

The Hidden Homeless:

Early Childhood Homelessness in Tarrant County

COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO HOMELESSNESS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD ALLIANCE

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“We see you.
We are going to help.”



SECTION 1

Executive Summary

Tarrant County has devoted significant attention and resources to addressing the needs of the homeless in the last decade, but the challenge remains severe in one particular area: early childhood homelessness.

Children are the hidden homeless. We do not see them camping under bridges, so we assume they do not exist. In fact, these children are living in a shadow world of insecurity and stress. They sleep in the back seats of cars, or piled four or five to a bed in a run-down motel, or on the floor of a relative's home.

Their moms are desperate to keep them safe and united as a family. They call on every friend and family member they know for help. They fear shelters are unsafe for their kids, but sometimes they have nowhere else to go. The reality is that few emergency shelter beds are even available for women and children, and those shelters that do allow kids put restrictions on families. Some shelters only accept mothers with sons under eight or twelve years old, or limit the number of children. Many mothers report they would rather sleep in their cars than separate their families.

Tarrant County social service providers and representatives of education, government, and healthcare agencies came together to better understand the challenge of early childhood homelessness and to develop recommendations to better serve this vulnerable population. They formed the Community Response to Homelessness in Early Childhood Alliance (CRHEC) in March 2016.

Their message to homeless children is this: We see you. We are going to help.

How many young children experience homelessness in Tarrant County?

Our committee's findings indicate that there are currently 14,981 homeless children living in Tarrant County. This is a shocking number—enough to fill 27 of FWISD's elementary schools to capacity. This number is far higher than the number of homeless children recorded by the Tarrant County Homeless Coalition, which was 282 in 2018. Like many agencies that serve the homeless, the Coalition only counts children living in shelters or who are found in camps.

This is an unrealistic view of childhood homelessness. Children sleeping in cars or staying in homes not owned or rented by their own family are in uncertain and often dangerous situations. Their living arrangements are often overcrowded or substandard; children sleep on porches, in garages, on bathroom floors, or in beds with five or six other kids. Adult supervision may be inappropriate or nonexistent; the risk of neglect and abuse soars.

Research shows the effect of this living arrangement is the same as other kinds of homelessness and may in some cases be worse. These children endure chronic stress and uncertainty; many witness violence or are the victims of abuse. The effects on the brains of developing children are long-lasting, creating problems at home and at school. All forms of

childhood homelessness can result in post-traumatic stress disorder and substance abuse in the teen years. A devastating cycle emerges: experiencing homelessness as a child is strongly associated with becoming homeless as an adult.

The CRHEC believes we must count ALL homeless children to truly understand the scope of the challenge. We must better serve those in shelters, but we must also seek out the hidden homeless and help them access services that will help them achieve stability and security.

“We must count all homeless children to truly understand...”

What causes homelessness in families with young children?

Poverty is the largest contributing factor to homelessness. Single mothers head most families that experience homelessness, and poverty hits children especially hard. Just under 20 percent of children (14.5 million kids) live in poverty in the United States.¹ Tarrant County had 113,084 children living in poverty in 2014.² This number represents 22.1 percent of children in the county, a rate higher than the national average.

The lack of affordable housing also contributes to homelessness. More than 45.9 percent of Tarrant County renters spend more than 30 percent of their monthly income on housing, and 22.7 percent spend more than 50 percent of their monthly income.³ With so much of their income going toward rent, any unexpected cost such as a medical bill or a flat tire can push a family straight to the streets.

A shortage of affordable child care also contributes to homelessness. The cost of full-time child care in a center for an infant is \$8,500—as much as full-time tuition at a state university.

¹ National Center for Children in Poverty. "Child Poverty." NCCP | Measuring Poverty in the United States, Columbia University, www.nccp.org/topics/childpoverty.html.

² Smith, Diane. "Tarrant County's Most Vulnerable Children Highlighted in New Report." *Star-Telegram*, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 30 Mar. 2016, www.star-telegram.com/news/local/community/fort-worth/article69049887.html.

³ BBC Research & Consulting. *Housing Needs Assessment*. Arlington Housing Authority, 2005, *Housing Needs Assessment*, www.arlington-tx.gov/cdp-housing/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2014/10/Housing-Needs-Analysis.pdf.

Government programs exist to help low-income families pay for child care, yet the majority of eligible children do not receive these services. In Tarrant County, there are 22,000 more low income children than subsidized child care seats.⁴

Lack of transportation is another challenge, particularly in car-friendly Tarrant County. It can take hours to travel from residential areas of the city to employment areas by bus—and residents outside of Fort Worth do not even have that option.

The CRHEC conducted focus groups with mothers of homeless children, and the mothers agreed with research findings about the causes and contributing factors to homelessness. They emphasized the need for child care, both long-term, quality, affordable care and care within homeless shelters that would allow them to look for work and attend job training courses. Not surprisingly, service providers for the homeless also identified child care as the top need for homeless families.

Recommendations

CRHEC proposes a pilot program designed to remove the systemic barriers to help families with young children escape homelessness. The program will provide comprehensive services to support families moving toward sustainable, independent living while helping providers learn the most effective ways to create a path out of homelessness.

The program will integrate services targeting housing, child care, employment, and transportation needs. Families will be placed into housing, provided rental assistance, offered job training and employment. Interventions will be provided for children with developmental delays or mental health concerns. The program is currently in the planning phase.

Other recommendations were developed by the CRHEC to improve the community systems intended to support these families including housing, child care, employment supports and transportation. Homeless service system changes are also recommended, including working within the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidelines to more accurately count homeless children and families, increasing funds to be used for eviction prevention, and improving tracking for families experiencing homelessness so they are able to access appropriate services.

Protecting Tarrant County's children

Homeless children experience the world as a dangerous and uncertain place—a place where adults are always fearful, where no shelter is reliable, where danger is ever-present.

As a community, we can show these children a world of safety and security. We can give their parents dignity. We can help them stay together as a family.

Early childhood homelessness is not an insurmountable problem if our community demonstrates the courage to face the reality of the problem and takes actual concrete steps toward resolving it.

⁴ Children at Risk. *Access to Quality Child Care in Fort Worth, Tx*. Children at Risk, 2017, *Access to Quality Child Care in Fort Worth, Tx*, childrenatrisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/CHILDREN-AT-RISK-Child-Care-Access-Presentation_Fort-Worth-9.26.17.pdf.

SECTION 2

Understanding the Problem of Early Childhood Homelessness in Tarrant County

Introduction

Despite the nation-wide rise in family homelessness, a widespread myth still prevails: that all people who are homeless are single adults, primarily men, with obvious symptoms of severe mental illness and substance abuse disorders.

The fact is that among those who spend time in shelters, the most frequent age is the first year of life, followed by the ages of two to five years old.⁵ Coupling this fact with the reality that 75 to 80 percent of children who experience homelessness never enter the shelter system, but instead sleep in cars, motels and the homes of other people, it is clear that our common understanding of homelessness is inaccurate.

“**75-80% of children who experience homelessness never enter the shelter system.**”

Most concerning is that misinformation about homelessness directs limited resources to only the most visible and demanding portion of the population. This has devastating long-term consequences for children and our community.

While important initiatives are currently addressing childhood literacy such as Read Fort Worth, and access to quality early childhood education,

such as Early Learning Alliance, it is critical that **we address the needs of children with the highest level of vulnerability: young children who experience homelessness.** Without both acknowledgment and corresponding action, we are jeopardizing the success of these initiatives and are all but certain to create a lifetime of difficulty for these children at a high cost to the community.

Community Response to Homelessness in Early Childhood Alliance

To better understand the scope of the problem, raise awareness and develop a platform for action, 39 nonprofit agencies and government entities in Tarrant County formed the Community Response to Homelessness in Early Childhood (CRHEC) Alliance in March 2016.

Co-chaired by Center for Transforming Lives CEO Carol Klocek and community leader Elaine Klos, the alliance intentionally focused on the perspective of the youngest children because of their level of vulnerability and their unique situation of homelessness in the early years. This point of view allowed for an effective study of the issues of homeless families and developed both policy and practice recommendations and a pilot program designed to help end homelessness in families in Tarrant County. The Alliance sought to define the extent

⁵ Gubits, D., Shinn M., Bell S., Wood M., Dstrup S., Solari, C...Abt. Associates, Inc. (2015, July). Family options study: Short-term impacts of housing and services interventions for homeless families. Washington, D.C.: Prepared for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research by Abt. Associates and Vanderbilt University.

of the problem of young children experiencing homelessness in Tarrant County and make recommendations to improve the situation.

Realizing that this population was under-accounted for, a steering committee focused initial meetings on reviewing the literature nationally and locally to determine the extent of the problem. In addition, the committee conducted listening sessions for providers and focus groups for families living in homelessness. Once the Alliance determined the extent of the problem, as well as the specific needs of this population, the committee began investigating potential solutions.

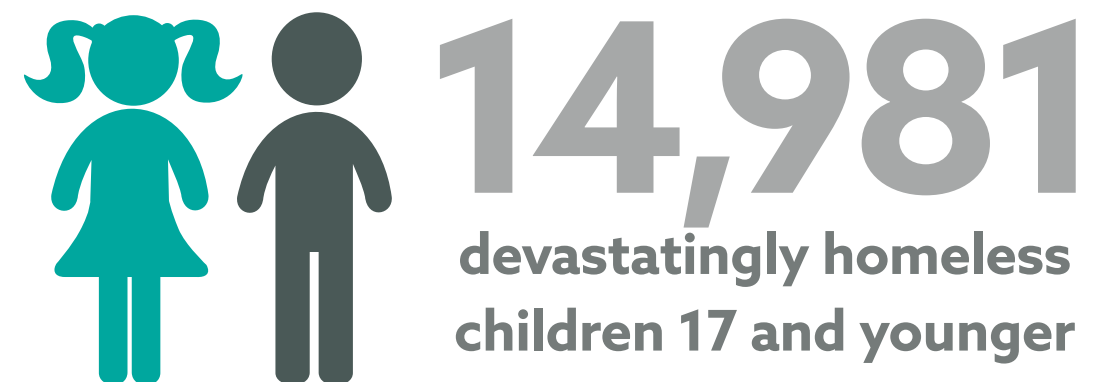
Three additional committees were formed based on the results of the listening sessions and focus groups. These committees included 1) Child Care; 2) Housing; and 3) Employment and Job Training. The committees were chaired by individuals on the steering committee and additional representatives were included. Each committee studied the issues for eight (8) months. As a result, a collaborative pilot project was recommended that coordinates all three focus areas. In addition to the pilot project recommendation, policy and practice recommendations were developed.

