



**THE  
FORGOTTEN  
FACE OF  
HOMELESSNESS:  
CHILDREN**

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**APRIL 4, 2018**

**win**

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# ABOUT

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Every night in New York City, over 23,000 children go to bed in a homeless shelter — a six percent increase from 2016 to 2017. Over the past few years, Win has worked with partners in government, homeless services and progressive advocacy organizations to center the city’s approach to homelessness on mothers and their children. This is reflected in the release of *The Forgotten Face of Homelessness* report issued in October 2016. But with a growing number of children entering the shelter system from often unstable housing situations, Win is releasing the second in a series of policy solutions that empower families in need: *The Forgotten Face of Homelessness: Children*. This work focuses on reducing trauma, improving education and increasing housing stability, for homeless children.

*The Forgotten Face of Homelessness: Children* explores the unique daily crises faced by homeless kids across the city and moves towards policy solutions. If adopted by policymakers, and implemented correctly, these solutions will create more stable housing for the one in 10 public school students who experience homelessness. In fact, one in seven New York City public school students will experience homelessness before reaching fifth grade.

Data show that children currently represent over 60 percent of New Yorkers in family shelters. Seven out of 10 children who arrive at a Win shelter have already experienced housing instability. Housing instability can stymie children’s healthy socio-emotional and cognitive development, with implications for mental health, behavioral health, and success in school and in life. Homelessness is also closely linked to chronic absenteeism, defined by the New York City Department of Education as missing 18 or more days of school. Additionally, it is linked to lower grades and test scores, leading to dimmed chances for high school completion, college and job prospects.

The vast majority of Win families' income lies below \$23,300 a year. The post-recession income gains that have eased hardship for many families have not fully reached very low- and extremely low-income families. Nationally, average household income for the poorest fifth of households fell by \$571 from 2006-2016. Compounding the challenges of lagging wages, housing in New York City's real estate market is as unaffordable as ever.

**It is imperative that New York City takes action to bring stability for homeless children. *The Forgotten Face of Homelessness: Children* identifies three specific areas that can make a difference:**

- **Addressing trauma and instability of children before they enter shelter**
- **Expanding and developing services that prioritize the needs of children during homelessness and time in shelter**
- **Connecting families to necessary services to prevent returning to shelter, including creating housing affordability and aftercare**

Data on Win families presented in this report are from 2015-2016, the most recent years that data is fully available, and is primarily drawn from CARES, New York City's homelessness management information system. CARES is a computerized case management system and database administered by the NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and is used by city agencies and homeless service providers. For service and program performance management purposes, Win also gathers additional client information regarding income, employment, and education of families participating in Win's Income Building Program. Data included in this report are housed in the Win IMPACT Network, Win's comprehensive intranet data warehouse and metrics system.

*The following pages begin with an outline of the progress achieved on key reforms since the release of Win's 2016 report and the work ahead, which include the following strategic goals: continue reforming New York City's Living in Communities Initiative (LINC) to increase funding and remove arbitrary time limits; closing loopholes in New York State's rent regulation legislation; and initiating comprehensive planning efforts to end the use of scattered site and cluster and hotel housing and build or redesign sufficient shelters to meet the unique needs of families with children.*

## **ABOUT WIN**

For 35 years, Win has provided homeless families and their children with the safe housing, critical services, and groundbreaking programs they need to succeed on their own. Founded in 1983 as Women In Need, Win started with four homeless women and their six children. Today Win continues to evolve and adapt to help families break the cycle of homelessness. Across 10 family shelters in four boroughs, last year Win provided shelter and services for more than 2,400 families, including nearly 4,700 children. Win serves approximately ten percent of all New York City children in homeless shelter.



# WORDS FROM OUR CEO

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*The heartbreaking truth about homelessness is that it can have a devastating impact on the most vulnerable: children. For a child, homelessness is a constant churn — changing bedrooms, schools, neighborhoods, and adult mentors. But the more insidious effects often don't present themselves immediately. Homeless children are more likely to experience trauma in their life, including eviction, witnessing domestic violence, or losing a parental figure. Cumulative effects can manifest in learning difficulties, decreased school achievements, and emotional disorders such as depression. The tragic truth is that these traumas will increase the chances of homelessness later in life — turning a homeless child into a homeless adult — if we do not deliver stability to families in need and address trauma for each member of every homeless family, especially children.*

Until recently, homeless policy and response was largely driven by unfair negative media coverage around single adults, especially single men, despite research confirming that more than 70% of homeless New Yorkers are families with children. In October 2016, Win released *The Forgotten Face of Homelessness* report and advocacy agenda to spur policy changes and public perception of homelessness. The report looks closely at homeless families in over a dozen Win facilities across the city to ground its findings in data and real-life experience. The *Forgotten Face of Homelessness* report sought to raise awareness of the least visible people in the homelessness crisis: mothers with children. In

response to the family homelessness crisis and the larger crisis gripping the city, Win also developed a set of policy and legislative solutions aimed at breaking the cycle of homelessness by carefully addressing the factors that lead to homelessness and keep families from returning to shelter.

