

Utah's 2017 Family Impact Seminar
Homelessness and Families
Homeless Families: Impacts and Cost Estimates
From the Family Options Study

February 2, 2017
State Office Building Auditorium

Background Problems

The face of homelessness is shifting; leaving many communities scrambling to fulfill the needs of this new homeless demographic. The need for affordable housing has increased in recent years, leaving many families homeless. Throughout the United States there are about 150,000 homeless families. In Utah alone, 46% of people experiencing homelessness were families. To break down those numbers even more, there are about 1,000 homeless families on any given night in Salt Lake City alone.

What is the Family Options Study?

The Family Options Study was conducted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as a learning tool. The goal was to discover which housing interventions and services are most beneficial to homeless families. In addition, a federal goal was made to end family homelessness by 2020.

- Information was gathered from 2,300 homeless families across 12 different communities in the United States.
- Families were randomly assigned to one of four interventions that have been identified as suitable systems of support for family homelessness based on the theories behind the nature of family homelessness.
- Families were followed for three years.
- Family well-being was measured in housing stability, family preservation, adult well-being, child well-being, and self-sufficiency.
- Salt Lake City was one of the 12 sites who participated in the study.

Participant Info

- Typical Family was a single 29 year old woman with 1-2 children.
- The median annual household income was \$7400.
- 30% suffered from PTSD symptoms or other psychological distress.
- 63% had prior episode of homelessness.



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Homeless Interventions

- Short term rental subsidies, also known as rapid re-housing, constitute temporary housing subsidies of up to 18 months.
- Project-based transitional housing, a 24 month, service-intensive, temporary stay at a housing facility.
- Usual Care is traditional homeless and housing assistance without any priority access to a program.
- Long-term housing subsidies, such as housing choice vouchers.

Study Outcomes

The study suggests that the current homeless assistance system does not successfully meet the needs of homeless families. Results were varied across the different interventions.

- Short term rental subsidies provided an increase in income and food security, fewer school absences and child behavior problems. However, no improvements were found in improving housing stability or preventing subsequent homelessness.
- Project-based transitional housing did reduce shelter stays but produced few benefits in other areas.
- Usual care participant families experienced few benefits. In fact, many experienced elevated child behavior problems and poor health.
- Long-term housing subsidy participants showed the greatest benefits. Including reducing subsequent homelessness by half, reduced child separations by two fifths, reduced intimate partner violence by one third, reduced school mobility, absences and behavior problems in children, and reduced food insecurity.

Typical Program Costs across Interventions

Per family monthly cost

- Short term subsidy - \$880
- Project-based transitional housing - \$2,706
- Usual Care - \$4,819
- Long term subsidy - \$1,162

Results and Policy Recommendations

The Family Options Study indicates that there are notable improvements in family health and well-being when families have access to long-term housing subsidies; supporting the view that housing costs exceed the income of poor families, a major contributing factor to family homelessness. Homelessness for women and children is a major issue within the state of Utah and this seminar provided legislators with empirical data and non-partisan information to support them in their deliberations regarding affordable housing options.

- Long-term housing subsidies best support the transition from homeless to safely home.
- Safety and neighborhood location must be considered in any housing policy.
- Awareness of the face of homelessness could influence positive improvements in policy-making.

The purpose of the Utah Family Impact Seminar is to give salient, unbiased, empirically supported information concerning current legislative topics. Legislators are encouraged to use the Family Impact Lens in their policy making.

Potential Future Topics:

- Financial Security of Families
- K-12 Education
- Teens and Sexting Laws
- Fatherhood
- Strengthening Utah Marriages
- Literacy
- Opioid Abuse
- Autism
- Supporting Soldiers and the Families
- Teen Suicide Prevention