The Alliance began by researching the number of children under age six who are experiencing homelessness in the county. **The Alliance found that between 7,400 and 7,500 young children in Tarrant County are devastatingly homeless.** They lack even a basic sense of security. Their fundamental needs are not met, burdening them with the sort of unrelenting anxiety that can cause long-term developmental delays, lasting emotional harm and hinder proper growth.

The Alliance then conducted a series of focus groups and individual interviews to better understand what is causing homelessness and how agencies can better serve families in crisis. Focus groups were comprised of both parents experiencing homelessness and service providers.

The Alliance expected at least some divergence between the concerns expressed by individuals and providers, but the two groups agreed on all major points. **The most important needs identified by both groups were child care, job training, and housing.** Both groups also noted that lack of transportation creates a barrier for meeting the other three needs. Critically, none of these factors can be treated in isolation. If any one of these needs is left unmet, a family finds breaking out of homelessness painfully difficult, if not virtually impossible.

Summaries of the focus group findings are presented in the following section.



How many children in Tarrant County are homeless?

Of the roughly two million people living in Tarrant County in 2016, approximately 540,000 were children.⁶ Of that total, 170,636 were children under the age of six.^{7,8} The Tarrant County Homeless Coalition reported just 282 homeless children under age eighteen in 2018⁹. The (CHREC) Alliance, however, found that **14,981 children under the age of eighteen experience homelessness each year in Tarrant County**. Of these, 7,400 are under the age of six.

How the CRHEC Alliance determined the number of homeless children in Tarrant County

The effort was intentionally focused on the perspective of the child, and so the CRHEC relied upon methodology established by a federal agency entitled The Administration for Children and Families. The CHREC began by determining the total number of children in Tarrant County, which according to 2015 Census data was 533,292.⁶ Research by the National Center on Family Homelessness has found that one in 37 children in Texas is homeless¹⁰; applying that percentage to the total of Tarrant County children gives a number of approximately 14,500 homeless children. Additional research by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) finds that about 51 percent of the total number of homeless children is under age six. That results in a final count of roughly 7,400 children under the age of six who experience homelessness each year in Tarrant County.

This number was validated by examining data from Tarrant County school districts, which document the number of homeless children in school every year. The number of children identified as homeless by Tarrant County schools in the 2014-15 school year was 7,548.¹¹ Since few children under age six attend school, they are not included in this number. However, we can again turn to the HUD research that reports 51 percent of all homeless children are under the age of six and 49 percent are above the age of six¹¹. Therefore, we assume that if approximately 7,400 students of school age are homeless in the county, then approximately 7,400 children under age six are experiencing homelessness each year. This totals to approximately 15,000 children under eighteen experiencing homelessness, which correlates with figures the CHREC derived from different sources. **The CHREC Alliance states with confidence that between 7,400 and 7,500 children under age six are homeless in Tarrant County.**

This analysis simply captures a more comprehensive view of homelessness experienced by children in order to understand the impact on young children and on the community. Therefore, a more accurate representation captures the true scope of homelessness among Tarrant County youth and changes the count of homeless children—by an alarming amount.

⁶ "Tarrant County, Texas." U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts, U.S. Department of Commerce, www.census.gov/quickfacts/

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau (2017). *American Fact Finder: Tarrant County Texas*

⁸ North Texas Community Foundation (2017). *Growing Up in North Texas 2016: A Community Assessment for Tarrant County*.

⁹ North Texas Community Foundation (2017). *2017 Community Briefing on Homelessness Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.ahomewithhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2017-Community-Briefing-on-Homelessness-Report-4.10.17.pdf>

¹⁰ Ellen L. Bassuk, C. J. (2014). *America's Youngest Outcasts: A Report Card on Child Homelessness*. The National Center on Family Homelessness and the American Institutes for Research.

¹¹ "2017 Community Briefing on Homelessness Report." *A Home with a Hope*, Tarrant County Homeless Coalition, 2017, www.ahomewithhope.org/wp-content/uploads/2017-Community-Briefing-on-Homelessness-Report-4.10.17.pdf.



“14,981 children under the age of eighteen experience homelessness each year in Tarrant County.”

Problem of the definition: Who are we looking for?

Homeless advocates have debated for years about how to define, measure and report homelessness, in particular for families and youth. There are a number of federal definitions of homelessness, depending upon the intent of funding, by which youth are determined eligible for services. For example, the Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Agriculture (USDA) relies upon Section 725 of Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney Vento Act in order to ensure adequate access to education and nutrition services. Runaway and homeless youth funding relies upon Section 387 of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, which emphasizes safe living environments for youth. HUD funded homeless assistance programs rely upon Section 103 of Subtitle 1 of the McKinney Vento Act, which was updated through the HEARTH Act in 2009 and then updated again with very specific regulations in December 2011. Within these latest regulations, homelessness for families is defined in four different ways, which provides a means to prioritize who is eligible for which services and how quickly they are able to access them. The four categories are: (1) families who lack a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence, including those living in a shelter or place not meant for human habitation; (2) families who will imminently lose their primary nighttime residence; (3) families with children who are defined as homeless under other federal statutes; and (4) families who are fleeing family violence. A chart with a complete overview of the definitions is found in the appendix¹².

This lack of consistency in defining homelessness is problematic for families and children, resulting in communities that are ill-equipped with limited and inadequate resources to meet the needs of their most vulnerable population.

¹² "Definitions of Homelessness for Federal Program Serving Children, Youth, and Families." ACF, Administration for Children and Families, www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ecd/homelessness_definition.pdf.

Which homeless child counts as homeless?

The annual Point-In-Time Count in Tarrant County uses two of the four definitions of family homelessness from the HEARTH Act in order to count and report on child and family homelessness. These counted families are those accompanied by children and living in shelters, with some living in camps or under bridges where people who are homeless congregate. The annual count, required by HUD, is completed each year in January in those communities that receive HUD funding. The rationale for the methodology, developed when the population was primarily single adult males, is that normal January temperatures will drive more individuals who are homeless to seek shelter or congregant situations such as camps in order to stay warm. This makes them easier to count. These numbers are reported to HUD for planning purposes and for evaluation of a community's performance on specific measures. At the completion of this count, these numbers are reported to the public at large as those living in homelessness.



However, in Texas an average of only 15 percent of homeless children live in shelters; the rest are the **hidden homeless** with only an unsafe and unpredictable roof over their heads¹³. The reality for these families is that many are sleeping in cars, parks, garages, storage units, motels, or temporarily with friends, family members or even with strangers. Unless the family is sleeping in a car in an area near where other homeless people are congregating, they will not be identified as homeless in the official Point-In-Time count. This causes a significant discrepancy between the 'official' count and the actual count—a perception far from reality.

This approach contributes to the misperception that these "hidden" children

are not 'literally homeless,' and are therefore not in need of assistance from homeless service providers. Clearly, these situations do not indicate that their housing situation is safe, stable or secure. It also does not mean that they are not homeless. According to the HEARTH Act definition, they are homeless. A closer look here reveals the deep challenges and safety concerns facing these families who are the hidden homeless.

¹³ Data: Texas Archives." *Texas Homeless Education Office*, The University of Texas at Austin, www.theotx.org/resource_type/data-texas/.

Life for the Hidden Homeless: A State of Constant Disruption

Nationally, and in Tarrant County, 75 percent to 80 percent of homeless children never receive services from homeless service providers.¹⁴ Instead, mothers who become homeless make enormous efforts to find someplace else for their children to sleep. When mothers with young children lose their homes, life is a series of constant disruption, insecurity and painful separation, with worsening instability over time. It is important to understand the realities and living conditions for families as they attempt to get to safety and stability while living without a home. Constant disruption hurts the entire family but is particularly damaging to children, who never know where they will sleep, have many different caregivers, and whose basic needs often go unmet.

Doubled-up housing

After losing their homes, approximately 75 percent of the families turn to friends, family members or others, according to research by the Texas Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program¹⁵. This is commonly known as "doubling-up." Some might view a family who is able to draw upon friends or relatives for housing as not being truly homeless. The perception is that these moms have a support network that those living in shelters or on the street lack. But doubling up with other households is unstable, substandard, and often puts children at higher risk of abuse.

Most mothers double-up only as a last resort. They call on friend after friend until they find someone with an accommodation they perceive to be safe. Often the family with whom they share space is also on the economic edge, and the addition of a second family in crisis can send *both* into a downward spiral. In fact, since most apartment contracts prohibit anyone not named on the lease from living in the residence and/or limit the number of residents, those trying to help out family or friends put themselves at risk of losing their housing.

Status as a doubled-up family may last for weeks or months. Many homeless families must change locations weekly or even daily as they wear out their welcome in one home and search for another. Moving from place to place makes it hard to get to school, and kids might find themselves bouncing between campuses and even districts. Studies have found that children in doubled-up housing earn significantly lower grade-point averages and are less likely to graduate on time than students in permanent housing¹⁶.

“Moms will often stay in personally abusive situations if they fear they have no safer place to take their children.”