Beginning with a discussion of Win's advocacy efforts over the past year, *The Forgotten Face of Homeless Children* represents the second in a series of continued efforts. It dovetails from the discussion initiated in our first report from 2016, which concentrated on homeless mothers. This report is focused on the unique experiences of homeless children and



youth and the potential implications of the homelessness crisis for their life outcomes. The following pages offer a glimpse of the state of family homelessness in 2018, with an explicit focus on the experiences of homeless children. It also lays out Win's policy and advocacy plans for the upcoming year: promoting housing stability for homeless children. Our goal is to ensure we can break the cycle of homelessness by ensuring children and youth have a stable place to call home.

In 2017, nearly 67 percent of children in a Win shelter had been in shelter at some point before in their young lives. In fact, by the time a child comes to Win they may have already stayed at

three different unstable residences (shelter or otherwise).

This report tracks progress made on our previously identified policy priorities and proposes a new agenda to build on strides already made citywide. It also specifically presents an advocacy agenda and series of legislative pathways to address the challenges experienced by homeless young people, from early childhood to the teenage years. Working together, we can break the cycle of homelessness once and for all for multiple generations.

# POLICY SOLUTIONS: TRACKING PROGRESS

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*In October of 2016, Win proposed a series of policy solutions for increasing permanent housing for vulnerable families with children. A number of the proposals focused on mitigating the economic forces at play in family homelessness, while others worked to minimize and address trauma, and improve services for homeless families. Win has engaged in strategic advocacy efforts toward realizing these policy solutions.*

Win's advocacy work seeks to engage New Yorkers — including elected officials and legislators, community leaders, government agencies, social service providers, advocates, philanthropists and funders, and the community at large — in recognizing the Forgotten Face of Homelessness and advancing solutions to address the family homelessness crisis. Specifically, Win's advocacy seeks to increase the resources available to extremely low-income families striving to break the cycle of homelessness.

Win's advocacy has brought awareness and successful action to the need to: reform New York City's rental assistance program; close loopholes in New York State's rent regulation legislation; and comprehensive planning for sufficient shelters purpose built to meet the unique needs of families with children. The next pages set forth the milestones achieved over the past year, as well as emergent challenges that highlight the need for further efforts. Given the enduring nature of the homelessness crisis, each solution remains critical for ending the cycle of homelessness in an intergenerational way.



## Solutions to Mitigate Economic Forces

### Targeted Solution: LINC Reform

In 2016, Win recommended fundamentally reworking rent subsidies by **enhancing Living In Communities Initiative (LINC)**, New York City's rental assistance program launched by the de Blasio Administration to help homeless families move out of shelter and into permanent homes. Win advocacy efforts laid out the key rental subsidy elements proven to address family homelessness, while advancing efforts to enhance LINC with proven elements. To ensure the effectiveness of LINC, enhancements would:

- Allow qualifying families in need to renew LINC assistance beyond the five year limit (currently LINC

vouchers are set to expire after 5 years)

- Increase the assistance amount and allow annual increases to realistically reflect housing costs
- Allow time spent in foster care to satisfy the homelessness eligibility requirement so that youth aging out of foster care can access assistance without entering shelter.

### Win's results to date:

- Partnered to convene a City Council oversight hearing on family homelessness in June 2017, where LINC was a major part of the hearing
- Brought together elected officials, advocates, and service providers at a press conference on the steps of City Hall on the needs of homeless families
- Drafted Win's LINC reform

recommendations into two bills introduced to the City Council in 2017 and reintroduced in the new 2018 session (Intro. 148-2018 and Intro. 146-2018)

- Gained support for homeless families from City Council members. A majority of City Council members (35 and 22) signed on to the two respective LINC reform bills.
- Pushed the press to publish a multitude of earned media articles and op-eds informing New Yorkers on the need for LINC reform to ensure hundreds of families do not return to shelter at the expiration of the rental assistance program.

Thanks to Win legislative advocacy, New York City is undertaking the requisite process to enhance LINC. Through these enhancements, shelter time and use will be reduced by equipping families with rental assistance that allows them to find a home in New York City's real estate market without fear that an arbitrary time limit on assistance might lead them back to shelter. Enhancements will also ensure that New York's most vulnerable families, including young mothers aging out of foster care, will be eligible for assistance.

