illinois Coalition for the Homeless	Williamson
City of Rockford Human Services	Winnebago

PARTICIPATING AGENCIES IN THE CITY OF CHICAGO:

AGENCY:

Pro-Center
Christ is Victory Emergency Response Center
Roseland Christian Ministries
D.M.T.C.
Operation Rescue NOW
Inner Voice Inc. TIB House
God's Helping Hands
Cornerstone Community Outreach

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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**THIS SURVEY IS A PROJECT OF THE
IT TAKES A HOME TO RAISE A CHILD STATEWIDE HOUSING CAMPAIGN**