Source: The Texas Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program: The Texas Picture, 2014-15 School Data

¹⁴ Hart-Shegos, Ellen. "Homelessness and Its Effects on Children." *Family Housing Fund*, Hart-Shegos and Associate, Dec. 1999, www.fhfund.org/.

¹⁵ The Texas Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program: The Texas Picture, 2014-15 School Data. <http://www.theotx.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Infographic-Annual-Report-2015-16.pdf>

¹⁶ Justin A. Low, R. E. (2016). Doubled-Up Homeless: Comparing Educational Outcomes with Low-Income Students. *Education and Urban Society*. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0013124516659525>

Doubled-up housing is often cramped and even unsafe. Crowded conditions promote the spread of illness. Adult supervision may be inappropriate or nonexistent, resulting in significant neglect. Moms and kids sleep wherever they can—piled five high in a bed, on floors or in garages. These kids struggle with secrecy and shame, are targets for bullying, and face constant anxiety about their living situation¹⁷. Increased isolation may also exacerbate developmental delays¹⁸. Overcrowding raises tension levels among both kids and adults, creating a constant atmosphere of high stress.

The risk of abuse increases for children in doubled-up housing. The risk of sexual abuse also rises since children are staying in tight quarters with non-family adults. Children are reluctant to reveal the abuse because they fear their family might lose their housing. Similarly, moms will often stay in personally abusive situations if they fear they have no safer place to take their children. A survey of unstably housed women who relied on others for housing reported an increase in sexual and physical violence within these chaotic housing situations.¹⁹

Beyond the instability this creates for children, doubling up might even drag a family deeper into financial crisis. Approximately one-third of women in doubled-up housing spent more than 50 percent of their income on housing²⁰. Frequently furniture, household goods and clothing are lost in the move, making starting over in a new home harder to manage.

In short, as former Senior Program Coordinator with the Texas Homeless Education Office, Vicky Dill said frankly, “There is no research evidence that shared living arrangements contribute to well-being.”²⁰ In fact, some advocates claim that homeless children not in shelters face greater challenges than those in shelters because they do not have access to the support services shelters provide. Research shows the effect of these living arrangements is the same as other kinds of homelessness and may in some cases be worse.²¹ The false impression of these families and children as better off may also have devastating long-term consequences because the families never receive the help they need.

Motels

Another more expensive option for families who have lost their homes are inexpensive motels where they can stay for a night or a week at a time. Many turn to them after experiencing an unaffordable hike in rent, conflict with a landlord, or when family is not an option.²² Unlike apartments, motels do not demand hefty utility deposits or ask for the first and last months’ rent up-front.²² But the cost of a motel room for a month at even the most dilapidated units often exceeds rent, and families struggle to get back into housing once they have been forced into living in motels.

¹⁷ Dill, V. (2015). Homeless--And Doubled Up. Educational Leadership. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar15/vol72/num06/Homeless--And-Doubled-Up.aspx>

¹⁸ National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (2015). Fact Sheet: Homeless Children and Early Learning. Retrieved from <http://www.naehcy.org/educational-resources/early-childhood>

¹⁹ Riley, Elise D., et al. “Recent Violence in a Community-Based Sample of Homeless and Unstably Housed Women With High Levels of Psychiatric Comorbidity.” *Advances in Pediatrics*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, Sept. 2014, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4151936/.

²⁰ Dill, V. (2014). The Doubled-Up Life: Impact on the Educational Attainment of Children and Youth. Presentation at the NAEHCY 20147 Annual Conference. Retrieved from <http://www.naehcy.org/sites/default/files/dl/conf-2014/h/c7/dill-doubled.pdf>

²¹ Dill, V. (2015). Homeless--And Doubled Up. Educational Leadership. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/mar15/vol72/num06/Homeless--And-Doubled-Up.aspx>

²² Kaufman-Scarborough, C. (2011). *The Hidden Homeless: Family Homes at the Motel*. Rutgers University School of Business. Retrieved from <https://monarchhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/TheHiddenRiseoftheMotelFamiliesShortVersionCarolKaufmanScarboroughAugust2011.pdf>

Motel rooms are usually cramped, with whole families living in tiny single rooms; multiple children and adults share beds, baby cribs are jammed into closets, and family meals are prepared on hot plates. The risk of crime is constant, and children are exposed to drug abuse, prostitution, and severe mental illness²³. The crowded, noisy conditions make it almost impossible for children to concentrate on homework, and many are sleep-deprived because the noise beyond their door never stops. Nevertheless, the number of homeless families living in motels has risen by 60 percent since the 2006-2007 school year.²⁴

Vehicles

When doubling up or motels are not an option, and if the family owns a vehicle, families will often live in their cars, choosing well-lit parking lots, such as those found at Wal-Mart, Whataburger and QT gas stations. Others may park in the lot of an apartment complex where a friend or relative lives so that they have access to restrooms, showers and a kitchen. One Tarrant County provider noted that of the calls they receive from families living in homelessness, an estimated nine calls each month are from families who are currently living in their cars. Living in a car is the most precarious of the non-shelter options for homeless families, but all of these are harmful to children.

What are the effects of homelessness on children?

The experience of all forms of homelessness disrupts a child’s sense of security, creates delays in social and educational development, and can result in severe trauma that may take years or a lifetime to heal. According to the American Psychological Association, homelessness has particularly adverse effects on children and youth including hunger, poor physical and mental health, and missed educational opportunities²⁵.

Adverse Childhood Experiences, known as ACEs, include the experiencing and witnessing of violence and other forms of abuse, neglect and family dysfunction. Violence and homelessness are a tragic and all-too-common pairing. According to the Service and Housing Interventions for Families in Transition study, more than **92 percent** of homeless mothers have experienced severe physical and/or sexual abuse in their lifetimes; one of four homeless women experiences homelessness because of violence committed against her¹⁰. The children of homeless families witness violence at a horrifying rate. By age twelve, 83 percent of homeless children have been exposed to at least one serious violent event, with almost 25 percent witnessing acts of violence within their families. Children who have witnessed violence are more likely to be violent themselves—they exhibit aggressive behavior, while showing increased fearfulness and higher rates of anxiety and depression²⁶.

²³ Vigeland, T. (2015, August 16). When a budget motel is ‘home,’ there’s little room for childhood. *National Public Radio: Around the Nation*. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/2015/08/16/432472821/when-a-budget-motel-is-home-theres-little-room-for-childhood>

²⁴ Child Trends. (2015, October). *Databank Indicator: Homeless Children and Youth*. Retrieved from https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/112_Homeless_Children_and_Youth.pdf

²⁵ Effects of Poverty, Hunger and Homelessness on Children and Youth.” *Monitor on Psychology*, American Psychological Association, www.apa.org/pi/families/poverty.aspx.

²⁶ Green Doors (2017). *Family Homelessness Facts*. Retrieved from <http://www.greendoors.org/facts/family-homelessness.php>

Story of one mother with an 18-month old:

“When I became homeless with my young son, the shelter only had room for me, so I had to find someone to take him. My father said yes – so he was there for a while, but then he changed his mind. My mother took him next but then she called my job every day with some problem and finally said to come and take him. We were in the car for a few days and then my aunt said she’d take him. I lost my job. You can’t bring a baby to work, you know?”

Other traumas secondary to homelessness are physical and sexual abuse, as well as neglect and family separation. Exposure to trauma associated with homelessness can cause a number of psychosocial difficulties for children both emotionally, including depression, anxiety, and withdrawal, and behaviorally in terms of aggression and other forms of acting out.²⁶ Half of school age homeless children experience problems with depression and anxiety and one in five homeless preschoolers have emotional problems that require professional intervention, according to research published by the American Psychological Association²⁷. Further, growing up in unstable circumstances with a mother under extreme stress leads to a sense that the world is a threatening place. This sort of childhood experience is associated with challenges during teen years, including mental health problems and substance abuse, according to the same study. Homeless youth are often more likely to grapple with mental health disorders including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse disorders.

Twenty-two percent of homeless children have been separated from their families in connection with homelessness.²⁵ Young children understand this separation from a parent as abandonment, even when a mother places a child with a friend or relative in order to keep them out of a shelter environment. Sadly, this separation from a parent may result in the unintended consequence of abuse or neglect.

Even when violence or abuse is not a factor, homelessness is linked to poor physical health for children, including low birth weight, malnutrition, ear infections, exposure to environmental toxins and chronic illness such as asthma.²⁴ Homeless children also are less likely to have adequate access to medical and dental care, which makes disease harder to control and therefore increases the reliance on emergency care.²⁴

²⁷ American Psychological Association (2017). *Effects of Poverty, Hunger and Homelessness on Children and Youth*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/poverty.aspx>

Since 2008, according to the Department of Education, the number of homeless students identified each year by the public-school system has increased by 90 percent²⁸. Homeless children lack stability in their lives with 97 percent having moved at least once on an annual basis, which leads to disruptions in schooling and negatively impacts academic achievement.²⁹ Children are more likely to be diagnosed with learning disabilities, exhibit poor classroom engagement and poor social skills in early elementary school, and are more than twice as likely to repeat a grade, be expelled or suspended, or drop out of high school^{24,26}. A steady increase in the homeless population will place greater demands on the school system to meet their needs.

Current research on brain development supports the idea that homelessness shapes the long-term development of children and can have effects well into adulthood³⁰. Negative impacts are frequently described as “toxic,” and recent science reveals the sad accuracy of this metaphor.³¹ Extreme stress causes actual damage to developing brains by interrupting the neural pathway development necessary for a child’s mastery of age-appropriate skills. Considering that 90 percent of the brain’s capacity develops before the age of five³¹, the impact on the brain of experiencing homelessness as a young child can be life-long.



“...the impact on the brain of experiencing homelessness as a young child can be life-long...”