As the City advances reform efforts, Win will closely monitor implementation of enhanced LINC.

Win has also sought to revise LINC **to ensure immigrant families have access to needed rental assistance, regardless of the family's immigration status.** In recognition of the heightened vulnerability immigrant families navigate in the current political climate, expanding the limited public resources and assistance undocumented immigrant families can

access is a priority for many leaders. Drafting this policy solution into a bill has proven difficult due to potential legal challenges to the sought after provisions. Additionally, the importance of minimizing the risk of exposing families with undocumented immigrant status to government agencies undertaking wide sweeping actions and legal proceedings has complicated progress toward the proposed policy solution.

Despite these obstacles Win continues to develop solutions with legal experts to assess the plausibility of making rental assistance available to all immigrant families. Win will also continue to collaborate with legislators and other stakeholders in 2018 to formulate solutions that expand access to resources that attenuate the housing risks that documented and undocumented immigrant families are especially vulnerable to experiencing.

### **Targeted Solution: Protect Rent Regulated Units from Legislative Loopholes**

Win advocacy has brought the attention of policymakers to a loophole in current State law that allows apartments to be removed from rent regulation when rented to a non-profit organization. State policymakers have recognized that this depletes New York's already sparse affordable housing stock, while also driving up the cost of serving New Yorkers in need.

### **By partnering with policymakers and stakeholders, Win has accomplished important milestones toward closing rent regulation loopholes:**

- Recognition among policymakers

- of the loopholes and their impacts
- Draft and introduction of legislation in the New York State Assembly (bill number A826) co-sponsors: Assembly Members Cymbowitz, Harris, Sepulveda, Barron, Arroyo, Simon, Dickens, De La Rosa, DenDekker, Weinstein
- Introduction of a same-as bill in the New York State Senate (bill number S6653) by Senators Golden, Avella, Hamilton, Bonacic, Krueger

Win worked with partners and with members of the New York State Assembly and Senate to draft and introduce revisions to the Emergency Tenant Protection Act, New York's rent regulation and stabilization laws. Introduced in the New York State Assembly in June of 2017, the legislation to close the loophole currently has nine co-sponsors. An identical bill was introduced in the New York State Senate without revisions. Win will continue efforts to educate stakeholders and bring attention to the issue through continued collaboration with State legislators.

### **Solutions to minimize and address trauma and improve services for homeless families with children**

#### **Targeted Solution: Construct Shelters Designed for Families with Children**

In October of 2016, Win called for New York City's leadership to articulate a **comprehensive plan to build an adequate supply of shelters designed for families with children**, while continuing to **phase out the use of cluster housing and commercial hotels**.

In February 2017, Mayor de Blasio publicly committed to such a plan with the release of *Turning the Tide on Homelessness*, the Administration's report on the homelessness crisis and strategies for addressing it. *Turning the Tide* commits to construction of **90 new shelters over five years, 40 percent of which have been set aside specifically for families with children**. Win was instrumental in securing this agreement. **The Mayor also committed to end all use of clusters and hotels to shelter homeless families**. The Administration has stated that in the eight months since committing to 90 new shelters, six new, quality sites were created.<sup>1</sup>

**Win advocacy played a central role in shaping the de Blasio Administration's plan for addressing the homelessness crisis.** The strategies in the plan ensure that homeless families have access to shelters that offer the safety, service space, and community integration they need to rebuild their lives. By expanding NYC's Tier II family shelter capacity, families will no longer need to be placed in often dangerous, underserved, and expensive commercial hotels and cluster housing.

# CHILD HOMELESSNESS IN NEW YORK CITY

*New York City continues to grapple with a homelessness crisis. On any given night, more than 23,000 children go to bed in a New York City homeless shelter.<sup>2</sup> Homeless children currently represent over 60 percent of New Yorkers in homeless family shelters.<sup>3</sup> The number of students who are homeless has reached an all-time high, with one in 10 students in New York City public schools experiencing homelessness during the 2016–2017 school year.<sup>4</sup> Based on current trends, it is estimated that one in seven students will experience homelessness before reaching the fifth grade.<sup>5</sup> Yet the homelessness discussion and service system does not recognize the unique needs of children growing up without a consistent place to call home.*

Win is the largest provider of shelter for families in New York City. Approximately 10 percent of the City’s homeless children go to bed in a Win shelter every night. Last year, Win sheltered nearly 4,700 children and more than half (about 56 percent) of Win clients were children under the age of 18. About one in three children in Win shelter are under the age of five and the remaining 66 percent were school aged (age 5 to 18). On average, a child and their family will spend over a year (approximately 14 months) in a Win shelter before leaving with their family

to permanent housing.