Homelessness and hunger are closely intertwined. Homeless children are twice as likely to experience hunger as their non-homeless peers, further contributing to health conditions caused by a lack of adequate nutrition.²⁵ Hunger has negative effects on the physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of children.²⁵

Because of these conditions and others, experiencing homelessness as a child is one factor in experiencing it again as an adult³⁰. Breaking the cycle of poverty, stress, and homelessness is critical to reducing suffering for generations to come.

²⁸ *Identifying and Supporting Students Experiencing Homelessness from Pre-School to Post-Secondary Ages* | U.S. Department of Education. US Department of Education (ED), 25 May 2016, www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/supporting-homeless-students/index.html.

²⁹ “How Homelessness and Domestic and Sexual Violence Impact Children and Youth.” *Doorways for Women and Families*, www.doorwaysva.org/our-work/education-advocacy/impact-on-children-and-youth/.

³⁰ Perry Firth (2014, September). *Homelessness, Poverty and the Brain: Mapping the Effects of Toxic Stress on Children*. Retrieved from <http://firesteelwa.org/2014/09/homelessness-poverty-and-the-brain-mapping-the-effects-of-toxic-stress-on-children/>

³¹ Holt, Lynne. “The Case for an Integrated Approach to Early Childhood Development.” *Bob Graham Center*, 20 Mar. 2017, [www.bobgrahamcenter.ufl.edu/sites/default/files/Final The Case for an Integrated Approach to Early Childhood Development March 20.pdf](http://www.bobgrahamcenter.ufl.edu/sites/default/files/Final%20The%20Case%20for%20an%20Integrated%20Approach%20to%20Early%20Childhood%20Development%20March%2020.pdf).

Causes of Homelessness

Families Living in Poverty

The Tarrant County Homeless Coalition states the matter succinctly: “Homelessness is a symptom of poverty.”³² It is important to note however, that poverty strikes different demographic groups at different rates. and women, especially women with young children, are more vulnerable to poverty. Nationally, more women than men live in poverty (14.8 percent versus 12.2 percent), and more single-parent families live in poverty than married couples (28.2 percent versus 5.4 percent.)³² Rates of poverty are highest among African-Americans (24.1 percent), followed by Hispanics of any race (21.4 percent). Caucasians have a poverty rate of nine percent.³²

Poverty hits children particularly hard. Just under 20 percent of children (14.5 million kids) live in poverty. Tarrant County had 113,084 children living in poverty in 2014—22.1 percent of children in the county, a rate higher than the national average³³. At least eleven percent of American children living in poverty are homeless.²⁵

It is discouraging to realize that living above the federal poverty threshold does not guarantee a family will not become homeless. The poverty threshold does not include expenses such as child care and health insurance³⁴. A more realistic measure is the “living wage,” which determines the minimum expenses needed to maintain a family’s basic needs while maintaining self-sufficiency.³⁴ As shown in Table 1, a living wage necessary to meet typical Tarrant County expenses is more than double the poverty level income.

Typical Expenses for Tarrant County - Table 1		
Annual Expenses	2 Working Adults and 2 Children	1 Working Adult and 2 Children
Housing and utilities	\$11,256	\$11,256
Child care*	\$10,015	\$10,015
Food	\$9,384	\$7,010
Medical	\$8,989	\$6,032
Transportation	\$7,301	\$5,756
Other	\$9,969	\$8,823
Taxes	\$5,179	\$5,591
Total (Living Wage)	\$62,094	\$54,482
Federal Poverty Line	\$24,600	\$20,420
Difference	\$37,494	\$34,062

Source: Economic Policy Institute Family Budget Calculator

* The Institute averaged the cost of care in a center with home-based care, which costs less. Care for infants and care in centers is more expensive, sometimes significantly so. Remember the cost for an infant and a child in a center in Tarrant County is \$17,020, which would add about \$7,000 to a family’s budget.

³² Tarrant County Homeless Coalition (2016). 2016 State of the Homeless Report. Retrieved from <http://ahomewithhope.org/tchc-services/tchc-initiatives/homelessnesscount/state-of-the-homeless-address/>

³³ North Texas Community Foundation (2017). Growing Up in North Texas 2016: A Community Assessment for Tarrant County.

³⁴ Glasmeier, A. K. (2017). Living Wage Calculator: Background. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Retrieved from <http://livingwage.mit.edu/pages/about>

The following example provides some insight into the difference between the poverty threshold and the living wage. The poverty line for a family of four (two working adults and two children) is \$24,600; that equates to a full-time hourly pay rate of about \$5.90 (assuming a 40-hour work week for 52 weeks).³⁵ While the state minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour, that salary would not be enough to actually pay for housing, child care, and other basic expenses in Tarrant County. In fact, with two wage earners in a household, a living wage would need to be a minimum of \$14.92 an hour, or nearly twice the minimum wage.

The reality is however, that children who are homeless are most often in families headed by single mothers.²⁵ Nationally, women head approximately 85 percent of homeless families. Female-headed households, particularly those led by women with limited education and job skills, are vulnerable to homelessness. The current economic climate has made the labor market even less hospitable as many of them do not have more than a high school diploma or GED²⁵. A single adult with two children must earn \$26.19 an hour to cover basic expenses, or \$54,475 per year. The average wage for a woman in Tarrant County is well below that at \$44,197³⁶.



The challenges of single parenting

Single parents – single mothers in particular – are more likely to face the challenges that lead to homelessness.

The most significant statistic here is that the poverty rate for single-mother families in 2013 was 39.6 percent, nearly five times higher than the 7.6 percent rate for married-couple families.

The result? The majority of homeless families—about 85 percent—in the U.S. are headed by a single mother.

Women are also more vulnerable to homelessness because of intimate partner violence. Domestic violence is the third leading cause of homelessness among families nationwide, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.⁵

³⁵ Federal Poverty Level (FPL) - HealthCare.gov Glossary. Retrieved from <https://www.healthcare.gov/glossary/federal-poverty-level-fpl/>

³⁶ "Tarrant County, TX." Data USA, datausa.io/profile/geo/tarrant-county-tx/.

Lack of affordable housing

One of the factors driving up the living wage, and therefore the experience of family homelessness, is the scarcity of affordable housing in Tarrant County. This problem extends nationwide, as only 35 affordable homes are available for every 100 extremely low-income (ELI) renter households.³⁷ ELI households are defined as those whose income is no greater than 30 percent of the area median income, which is \$61,553 in Tarrant County.³⁸ However, the Dallas/Fort Worth area tied for fourth place among U.S. urban areas that offer the fewest number of low-income housing units.³⁷ In our region, only 19 units are available per 100 extremely low-income renter households³⁷.

Housing is defined as “affordable” when rent and utilities cost no more than 30 percent of the household income.³⁹ This is becoming increasingly difficult for families as rents have risen steadily across Tarrant County. Over the last six years, average rents have increased by \$175 in Arlington and \$200 in Fort Worth—an average of more than 20 percent for the entire county⁴⁰. As a result, 45.9 percent of Tarrant County renters pay more than 30 percent of their monthly income on housing, and alarmingly, 22.7 percent pay more than 50 percent of their monthly income³⁹.

Spending this much income on rent is financially dangerous for families, who then have little left for other necessities. If a family earning at the poverty threshold of \$24,600 (or \$2050/month) pays 50 percent of their income on rent, they will be left with only \$1025/month for food, child care, health costs, transportation, and utilities. For example, the U.S. Department of Agriculture found that a thrifty budget for food for a family of four is \$655 per month.⁴¹ That leaves only \$370 monthly for every other expense. This is not nearly enough, and it is not sustainable. Child care would be impossible to afford, and a single disruption such as a flat tire, or an infection that requires a clinic visit and an antibiotic prescription could cost a family their home.



“Spending this much income on rent is financially dangerous for families, who then have little left for other necessities.”

³⁷ Aurand, A. (2017). *GAP: A Shortage of Affordable Homes*. National Low Income Housing Coalition. Retrieved from http://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Gap-Report_2017_interactive.pdf

³⁸ “Tarrant County Profile.” *The County Information Program*, The County Information Program, Texas Association of Counties, www.txcip.org/tac/census/profile.php?FIPS=48439.

³⁹ Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University (2017). *The State of the Nation's Housing 2017*. Retrieved from http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/research/state_nations_housing

⁴⁰ Rent Jungle (2017). *Average Rent Trends and Market Strength by City*. Retrieved from <https://www.rentjungle.com/rentdata/>

⁴¹ “USDA Food Plans: Cost of Food.” *Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion*, United States Department of Agriculture, www.cnpp.usda.gov/USDAFoodPlansCostofFood.



Families seeking help through public and subsidized housing programs face long wait times and limited options. One housing advocate put it bluntly, “Federal rental assistance programs are not funded adequately to serve all, or even most, eligible households.”⁴² Need outstrips resources so greatly that many housing authorities maintain years-long waiting lists and no longer accept new applicants. **The Tarrant County Housing Assistance Office opened its wait list in March 2017 and received more than 14,900 applications in only two and a half days.⁴³ The backlog is so long that Tarrant County does not expect to take new applications for at least seven years⁴³.**

Nationally, the number of available units and vouchers has declined even as need has grown. The number of public housing units has fallen by more than 250,000 since the mid-1990s⁴⁴. Funding for vouchers and other federal programs is \$2.1 billion (4.6 percent) below the 2010 level (adjusted for inflation). As a result, only about 25 percent of eligible renters receive federal assistance.⁴⁴

⁴² Leopold, J. (2012, July). The Housing Needs of Rental Assistance Applicants. *Cityscape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research*, 14(2). Retrieved from https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/cityscpe/vol14num2/Cityscape_July2012_housing_needs.pdf

⁴³ Tarrant County (2017). *Housing Assistance Office: Wait List Information*. Retrieved from <http://access.tarrantcounty.com/en/housing-assistance-office/apply-for-housing/waiting-list-information.html>

⁴⁴ Douglas Rice (2016, April 12). *Chart Book: Cuts in Federal Assistance Have Exacerbated Families' Struggles to Afford Housing*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/chart-book-cuts-in-federal-assistance-have-exacerbated-families-struggles-to-afford>

Local Realities that Make Getting Out of Homelessness More Difficult

Shortage of affordable child care

Families with young children in extreme poverty face impossible choices. In order to support themselves, they must have access to child care, but the cost is so prohibitively high, that there are inadequate resources left to pay for rent, food, or other necessities.