## Housing Experiences of Homeless Children

ABOUT  
**1 IN 3**  
CHILDREN  
IN WIN SHELTER  
ARE UNDER  
**THE AGE OF 5**  
AND THE REMAINING  
66% WERE SCHOOL  
AGED (AGE 5 TO 18).

**The majority of children in Win shelter knew housing instability and homelessness before arriving at Win.**

About 57 percent of children came to Win right after sharing a home with friends, family, or with others (living “doubled-up”) and nearly 11 percent of children came to Win directly from a homeless

shelter. Taken together, this means that **nearly seven out of ten children at a Win shelter have already experienced**

HOMELESS CHILDREN CURRENTLY REPRESENT **OVER 60%**  
OF NEW YORKERS IN HOMELESS FAMILY SHELTERS.

**housing instability.** In 2017 alone, 3,000 children at Win had been at a homeless shelter at some point in their lives already. This represents approximately 67 percent of children at Win. For many homeless children and youth, housing instability and homelessness are not only prolonged experiences, they are also repeated.

An alarming number of children are experiencing multiple moves in less than a year, facing the uncertainty of whether another shelter move is a day away. At Win, about 785 children (about 17 percent of all children at Win) had been in shelter less than a year earlier.

**The vast majority of Win families who entered shelter more than once in 2017 had involuntarily exited because they were initially found ineligible for shelter services.** These families were then found eligible when returning to the City's shelter intake process.

Housing instability experienced by children and youth in shelter can have short-term and long-term effects on their education and their lives.

### Housing Instability and Child and Youth Outcomes

Stable housing is a prerequisite for children to have the predictability they need to grow.<sup>6</sup> Predictability in day-to-day routines and in relationships and interactions creates a sense of safety that allows children to explore. Learning and socio-emotional development take place through this exploration, which is supported by stable housing.<sup>7</sup> Frequent changes in housing disrupt the consistency children rely on for safety and learning. In this way, prolonged, repeated housing instability can stymie the healthy socio-emotional and cognitive development of children with implications and success in school and in life.

Furthermore, chronic homelessness has been linked to mental health problems in younger children<sup>8</sup>, particularly internalizing disorders, such as anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal.<sup>9</sup> Research found that only 75 percent of homeless children reported having a close friend, compared to 95 percent of housed children.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, 48 percent of homeless children had not spent any

Nearly 3,000 children in Win shelter in 2017 had been in a homeless shelter at some point before in their young lives. This represents approximately 67 percent of children at Win.



**NEARLY 7 OUT OF 10 CHILDREN CAME TO A WIN SHELTER  
NOT HAVING HAD A HOME OF THEIR OWN FOR A WHILE.**

time with friends over the previous week.

As children advance into their school age years, housing instability frequently causes a high rate of school mobility with implications for academic outcomes. Students living in shelter experience higher rates of mid-year school transfers across all grades. During elementary school, they often transfer schools at least two times during the school year. Students who experience homelessness and school mobility show significantly more problems engaging with tasks, teachers, and peers.<sup>11</sup> Homelessness is closely linked to chronic absenteeism, defined by the New York City Department of Education as missing 18 or more days of school,<sup>12</sup> and is linked to lower grades and test scores. **According to the New York City Independent Budget Office, 62 percent of students living in shelter were chronically absent from school (2015–16 school year),** compared to 24 percent of permanently housed students.<sup>13</sup>

**Among third through eighth grade students living in shelter, only 15 percent scored proficient in reading and only 12 percent scored proficient in math on standardized tests.**<sup>14</sup> The negative effects of homelessness on academic outcomes continue into high school and beyond, including a decrease in the likelihood of enrollment in postsecondary education.<sup>15</sup>

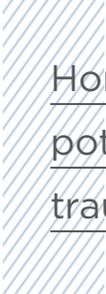
In adolescence, a time when strong peer relationships are central to healthy development,<sup>16</sup> an increased number of housing moves is linked to an increase in adjustment problems,<sup>17</sup> and homeless teens have been found to suffer from higher rates of unmet mental health needs. In New York City, homeless youth report higher rates of depression than housed youth (34.5 percent, compared to 28.4 percent) and are much more likely to attempt suicide (13.3 percent of homeless youth reported a suicide attempt, compared to 5.8 percent of housed youth).<sup>18</sup> The effects of

Stable housing is a prerequisite for children and youth to have the predictability they need to grow and flourish.<sup>6</sup>

homelessness on adolescents may linger beyond the time they are homeless, with researchers finding that teens presented more behavior problems and more chronic school absence nearly two years after leaving homelessness.<sup>19</sup>

potentially traumatic conflict and disruptions, as well as traumatic levels of toxic stress.

Homeless children share the traumatic experience of losing their homes and entering the homelessness services system. Homeless families are disproportionately likely to experience



Homeless children are at an increased risk of experiencing potentially traumatic conflict and disruptions, as well as traumatic levels of toxic stress.

### **Homeless Children, Toxic Stress, and Trauma**

Homeless children are at an elevated risk for experiencing toxic stress through strong, frequent or prolonged adversity and traumatic circumstances.<sup>20</sup> The potential effects of trauma and toxic stress on children are well documented. Stress causes a physiological chemical response, putting the individual in an alerted state. When stress is toxic, this chemical response can disrupt the development of brain architecture and increase the risk for cognitive impairment and stress-related diseases.<sup>21</sup>

Trauma is recognized to be an event or series of events that create a sense of fear or helplessness that overwhelms a person's ability to cope and can reshape a person's behavior, ability to feel safe and in control, and even their overall perception of themselves and of the world.<sup>22</sup> Homeless children are at an increased risk of experiencing

involvement with multiple systems, notably the child welfare system. Just over half of the investigations conducted by New York City's child welfare agency took place in the 15 districts where the majority of homeless families resided prior to homelessness.<sup>23</sup> Among families in a Win shelter, over 22 percent have had an open child welfare case at some point. Involvement with systems such as child welfare and homeless services can be traumatic because it subjects families to investigations, scrutiny, and heightened rules, even though the priority is always child safety. It can also lead to the feared or actual loss of critical relationships. National studies have found that 44 percent of homeless families had experienced a child separation.<sup>24</sup>

Homeless children experience high levels of economic adversity. The vast majority of Win families are extremely low-income, meaning they live in New York City with an income below \$23,300 a year. Severely rent



burdened families with children in the lower income brackets face difficult trade-offs in meeting basic needs. For example, research has found that rent burdened, low-income families spend 75 percent less on healthcare than similar families in affordable housing.<sup>25</sup> Before entering shelter, the majority of homeless families resided in high poverty neighborhoods. In 2015, 60 percent of homeless families with children came from only 15 of New York City's 59 community districts.<sup>26</sup> The average poverty rate across these 15 community districts was about 30 percent in 2015, significantly higher than the city-wide poverty rate of about 19 percent, and five percent of the community had poverty rates about double the city-wide average. Exposure to above average levels of community economic deprivation and concentrated poverty compounds homeless children's experiences of material hardship.

There is also a disproportionate risk of exposure to violence in the districts in which homeless families are most likely to live. The average rate of violent felonies committed in these 15 community districts was approximately 8.5 per 1,000 individuals, nearly double the city-wide rate of about 4.6. An elevated likelihood of experiencing domestic violence also exists, as many of the districts with the highest rates of domestic violence also have the highest rates of family homelessness.<sup>27</sup> The reasons Win families report for becoming homeless also reveal potentially traumatic conflict. Nearly 26 percent of families reported becoming homeless due to domestic discord, and 10.7 percent reported domestic violence to be the direct cause of their homelessness.

# CHILDREN'S CONTEXT: FAMILY HOMELESSNESS IN NEW YORK CITY

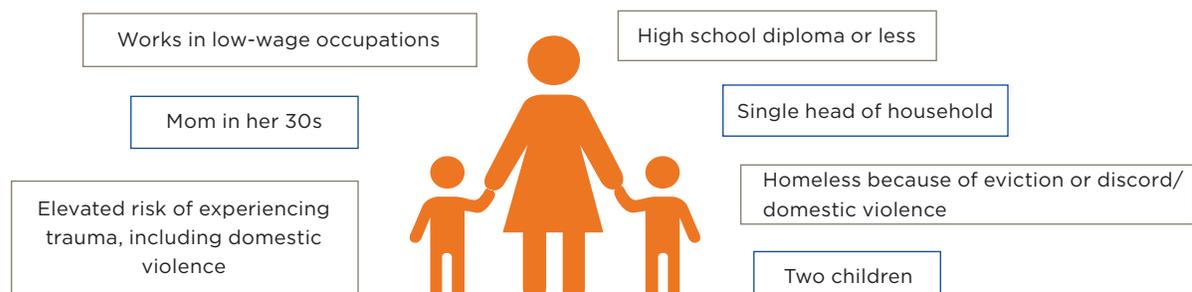
*New York City continues to grapple with a homelessness crisis. On an average night last year, a record 12,800 families<sup>28</sup> with more than 23,100 children<sup>29</sup> went to bed in the City's homeless shelters. The new record high reflects a **six percent increase** from 2016 to 2017<sup>30</sup> in the number of homeless families with children in shelter. At least 730 more families with children were homeless on an average night in 2017 than in 2016. The crisis continues, and it continues to be one that impacts families with children the most. On any given night, nearly 70 percent of New Yorkers in shelter are in families with children.*