“If kids aren’t in school, mom can’t do anything.”

— Provider of services to homeless families, CHREC Listening Session

The cost of child care has ballooned in recent years, even as salaries have stagnated. The annual average cost of care in a center for an infant in Tarrant County is \$8,500; an amount equivalent to full-time tuition at a state university.⁴⁵ Families with two preschool aged children must pay \$17,020 a year for care. Single parents in Texas pay an average of 39 percent of their income to ensure child care for just one infant.

Furthermore, many providers offer limited schedules that fail to match the reality of low-income American’s jobs.⁴⁶ Few providers offer care that accommodates overnight or weekend shifts. With limited options available, most low-income parents rely on family, friends or neighbors—people who may or may not be suitable caregivers, and who are unlikely to be able to provide a rich early childhood education.

Government programs exist to help low-income families pay for child care, but they fail to serve many families who could benefit from them. In Tarrant County, mothers can receive child care subsidies through Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County under the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant.⁴⁷ They can also enroll children in free Early Head Start (for children 0 to three years old) and Head Start (age three to five) programs. These programs provide an enormous service for those mothers able to access them, yet the majority of eligible children do not receive these services. Of the 113,084 children living in poverty in Tarrant County, only 10,510 children received subsidized care in Tarrant County in 2014-15.⁴⁷ Only 2,440 enrolled in Head Start⁴⁸ and 192 enrolled in Early Head Start⁴⁸. According to a 2017 report by Children at Risk, there are 22,000 more low-income children than subsidized child-care seats.⁴⁷ This means that 79 percent lack access and mothers may wait months, or even years, to enroll their children.

⁴⁵ Childcare Aware of America (2017). *What is the cost Child Care in your state: Texas*. Retrieved from <http://usa.childcareaware.org/advocacy-public-policy/resources/research/costofcare/>

⁴⁶ Jones, G. (2017, June 2). Homelessness, child care and the link to self-sufficiency. *Street Sheet: A Publication of the Coalition on Homelessness*. Retrieved from <http://www.streetsheet.org/?p=3449>

⁴⁷ Kids Count Data Center (2017). *Children (0-12 years) receiving subsidized child care*. Retrieved from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/3072-children-0-12-years-receiving-subsidized-child>

⁴⁸ Kids Count Data Center (2017). *Early Head Start Enrollment (ages 0-3)*. Retrieved from <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/7888-early-head-start-enrollment-ages-0-3?loc=45&loc=5#detailed/5/6734/false/1484,1457,1228,1070,1022/any/15214>

Experts have found that lack of information and misinformation about these programs limits access by homeless parents, and that many mothers are deterred by the complexity of the application process⁴⁹. Statewide, few homeless children participate in early learning programs, meaning that the vast majority (89 percent) are left unserved⁵⁰.

Large portions of Tarrant County are classified by the Center for American Progress as “child care deserts”—that is, more than three times as many children live in the area as there are licensed child care slots available.

Another challenge is the lack of licensed child care in the county. Large portions of Tarrant County are classified by the Center for American Progress as “child-care deserts, defined as more than three times as many children living in the area as there are licensed child-care slots available⁵¹. For example, one census tract in east Fort Worth has one licensed child-care provider with the capacity to care for three children total (this is most likely a licensed home-care provider); the area has a population of 289 children under the age of five. Another census tract, in the southwest section of the county, has a population of 436 children under age five and zero licensed providers. Yet nearly 70 percent of mothers in this area participate in the workforce.⁵² Care for these children is often provided by family, friends and neighbors, some of whom are not appropriate care providers, but are the only option desperate families can afford.

Lack of transportation

Surviving without a car in Tarrant County is incredibly difficult. In our sprawling region, access to jobs, child care, healthcare, and groceries is almost impossible without a reliable vehicle.

Public transportation in the region is extremely limited. Of the 41 cities within Tarrant County, only three offer any transit services⁵³, with the largest transit network provided by the Fort Worth Transportation Authority. Using buses to move around the city is difficult and frustrating. Buses travel slowly and routes tend to converge downtown. Instead of going directly from their home to their workplaces, passengers must travel downtown, wait for another bus, and then ride to their final destination. It takes about two hours to get from the low-income housing areas in west Fort Worth around Cherry Lane to Alliance Airport, a major employment area.

⁴⁹ Institute for Children, Poverty and Homelessness. (2014). *Meeting the Child Care Needs of Homeless Families: How Do States Stack Up?* Retrieved from http://www.icphusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ICPH_policyreport_MeetingtheChildCareNeedssofHomelessFamilies.pdf

⁵⁰ “Early Childhood Homelessness in the United States: 50-State Profile.” ACF, Administration for Children and Families, Jan. 2016, www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ecd/homelessness_profile_package_with_blanks_for_printing_508.pdf.

⁵¹ Hamm, R. M. (2017). *Mapping America’s Child Care Deserts*. Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2017/08/30/437988/mapping-americas-child-care-deserts/>

⁵² Table 5. Employment Status of the Population by Sex, Marital Status, and Presence and Age of Own Children under 18, 2016-2017 Annual Averages.” U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 19 Apr. 2018, www.bls.gov/news.release/famee.t05.htm.

⁵³ North Central Texas Council of Governments (2014). *Tarrant County Transportation Needs Assessment*. Retrieved from <http://www.arlington-tx.gov/tac/wp-content/uploads/sites/65/2016/10/Tarrant-County-Transportation-Needs-Assessment-2014.pdf>

The vast majority, 93 percent, of Tarrant County workers either drives or carpools to work.⁵⁴ The Economic Policy Institute estimates that a family of four in Tarrant County must spend an average of \$608 a month to own and operate a car for work and other necessary trips.⁵⁵ This represents a disproportionately large portion of a family's income⁵⁵.

Social service agencies and some Tarrant County cities provide transportation services for senior citizens, people with disabilities and those needing medical care. Other services are available for low-income individuals. Catholic Charities, for example, offers a transportation service for trips within Tarrant County that fall outside of the Fort Worth Transit Authority's service area or service hours. However, this patchwork of services is virtually impossible to navigate for families in crisis.

Lack of shelters for families

Despite the significant number of homeless families with young children in Tarrant County, the problem remains largely invisible to the public and even to the providers of homeless services themselves. One of the main reasons for this is that families are rarely able to access shelters, even when they decide to request assistance.

“My hope is a house and a reliable vehicle. I am stressed about my new baby, and all I have are a few diapers and a blanket.”

— Parent of young homeless children, CHREC Listening Session

Providers and families reported a lack of shelter availability as the primary reason that families did not access homeless services. Of the seven dedicated homeless shelters in the county, only four serve homeless families. From these four shelters, only 19 low or no-barrier emergency beds are available. **[Note:** As a result of the CRHEC initiative The Salvation Army in Fort Worth opened 58 additional much-needed emergency shelter beds for women with children.]

Most of the available shelter beds, known as program beds, have barriers to access, such as fees and conditional requirements. Emergency shelter beds are

the only true crisis shelter available for families who need a place to stay immediately because they have no requirements to enter and charge no fees. These beds are intended to provide a safe space for families who would otherwise sleep on the street, but there are fewer than 80 of them, including the additional beds offered by the Salvation Army. This is a vast improvement but does not come close to meeting the needs.

⁵⁴ United Way of Tarrant County (2015). 2015 United Way Tarrant County Community Assessment. Retrieved from <https://unitedwaytarrant.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/2015-COMMUNITY-ASSESSMENT.pdf>

⁵⁵ Economic Policy Institute (2015). Family Budget Calculator. Retrieved from <http://www.epi.org/resources/budget/>

Program beds are not a refuge for families as they are usually either filled or have restrictions that make accessing them difficult for families. For example, some shelters only accept mothers with sons under age eight or twelve, or limit the number of children they may bring with them. Most homeless children never stay in a homeless shelter due to limited availability and restrictive shelter rules¹⁸. Mothers report that they would rather remain homeless than be separated from their children.

Another limitation of shelters in Tarrant County is their geographic distribution. Shelters are concentrated in central Fort Worth and central Arlington. Rural areas lack shelter space, as do the rapidly growing northeast and southeast parts of the county. A family finding itself homeless in Grapevine, Azle, Euless, Hurst, or Mansfield is miles from the nearest shelter.

Cost to the Community—Cost to Our Future

The vulnerabilities of these families cannot be overstated and have far-reaching impacts on the community. The cost of family homelessness is difficult to calculate because systems, such as health care, often do not track these individuals as homeless. **For chronically homeless individuals in Tarrant County, the estimated cost to the community is \$40,000 per year,** according to research by the City of Fort Worth Planning and Development Department⁵⁶.

A 2014 HUD study noted that the average cost in Texas for a family relying on emergency shelter in terms of the cost to the homeless services system is \$11,627 per family⁴², with a shelter stay of less than four months. This does not consider other associated costs such as increased medical costs, external social service supports, special education services, mental health services or child protective services involvement, including foster care. Approximately ten percent of the children entering the child welfare system do so because of inadequate housing¹². Once involved in foster care, the average time a child spends in the system in Texas is 42.5 months. It is clear that the longer families spend in homelessness, the more expensive they are to society over time.