The post-recession income gains that have eased hardship for many families have not reached very low- and extremely low-income families. Compounding the challenges of lagging wages, housing in New York City's real estate market is as unaffordable as ever for families living in poverty. There has been an 18

percent increase in the median gross rent vs. a six percent increase in the median household income for renters.

Mayor de Blasio and his administration made commendable efforts to improve, expand, and put in place interventions that aim to prevent and address homelessness. The

## THE TYPICAL WIN FAMILY



Administration has revamped the Homebase program to more effectively provide neighborhood based services that help families stay in their homes and avoid evictions and subsequent homelessness. The recently launched program providing free legal representation in housing court is also helping low-income families avoid eviction, one of the leading, immediate causes of homelessness. Rental assistance programs launched during the Mayor's tenure have become more effective at helping families leave shelter and stay in permanent homes.

Despite these efforts, the number of homeless New York City families with children continues to grow.

### The Average Win Family

The average Win family is headed by a mom with about a \$1,330 a month income in 2017, approximately the same income as in 2016. With annual income below \$23,300, Win families meet the criteria for extremely low-income. Approximately 20 percent of Win moms continued their education beyond high school, but the vast majority (80.5 percent) are heading a family with a

high school diploma or less. Win moms most frequently have work experience in the retail, home health care, food service, customer service, and cleaning/maintenance industries.

Historically, eviction has been the leading, immediate cause of homelessness reported by Win families when applying for shelter at New York City's intake and application center for homeless services. In 2017, the number of families indicating conflict as the reason for homelessness increased, placing it with eviction as a leading cause Win families need shelter.

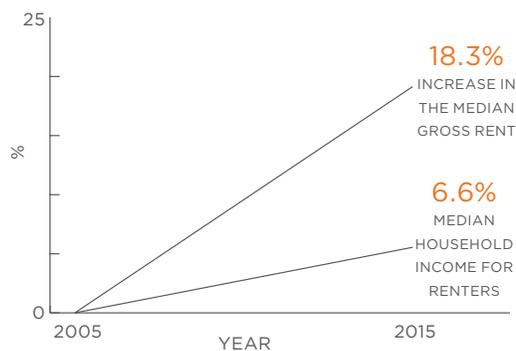
Eviction was reported by 26.6 percent of Win families, and **36.8 percent reported conflict, which is comprised of families reporting discord\* (26.1 percent) and families indicating domestic violence (10.7 percent).**

The other main reported reason for homelessness in 2017 was overcrowding (15.6 percent).

### Economic Forces at Play in Family Homelessness: 2017

New York City's **lowest-income families have been left behind** by the 2008-2009 recession recovery. Despite

### CHANGES IN INCOME AND RENT



Source: NYU Furman Center (June 2017) 2016 Focus: Poverty in New York City

increased employment, the average Win family has not benefited from the wage gains seen in many sectors:

- Nationally, average household income for the poorest fifth of households fell by \$571 from 2006–2016.<sup>31</sup>
- In NYC, many of the occupational groups that Win moms are most likely to be employed in, including healthcare support and food preparation and service, experienced below average wage growth or even wage loss through 2017.<sup>32</sup>
- Wage loss is most acute for women, with researchers finding that median income of women stopped growing in the 1990s.<sup>33</sup>
- Median income decreased or barely increased in the NYC community districts where the majority of families in shelter resided before becoming homeless.<sup>34</sup>

Meanwhile, **rents continue to increase in New York City and the affordable housing stock continues to shrink.**

Despite observable development of new apartments and efforts to preserve and grow the affordable housing portfolio, the number

of available apartments that are affordable to extremely low-income families continues to decrease.

- 83.3 percent of renters in the NYC metro with incomes similar to Win families were rent burdened, with nearly 61 percent spending at least half of their income on rent.<sup>35</sup>
- In 2010, 11.2 percent of rental units financed by the Federal Home Loan Corporation Freddie Mac were categorized as affordable to very low-income households. Of those same units financed again in 2016, only 4.3 percent remained affordable.<sup>36</sup>
- With a recent shift in renter demographics, higher income renters occupy 43 percent of the most affordable units.<sup>37</sup>
- HUD estimates that even with rental assistance, 6 of 10 extremely low-income renters do not have access to an affordable apartment.<sup>38</sup>

### SHORTAGE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING



Advocates estimate that only **35** affordable apartments are available per **100** extremely low-income renters in New York

Source: National Low Income Housing Coalition (March 2017) *The Gap: A shortage of affordable homes.*

# POLICY SOLUTIONS 2018: PROMOTING STABILITY FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN

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*Win is committed to fixing the problems surrounding family homelessness by advocating and fighting for policy solutions that make housing affordable for extremely low-income families, while expanding and connecting families to appropriate community and shelter based social services.*

**It is imperative that New York City takes action to bring stability for homeless children. Win identifies three specific areas that can make a difference:**

- **Addressing trauma and instability of children before they enter shelter**
- **Expanding and developing services that prioritize the needs of children during homelessness and time in shelter**
- **Connecting families to necessary services to prevent returning to shelter, including creating housing affordability and aftercare**

## **Addressing trauma and instability of children before they enter shelter**

### **Review and update the City's family intake process to ensure greater stability for children and youth before they enter shelter:**

Given the repeated and often unnecessary experiences of families applying for shelter, the City must evaluate its intake process to gain a fuller understanding of the barriers to eligibility and to streamline processes to better meet the needs of homeless children. Strategies for greater efficiencies and transparencies during the intake process for shelter are needed to minimize trauma and instability caused by multiple entries into the shelter system. This can reduce the number of families with children that are found ineligible for services only to have to return to PATH shortly after and be found eligible upon reapplication, thereby cycling in and out of the system.

### **Continue focus to reduce workloads for ACS workers in highest-risk neighborhoods**

Win commends the city's efforts and success in reducing caseloads of ACS workers citywide. As noted in the report, more than half of child welfare investigations conducted in NYC take place in the 15 community districts where the majority of families reside before becoming homeless. Therefore, a continued focus on these neighborhoods is warranted. Expanded resources are also needed to increase preventive services to maximize the safety and well-

being of children and youth at risk of homelessness.

## **Expanding and developing services that prioritize the needs of children during homelessness and time in shelter**

### **THE THRIVE INITIATIVE: Expanding specialized shelter staff to provide comprehensive services targeted towards children**

The launch of First Lady Chirlane McCray's Thrive Initiative makes true progress in providing homeless families mental health services and support. This will help them achieve and maintain housing stability and address historic trauma.

To truly make this program successful we need to expand Thrive to include and require shelter-based Licensed Clinical Social Workers specialized in at-risk children and youth. With adequate support and staff, the initiative has the potential to address trauma, and provide appropriate therapeutic services.

### **SCHOOL BASED SUPPORTS: More than double school-based licensed social workers to meet social-emotional needs of homeless children and youth.**

The City should more than double the number of school-based social workers in schools with the highest proportion of homeless students to 100 (currently 43). The goal is to provide ongoing intensive support to children and youth who are displaced and to mitigate the negative impact on educational and social-emotional

outcomes.

Given the well-documented correlation between housing instability, trauma and poor educational outcomes, greater attention and resources are warranted to meet the needs of homeless students. Win will continue to work with key partners and leading advocates to ensure that the City increases investments in critical support school-based services for homeless children and youth.

**ATTENDANCE SUPPORTS: Help students stay on track in school with attendance supports provided through strengthened collaboration between schools and homeless service providers.**

Homeless students must overcome numerous obstacles to attend school and maintain their learning and academic attainment. To help students overcome obstacles, innovative models that provide individualized, wrap around attendance supports based on real time data and on the ground collaboration between schools and homeless service providers are key to keeping homeless students in school and on track.

**ART AND SCIENCE BASED SERVICE MODELS: Increase funding for proven creative art and science-based service models system-wide that strengthen the coping skills of homeless children and youth.**

Greater focus needs to be given to the vital role the arts and science can play in developing coping skills for children and youth across the spectrum. Art-based curriculum in either child care,

after school and other extracurricular models and activities holds the potential to build resiliency during the formidable years of homeless children and youth in living in family shelter. Through strategic partnerships with arts and cultural institutions, Win has worked on promising models that allow for creative expression. Win will continue to work with partners to increase awareness and advocate for resources for these often overlooked services.

In addition, the city has had great success with SONYC - that provides shelter-based after school programming utilizing STEM and STEAM curriculums that meet the needs of homeless children and youth. This program should be expanded to all shelters.