Summary

When the Community Response to Homelessness in Early Childhood Alliance began to examine the issue of early childhood homelessness, the members decided to prioritize the perspective of the child. This emphasis on young children and their experiences led the committee to explore the realities of the homeless who are in shelters, as well as those who are the hidden homeless in our community. When approximately 7,400 children under the age of six will not have a stable home this year, the sense of the problem becomes daunting. However, this focus also led the Alliance toward solutions that emphasize helping service delivery systems work together more effectively and increasing resources that are available to families in housing crisis.

⁵⁶ City of Fort Worth Planning and Development Department (2008). *The Cost of Homelessness in Tarrant County, Texas*. Fort Worth, TX

SECTION 3

Findings of the CRHEC

In order to prioritize the needs of young children living in homelessness, the CRHEC intentionally sought an understanding from families living in homelessness with young children and the perspective of those working directly with the families in the situations described above. The findings are summarized here.



Major barriers to escaping family homelessness in Tarrant County

The CRHEC conducted individual or group interviews with 36 parents of young children experiencing homelessness. The interviews took place between September 1 and October 15, 2016. Participants were drawn from parents receiving services from Tarrant County providers, including Early Childhood Intervention, MHMR, Presbyterian Night Shelter, Center for Transforming Lives, and Arlington Life Shelter.

About the participants

Of the 36 parents interviewed, 35 were women and one was a man. A cross-section of racial groups was represented, including African-American, Caucasian, Asian, American Indian or Native American, and 28 percent identified themselves as Hispanic. The families had been homeless for periods from under one month (eight percent), between one and six months (44 percent), and between seven and twelve months (eleven percent) to more than a year (25 percent.)

The 36 parents had a combined 94 children, ranging in age from infant to 20, and every participant had at least one child under the age of six. Roughly half of the children were under age six, the other half were six or older. Three women reported being pregnant at the time of the interview. Thirty percent of the children were not living with their parent at the time of the study.

Child care

When asked to suggest what services the CRHEC could provide to help them get out homelessness, the most prevalent response was child care.

Child care is particularly problematic while parents are in shelters. Parents in shelters cannot look for work, attend job training, get mental health services, or seek housing options without safe care for their children, and yet no local shelters have on-site child care. Without child care, women cannot work, and without a job, paying rent or a mortgage is impossible. This is a frustrating Catch-22 for homeless families.

Shelters also have few services or activities for children. When asked, parents wished their children could play outside, participate in arts and crafts, and have opportunities for tutoring and mentoring. Without meaningful activities, children have few distractions from anxiety about their situation.

The lack of child care limits possibilities for parents as well. Those looking for entry-level work realize many of the jobs available to them involve shift work, where there are few if any child care options available on nights and weekends. Care for sick children is also difficult to find, so parents with sick kids are forced to miss work and often end up losing their jobs.

Child care is often framed as an issue for younger children, but school-age kids also need after-school care. Summers also present a huge challenge for low-income families who are either forced to pay for care for their older kids or leave children alone in a potentially unsafe environment during the day.

Several parents also expressed particular concern about their children with special needs. These parents face anxiety over their children's futures, and have a need for information on the available services.



The parents interviewed wanted what all families want for their children: love, happiness, and security. "I want them to have a good childhood and feel loved by me," said one parent. Others hoped to bring more routine to lives that had been uprooted and unsettled by homelessness. They hoped for a future with structured bedtimes and naptimes, more family meals, and stronger family customs.

“Child care is very hard to get with extremely long wait lists.”

— Parent of young homeless children, CRHEC Listening Session

Housing

All of the participants interviewed hoped for a future where they and their children would have a safe, secure home. Many had been working when they became homeless, but their income was too low to have emergency savings in place or to regularly pay full rent. Others lost their homes when they lost their jobs, or had an emergency situation that sabotaged their rent money. The factors that contributed to the homelessness of the family as identified by the parent included the following:

- Income too low – 64 percent
- Unemployment – 58 percent
- Rent too high – 44 percent
- Eviction due to missed rent– 33 percent
- Health or disability condition – 14 percent
- Mental health condition – 14 percent

(Participants could identify more than one barrier to secure housing, so percentages add up to more than 100 percent.)

“I worry about being in this shelter and not being approved for housing, all my kids ask are, ‘When are we leaving?’”

— Parent of young homeless children, CRHEC Listening Session

Families expressed frustration with social supports as they tried to escape homelessness. They were discouraged by the limited supply of housing vouchers and subsidized housing in the community. Once they had experienced homelessness, they struggled with the fear of again finding themselves with nowhere to go.

While living in a shelter gave parents a reprieve from the elements, families found the conditions challenging. Mothers worried about their own

safety and the safety of their children, especially in the East Lancaster area of Fort Worth, where the majority of county shelters and services are located. Their fears were justified. One study by the UNT Health Science Center found that 61 percent of homeless women in the East Lancaster area reported at least one form of physical violence, threats, stalking or verbal abuse; 46 percent were physically or sexually assaulted, and 17 percent reported rape⁵⁷. Anxiety about life in the East Lancaster area was clearly validated.

In general, focus group mothers expressed concern about fighting, drug sales, and other criminal activity. They wanted clean, safe spaces for their children to be able to live and play. They also expressed frustration about the rules and restrictions of shelter life, such as the curfews, which made accepting shift work jobs impossible

Job training

Participants sought better job training options that would help them find living-wage jobs that would allow them to support their families. They hoped for the financial stability to keep their families safe and secure.

The greatest worry of homeless parents was finances. They worried about the fundamental costs of living, like paying the bills, as well as the little things that are part of family life, such as buying a birthday gift for a child.

Transportation

Lack of reliable transportation hobbled parents in their search for jobs and housing. Few participants had their own vehicle and were limited to public transportation, which meant every trip took hours instead of minutes. “It takes one-and-a-half hours to run a 15-minute errand using the bus,” one participant said.

Parents struggled to get their children to doctor’s appointments, expressing frustration with the unreliability of the bus system. Taxi services are prohibitively expensive. Navigating life without a car is extremely difficult in a car-centric county, especially for parents with young children.

Coordination of services

A central point that many participants made is that all of these factors are inter-related. Parents need child care *and* job training *and* transportation *and* housing to break the cycle.

If only one of these four elements is missing, an at-risk family can be pushed over the edge and into homelessness. A single mother could easily lose her job if she loses her child care. If her car breaks down and she cannot get to work, she could be unemployed within days and evicted in a matter of weeks.

Focus group members expressed the need for social service agencies to recognize this fact and create combined services. For example, they suggested that child care and job training be provided at shelters, limiting the need for transportation and decreasing the barriers to participation.



⁵⁷ Emily Spence-Almaguer, G. S. (2013). “It Happens Out Here”: The victimization experiences and health challenges of women who are homeless. UNT Health Science Center School of Public Health. Retrieved from <http://www.ahomewithhope.org/wp-content/uploads/HWHVS-Final-Report-to-the-Communityx.pdf>



Other major concerns

Two other significant themes emerged from discussions with interview participants:

- *Uniting families:* Families struggled to stay together during the crisis of homelessness. Shelters often limit the number of children per mother. Mothers often have to choose which children stay by their sides and which go to a friend or family member. For these mothers, and their separated children, the emotional stress compounds an already difficult situation. The primary goal of those who had been separated from their children is to be reunited.
- *Respect and empathy:* Many mothers felt their situation was made worse by the lack of respect they sometimes received from agency staff. "I was treated like I was a criminal," said one participant. "The shelters felt like jails. Staff were harsh. Did I do something wrong?" Parents were fighting for self-respect and dignity as much as for safe housing. "I'm not lazy. I do want to get up and work. But I have kids with special needs. I have to do it all myself and it can be overwhelming," said one parent. "I really want to be more self-sufficient, I just need a little help," said another.

“People assume if you are homeless, you have a drug or alcohol problem.”

— Parent of young homeless children, CRHEC Listening Session

Major concerns of providers when helping homeless parents in Tarrant County

The CRHEC conducted a listening session with 50 individuals who work with and on behalf of individuals living with homelessness in Tarrant County. Organizations that participated in the session included MHMR, Child Care Associates, Union Gospel Mission, Lena Pope, Catholic Charities, Center for Transforming Lives, Arlington Night Shelter, ACH Child and Family Services, Presbyterian Night Shelter, City of Fort Worth, Momentous Institute, Cook Children's, Learning Center of North Texas, the Women's Center, UNT Health Science Center, SafeHaven of Tarrant County, and Fort Worth Independent School District.

Child care

Providers identified child care as the single most important need of families experiencing homelessness. Workers noted that there are not enough providers of child care for children experiencing homelessness and there were many barriers to care, such as transportation. The primary reason providers are concerned about lack of child care is that this lack of child care is a major barrier to parent employment. Providers recognized the need for child care within shelters and coupled with other programs such as job training, education, and other social service programs.

Providers also emphasized the need for more summer programs for school-age children. "Children are alone for long periods of time during the summer," one provider noted. Concerns included children being left alone without care, and missing out on free school breakfast and lunch programs, which meant they might go hungry. Providers also noted that the strain of summer months increased pressure on the entire family, and that child abuse is reportedly higher when school is not in session.

Housing

Providers identified the need for different kinds of housing options, both short-term and long-term. The move from shelters to housing is a difficult one, and transition services are needed to support families through the process. Providers noted concerns that 12 months of rapid rehousing is insufficient to stabilize the most fragile families and would result in faster return to homelessness. Overall, providers recognized that the lack of affordable housing in combination with low and inconsistent wages creates family vulnerability to homelessness.

Providers urged faster transition into housing to get families out of shelters or unsafe situations and into apartments or homes. "It takes too long!" one provider said. "Even three months is too long." They expressed frustration with the available housing options, noting that families need housing that is safe, as well as affordable.

Many recognized that families feel unsafe in shelters. Providers know East Lancaster is dangerous, and that women feel unsafe in the area. Some families also feel unsafe in shelters, and others choose to live in camps or their cars because of restrictive shelter rules and a desire for the family to remain together. A mother and twelve year-old son, for example, might choose to sleep in a car rather than be split up in a shelter.



Job training and transportation

Providers asserted that education and job training were essential components to helping families break out of the cycle of poverty. Reliable transportation to those services was also a factor. Focus group participants also emphasized that child care, job training, and transportation must work together in order for families to achieve stability.

Other major concerns

Other points that emerged in discussion with providers included the following:

- *Case management limitations:* Per the Continuum of Care policy guidelines, there is a twelve-month limit on rental assistance with case management for families as they move out of homeless shelters. Most providers believe this is not enough time for families to truly stabilize, both emotionally and financially. They would prefer to extend these supports for several more months, especially for the most fragile families. Providers also pointed to their high caseload ratios, expressing the need for more case managers. High turnover within the field remains a challenge, as the emotionally taxing environment and low pay (average salary of \$33,000) take a toll on these professionals.
- *Need for structure and stability:* Providers wanted to help families secure a structured, stable life for children during homelessness. While mothers work to get out of shelters, school and child care staff can provide a structured environment that helps kids maintain a sense of stability even when other elements of their lives are unpredictable.
- *Improved collaboration between agencies:* Providers recognized that families must navigate a complicated, inefficient system of service providers. Listening session participants urged better collaboration between agencies. Data should be shared between providers, and communication increased to increase efficiency and reduce duplication of efforts.

SECTION 4

Recommendations

Relying upon the research and feedback from the focus groups and interviews conducted with providers and families and informed through the committee process, the CRHEC developed wide-ranging recommendations that include the creation of a local pilot program to serve homeless families to addressing the need for system changes in the community and in the homeless services system itself.

Pilot Program

Without coordinated, comprehensive services, it is almost impossible for a family with a young child to escape the trap of homelessness. The CRHEC therefore recommends the creation of a pilot project designed to demonstrate the effectiveness of a seamless and integrated service model that would help these vulnerable families break free from homelessness.

The goal of the pilot program would be two-fold. First, it would provide comprehensive services to families to support them as they worked toward sustainable, independent living. At the same time, the homeless services system would use the program to improve itself by learning and refining ways to create a true path out of homelessness for families with young children.

As envisioned, the program would include the following elements:

- Thirty families would be selected based on their status as homeless with a child under the age of six, and with a head of household ready to enter the workforce. Fifteen of the families would be referred from shelters and fifteen would be homeless, but would not have been served within the homeless services system.
- Services would be fully integrated, with locations of housing, child care and employment all considered in housing placement.
- Families would be placed into housing, with rental assistance for a period of time determined by the level of vulnerability of the family.
- Job training and employment would be provided toward the goal of earning a sufficient wage to remain stably housed.
- Additional training would include financial coaching and parent-child relationship development.
- Interventions would be provided for children with special needs such as developmental delays or mental health concerns.

The program is currently in the planning phase, and the CRHEC will be involved in securing funding, as well as oversight of implementation. Per family costs would vary, but are estimated to be \$27,160, which includes housing, child care for one child, employment supports, transportation, support services and case management. Funds would come from public and private sources, accessing both existing funding streams and new funding.

An evaluation of the pilot will be focused on outcome measures for the families and improvements to the systems working with the families.

Systems Change

GOAL 1: Improve the systems and the coordination of systems most likely to impact young children experiencing homelessness, including but not limited to HUD-funded homeless services, child care and Workforce Solutions systems

1. Create an ad-hoc task force on family homelessness under the oversight of the Continuum of Care Board, which oversees the implementation of the recommendations from the Community Response to Homelessness in Early Childhood (CRHEC)
2. Increase community-wide understanding and application of the HEARTH Act definition of homelessness for the community
3. Accurately count homeless children and families during the Point-In-Time Count and through other methodologies, such as establishing a process to find and identify families living in their cars at the time of the count, or those who reside in motels with insufficient capacity to remain there for longer than fourteen days
4. Establish and report the ages of children experiencing homelessness based on the HEARTH Act definition, by category
5. Improve tracking for families experiencing homelessness, in order for the family to be able to access appropriate housing
6. Engage and mobilize volunteers to:
 - Assist in Point-in-Time Count of families
 - Participate in Mentor/Coaching opportunities provided through agencies
 - Establish a phone bank to answer calls for families in housing crisis
7. Ensure community-wide resource listings (Workforce Portal, Pocket-Pal, TCHC website, etc.) that include resources for families experiencing homelessness such as child care, health care and transportation
8. Increase funding for supportive services, including mental health and substance abuse intervention services
9. In coordination with the Tarrant County Homeless Coalition, the Early Learning Alliance, the Home Visiting Network and other coalitions which impact the lives of young children experiencing homelessness, increase the knowledge base for service providers regarding issues faced by families experiencing homelessness with young children, including the resources available for these families and the referral process necessary to access these services
 - a) Provide intensive, week-long 'boot-camp' sessions on a quarterly basis for those new to working with families experiencing homelessness, with refresher sessions and technical support offered monthly
 - b) Coordinated through the Continuum of Care, provide training sessions utilizing a collaborative model, where providers volunteer their time to teach specific topics in their fields of expertise
 - c) Provide training with low cost or no cost to participants

10. Increase awareness and utilization of the HOPES central information resource process to access agencies to ensure that families needing services receive assessment, consistent information, and coordination of care:
 - a) Establish communication channels among organizations including "warm handoff" referrals with follow-up to ensure completion, smooth connections, and to improve system navigation
 - b) Work with Child Protective Services (CPS) to initiate child care through CCMS when a family has an open CPS case
 - c) Assist families in accessing child care and employment benefits by supporting enrollment in the TANF program, so that they can be enrolled in the CHOICES program offered through the workforce system
11. Develop protocols for better communication between various agencies (such as social service providers and hospitals) to improve the coordination and flow of client information
12. Identify, assess and prioritize ALL homeless families that fall under the HEARTH Act definition using a centralized database, such as Coordinated Entry System (CES), by:
 - Creating an addendum to the initial Coordinated Entry System assessment, to include additional questions beyond those in the VI-SPDAT (for individuals or families)
 - Ensuring the use of the Family VI-SPDAT for all families who are homeless, even when separated from their children because of homelessness
 - Providing/encouraging access to HMIS for providers that do not provide direct homeless services (like TWC, CMS, etc....) to identify and provide services to families on the list who do not qualify for CoC federal programs
 - Modifying the screening process to better identify needs for this population
 - Using non-CoC funds, hire a CES Navigator for families low in vulnerability and unable to access non-CoC funded programs/ services which helps families access other services and programs

GOAL 2: Offer emergency child care to ensure families have access to child care as soon as possible upon entering shelter services in order to facilitate escaping homelessness:

1. Use existing child-care facilities to pre-pay care for homeless children (CCMS or bridge funding from private foundations as a funding source)
2. Identify service providers to offer drop-in child care, accessible by families experiencing homelessness, funded through private donations
3. Enforce minimal requirements for crisis care to include but not be limited to:
 - Licensing requirements for per-child allotted space
 - Qualified staff and extended days and hours
 - Allotted space for a playground that meets licensing requirements
4. Ask community partners to invest in or to operate a childcare center with appropriate quality standards in an established shelter

GOAL 3: Working through existing community-wide transportation efforts, develop public/private partnerships that offer transportation solutions to overcome barriers to child care and employment for women with young children experiencing homelessness, including:

1. Expanding affordable transportation options to/from child-care facilities
2. Exploring 'door-to-door' options, such as contracts with ride-sharing companies
3. Ensuring access to car seats

GOAL 4: Keep families together by increasing both short and long-term housing options, with supportive services:

1. Increase capacity and funding for motel stays for families who are unable to access shelters due to the lack of available beds
2. Develop Room In the Inn, an overnight shelter program operated by participating churches, for families who are without access to shelter, due to the lack of system capacity, especially in times of extreme weather
3. Increase affordable 2-bedroom and 3-bedroom rental units by 1,000 units by the year 2020
4. Support the City of Fort Worth's goal of ending family homelessness by increasing rapid rehousing units by 1,860 units by the year 2027
5. Create or align with the existing county-wide affordable housing task force to assess the current and projected future landscape of housing affordability in the county, especially for families with children – from birth to five years old facing homelessness
6. Encourage cities and counties to work with CRHEC in order to better educate citizens and neighborhood groups about the need for affordable housing and housing options for those exiting homelessness
7. Construct new homes on vacant lots/ rehabilitate vacant homes in urban renewal areas or revitalization zones
8. Encourage/ incentivize employer supported housing, particularly in the Alliance Airport area
9. Expand a program for agencies to master lease units with multiple landlords for one or more units per property, which would allow non-profit organizations to hold a primary lease and sub-lease to families exiting homelessness, while providing support services
10. Explore and encourage creation of a community fund, to which both public and private entities would contribute, for construction/ gap financing for affordable housing properties, especially those providing permanent supportive housing
11. Establish a set of criteria for developers, including those submitting applications under the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit of nine percent competitive and four percent non-competitive application rounds

GOAL 5: Maintain families in housing in order to prevent families from becoming homeless:

1. Increase public and private funds to be used for eviction prevention to allow families to remain in their homes
2. Establish mediation and advocacy services to resolve disputes between landlord and tenants to help prevent evictions

GOAL 6: Increase coordination among major providers of workforce services for the homeless with shelter and housing providers:

1. Increase the use and rate of access to the Workforce Solutions Partner Portal by 50 percent
2. Train homeless service providers and others on how to access the program page of the Partner Portal
3. Increase coordination between TCHC and CoC workforce coordination groups, Tarrant County Workforce Solutions and other major providers of workforce services

GOAL 7: Increase awareness and understanding of Workforce Solutions' Career Pathways options for those serving the homeless population in Tarrant County:

1. Increase awareness and understanding of the Demand Occupation List each year through training
2. Train more organizations and direct service providers on Career Pathways and related opportunities in the community, so that individuals experiencing homelessness move beyond entry-level employment toward sustainable income
3. Develop more system support of Career Pathways through TCHC and CoC, including education of member entities, and alignment with plans (i.e. strategic plans)

GOAL 8: Increase employment retention by improving coordination, collaboration, and knowledge of and access to available support services:

1. Survey the community for supports offered, what population(s) can access those supports, and under what conditions
2. Through training and improved communications, educate providers on the employment and training supports that are available for those who are homeless
3. Explore means to utilize HMIS for employment efforts by workforce and agency providers to track specific activities for individuals
4. Increase business and corporate engagement in workforce development, including creating access to Career Pathways support within companies

SECTION 5

Conclusion

In the United States and Tarrant County today, we are failing our youngest children. As this report makes clear, homelessness among children in Tarrant County is harmful to them and to our community.