**DATA SHARING: Improving access to data, beginning with implementation of case management technology across agencies serving families and children.**

Limited and incomplete client histories and information hamstringing the ability of service providers to effectively assess family and children's needs and respond with tailored, holistic services. Through case management technology that spans multiple public agencies, providers can access the information needed to make effective service offerings.

Greater access to data is imperative not only to better serve homeless children and their families, but to also reduce the trauma often associated with homelessness. Better integration of data allows for a more



comprehensive account of families' needs without requiring families to repeatedly report information they've shared already.

Moreover, greater data access will allow for improved client outcomes through rigorous analyses that allow for predictive models that can point to the most effective service interventions that lead to stable housing.

**HIGHER EDUCATION: Expand access to higher education for homeless moms and youth (through a partnership with higher education institutions).**

Postsecondary educational attainment increases a person's earning potential

and prospects for the future, and is strongly linked to positive life outcomes for their children. Unfortunately, the vast majority of homeless moms have not completed schooling past high school, and homeless youth are at an elevated risk of not going college. Win will work with higher education institutions to set up a pilot initiative at a Win shelter that links homeless moms and youth to higher education opportunities through a dedicated recruitment program. This program will not only help with the application process, but will create targeted support systems to ease with the transition through the first year of college.

**INCOME BUILDING: Improve child and youth outcomes by building the**

**financial capacity of their parents and caregivers.**

To increase child stability, greater investments are needed to expand proven employment and training programs across the family shelter system. These models build the capacity of homeless mothers to truly break the cycle of homelessness. Win's unique Income-building program, for instance, has demonstrated success of connecting clients with employment in sectors known to improve income and sustainability of employment. These programmatic success have been possible due to strategic and public and private partnership.

**TIER II SHELTERS: Implementing a comprehensive plan to build Tier II shelters to phase out use of clusters and hotels, which lack the safety and services homeless children need.**

The Mayor's commitment to build 90 new shelters with 40 percent earmarked for families with children is a major step toward ending the inappropriate use of clusters and hotels. To ensure new shelters meet the needs of homeless children, space and staffing must provide for holistic services, including specialized child care and recreation, therapeutic activities, and mental health services.

**Connecting families to necessary services to prevent returning to shelter, including creating housing affordability and aftercare**

**Prevent repeated disruption for children by supporting housing stability of formerly homeless families in their new community,**

**through:**

**AFTERCARE: Provide one year of aftercare that is focused on families and the needs of children when they leave shelter.**

Aftercare currently provided through the HomeBase homelessness prevention program treats single adults and families with children as interchangeable. Currently, there is no family focused aftercare. Effective aftercare for families must respond to the unique needs of children and youth and include one year of continued case management and individual support from the family's care team. This ensures children experience continuity in the transition to a new permanent home, while also supporting long-term housing stability.

Given the alarming number of children who experience repeated episodes of homelessness, supporting families through the transition out of shelter and during the pivotal first year in their new home is critical to ensuring longer-term housing stability. Transition planning must begin before leaving shelter and include referrals to and follow-up on social services in the family's new community.

**CHILD CARE: Dedicated pool of subsidies for child care seats for homeless and recently homeless children.**

In order to ensure homeless and previously homeless families have access to quality child care outside of shelter, a dedicated pool of subsidies must be set aside so homeless children are categorically eligible. Additionally, child care seats, and when necessary vouchers, should be prioritized to

ensure currently and recently homeless children have care when they move into a community.

Child care provides children continuity and stability. It also allows moms to maintain employment.

In 2017, new rules were put into effect placing shelter-based child care under the purview of NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Win advocated on behalf of rules that meet the needs of homeless families, and will assess implementation of rules to ensure the same.

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING: Creating housing affordability.**

The existing shortage of housing affordable to very and extremely low-income families is a major cause of housing instability for vulnerable children. Subsidies that help families bridge the affordability gap are proven tools for gaining and maintaining a stable housing foothold.

**Expand and improve the housing subsidies available to NYC's more vulnerable homeless families with children by:**

**Serving all families indiscriminately.**

The LINC program is not currently available to all homeless families, including families who would be eligible for assistance but for their undocumented immigration status. Scarcity of housing assistance and resources puts these vulnerable children at elevated risk for prolonged, insurmountable housing instability.

**Make development of affordable, appropriate units for extremely low income families with children viable by deepening subsidies for HPD's Extremely Low & Low-Income Affordability Program.**

The Mayor wisely increased investment in the HPD administered Extremely Low & Low-Income Affordability (ELLA) Program and announced that 40 percent of units will be set aside for homeless families with children as part of his affordable housing plan. To realize the potential of this investment, subsidies are needed to expand the development of units affordable for extremely low-income families.

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Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness  
for Women and their Children

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