Immediate action must be taken to address the system issues that allow this devastation to remain invisible to the public and to providers. Furthermore, our homeless services system must adapt to the changing demographics of homelessness, and adjust to working with families who need multiple services that are coordinated and integrated. These services must take the complex realities of these families into account, and consider them within the context of the community.

Without this kind of response, families will continue to fail in their attempts to stabilize and support themselves. Acceptance of the status quo, low wages for working families, the alarming lack of affordable housing, the inability to afford child care and the lack of transportation is a recipe for disaster, as is blaming the families for failing to succeed in an impossible situation.

Without appropriate action, our rates of homelessness for families will continue to rise, and our efforts to improve quality of life in Tarrant County will fall. On the other hand, with a commitment to hard work and perseverance, Tarrant County can protect the most vulnerable citizens of our community and help them find a bright future.

SECTION 6

Appendix

Definitions of Homelessness for Federal Program Serving Children, Youth, and Families

The two major definitions of homelessness in use by federal agencies are the education definition in Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Act, and the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition in Section 103 of Subtitle I of the McKinney-Vento Act. The following chart illustrates the similarities and differences between federal agencies’ definitions of homeless. In December 2011, HUD issued complex regulations on the HEARTH definition of homelessness.

	EDUCATION DEFINITION	HUD DEFINITION - PRIOR TO 2009	HUD DEFINITION - HEARTH ACT - CURRENT	RHYA DEFINITION
Statutory Reference:	Section 725 of Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Act	Section 103 of Subtitle I of the McKinney-Vento Act	Section 103 of Subtitle I of the McKinney-Vento Act	Section 387 of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act
Federal Programs and Agencies Using This Definition:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Elementary and Secondary Education (ED)- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (ED)- Higher Education Act (ED)- Head Start Act (HHS)- Child Nutrition Act (USDA)- Violence Against Women Act (DOJ)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Homeless Assistance Programs (HUD)- Emergency Food and Shelter (Homeland Security)- Department of Veterans Affairs (all programs)- Department of Labor (all programs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Homeless Assistance Programs (HUD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Runaway and Homeless Youth Act Programs (HHS)
LIVING SITUATIONS COVERED BY THESE DEFINITIONS				
Unsheltered Locations	Yes: “(ii) 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 (within the meaning of section 103(a)(2) (C)); (iii) children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings”	Yes: “an individual who has 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.”	Yes: “an individual or family with 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,including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground;”	Yes, if the youth cannot live with relatives and has no other safe place to go: “a youth... for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative, and who has no other safe alternative living arrangement.”
Emergency Shelters and Transitional Housing	Yes: “children and youth who are living in emergency or transitional shelters”	Yes: “a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations”	Yes: “an individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements”	Yes, if the youth cannot live with relatives and has no other safe place to go: “a youth... for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative, and who has no other safe alternative living arrangement.”

SECTION 6
Appendix (continued)

	EDUCATION DEFINITION	HUD DEFINITION – PRIOR TO 2009	HUD DEFINITION – HEARTH ACT - CURRENT	RHYA DEFINITION
LIVING SITUATIONS COVERED BY THESE DEFINITIONS				
Motels and Hotels	Yes, if there are no appropriate alternatives: “children and youth who are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations” (emphasis added)	No, except for “welfare hotels”: “an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill);”	Generally, no, except for the following situations: - “hotels and motels paid for by Federal, State, or local government programs for low-income individuals or by charitable organizations” - “an individual or family who has a primary nighttime residence that is a room in a hotel or motel and where they lack the resources necessary to reside there for more than 14 days, who has no subsequent residence identified; and lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing;” - “any individual or family who is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life threatening conditions in the individual’s or family’s current housing situation, including where the health and safety of children are jeopardized, and who have no other residence and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing” - “unaccompanied youth and homeless families with children and youth defined as homeless under other Federal statutes who have experienced a long term period without living independently in permanent housing; and have experienced persistent instability as measured by frequent moves over such period; and can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time because of chronic disabilities, chronic physical health or mental health conditions, substance addiction, histories of domestic violence or childhood abuse, the presence of a child or youth with a disability, or multiple barriers to employment.	Yes, if the youth cannot live with relatives and has no other safe place to go: “a youth... for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative, and who has no other safe alternative living arrangement.”

SECTION 6
Appendix (continued)

	EDUCATION DEFINITION	HUD DEFINITION – PRIOR TO 2009	HUD DEFINITION – HEARTH ACT - CURRENT	RHYA DEFINITION
LIVING SITUATIONS COVERED BY THESE DEFINITIONS				
Staying with Others ("Doubled-Up")	Yes, if it is due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar situation (within the definition of lacking fixed, regular, and adequate situations): “...individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (within the meaning of section 103(a)(1)); and (B) includes — (i) children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason;”	No “an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill);”	Generally, no, except for the following situations: - “an individual or family who will imminently lose their housing, including housing they are sharing with others, as evidenced by credible evidence indicating that the owner or renter of the housing will not allow the individual or family to stay for more than 14 days, and who has no subsequent residence identified; and who lacks the resources or support networks needed to obtain other permanent housing: - “any individual or family who is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life threatening conditions in the individual’s or family’s current housing situation, including where the health and safety of children are jeopardized, and who have no other residence and lack the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing” - “unaccompanied youth and homeless families with children and youth defined as homeless under other Federal statutes who have experienced a long term period without living independently in permanent housing; and have experienced persistent instability as measured by frequent moves over such period; and can be expected to continue in such status for an extended period of time because of chronic disabilities, chronic physical health or mental health conditions, substance addiction, histories of domestic violence or childhood abuse, the presence of a child or youth with a disability, or multiple barriers to employment.”	Yes, if the youth cannot live with relatives and has no other safe place to go: “a youth... for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative, and who has no other safe alternative living arrangement.”

SECTION 6

Appendix (continued)

	EDUCATION DEFINITION	HUD DEFINITION - PRIOR TO 2009	HUD DEFINITION - HEARTH ACT - CURRENT	RHYA DEFINITION
LIVING SITUATIONS COVERED BY THESE DEFINITIONS				
"At Risk of Homelessness"	No such definition.	No such definition.	<p>Defines “at risk of homelessness” to include all families with children and youth defined as homeless under other Federal statutes.</p> <p>(1) AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS.- The term ‘at risk of homelessness’ means, with respect to an individual or family, that the individual or family-</p> <p>(A) has income below 30 percent of median income for the geographic area;</p> <p>(B) has insufficient resources immediately available to attain housing stability; and</p> <p>(C)(i) has moved frequently because of economic reasons;</p> <p>(ii) is living in the home of another because of economic hardship;</p> <p>(iii) has been notified that their right to occupy their current housing or living situation will be terminated;</p> <p>(iv) lives in a hotel or motel;</p> <p>(v) lives in severely overcrowded housing;</p> <p>(vi) is exiting an institution; or</p> <p>(vii) otherwise lives in housing that has characteristics associated with instability and an increased risk of homelessness.</p> <p>Such term includes all families with children and youth defined as homeless under other Federal statutes.</p>	<p>No such definition. However, RHYA does define “youth at risk of separation from family:”</p> <p>YOUTH AT RISK OF SEPARATION FROM THE FAMILY.—The term ‘youth at risk of separation from the family’ means an individual—</p> <p>(A) who is less than 18 years of age; and</p> <p>(B) (i) who has a history of running away from the family of such individual;</p> <p>(ii) whose parent, guardian, or custodian is not willing to provide for the basic needs of such individual; or</p> <p>(iii) who is at risk of entering the child welfare system or juvenile justice system as a result of the lack of services available to the family to meet such needs.</p>

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About the Center for Transforming Lives

For more than 100 years, the organization now known as the Center for Transforming Lives has served impoverished women and children in Tarrant County.

The YWCA of Fort Worth was organized by Mrs. Ralph Smith and Mrs. Q.T. Moreland in 1906. In 1907, it was chartered, making it the first YWCA in Texas. The organization ran a free lunch line and boarding house for poor women, and grew to include an employment bureau. In the 1920s, the agency organized the Community Chest, which later became the United Way of Tarrant County. In the 1930s, expansion to include free child care enabled impoverished women to enter the workforce. During World War II, the agency provided USO activities and acted as a ration station.

In 2015, the organization changed its name from the YWCA Fort Worth & Tarrant County to the Center for Transforming Lives to better articulate its mission.

The Center helps women and children escape poverty and recover from homelessness through:

- Safe Homes – an on-site homeless shelter for single women and off-site housing for women with children (92% success rate with previously homeless women who moved into stable homes and mainstream society)
- Education – free or subsidized early childhood development for homeless and low-income children (100% of 4- & 5-year-olds test Kindergarten Ready)
- Stable Futures – financial coaching and workforce (served 1,374 last year, 100% low income)

www.transforminglives.org

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