



# OUR STORY

## *It all starts with mothers...*

As the largest provider of family shelter in New York, we at Win know intimately the vital work of mothering. In fact, 90% of our heads of household are mothers; 77% of them, single mothers. They remind us every day that to raise a child is a labor of love- but also of time, money, resources, and so much more.


That work has been rendered almost invisible throughout history. [According to the US Department of Labor](#), employment-related costs for mothers providing unpaid care is estimated around \$295,000 over a lifetime. Although society's progression relies on people having children, the labor involved in raising a child has been consistently ignored, devalued, and undersupported by the government.

This is a problem because mothering is expensive. In 2021, the NYC Comptroller estimated that childcare alone costs over \$20,000 per year for an infant - about \$1,760 per month. Beyond that, the informal economy and care work (of which women, particularly women of color, make up the vast majority) offers no economic protections for child rearing such as parental leave at this critical time.

As a result of those and other pressures, [pregnancy is one of the strongest predictors of homelessness](#). In 2019, homelessness expert Beth Shinn found that the age at which someone is most likely to enter shelter in the US is infancy. At Win, more than 20% of clients living in transitional housing are children under five years old.

This expresses itself differentially among communities. Since the 1980's, academics have understood homelessness to be also strongly intertwined with race and racism. In fact, at Win, 94% of women heads of households are women of color.






## *Enter the pandemic...*

In 2020, when the pandemic shifted the ground under our feet, people from different ethnic, social and economic backgrounds shared an unprecedented and frightening experience. It became obvious that we were in the same storm, but not in the same boat.

Disparities in susceptibility to severe illness, essentiality in our workforce, access to the luxury of safety, ability to work and school remotely, income buffer to cope with emergencies, etc. illuminated how people's different contexts and needs affect their lives. The disproportionate impact of the pandemic among people living in NYC shelters translated into higher mortality rates compared to the overall population and lower move out rates.

As congregate settings and schools closed down and many people Zoomed into their co-workers' houses, the invisible work of caretaking was suddenly on full display. The socioeconomic disparities around who shouldered the disproportionate burden of mothering were put into stark relief.

The world opened its eyes to many problems and, therefore, its arms to new solutions- including ones that seemed out of reach only a short time before. The positive response to stimulus checks, expanded Child Tax Credits, and eviction moratoriums paved the way for a conversation that has been circling American society since its inception: guaranteed income.







## *An opportunity...*

2020 was also a catalyst for innovative action. During this year the Win team and partners started to explore guaranteed income solutions to imagine a better future. We sprung into action to support those who we recognize as the most impacted in our shelters: mothers and babies. We did what women have been doing since the dawn of time and we created our village.

Harnessing the work experts in the field have been doing since 2019, Win brought together a diverse team of mostly mothers to collaborate on a novel program design. Social workers to navigate the landscape, designers to provide program strategy, researchers to measure program impact, and policymakers to influence legislation.

But, most importantly, Win brought to the team mothers who have lived experience going through shelter with their babies. The expertise of these consultants was incorporated into all aspects of program design and planning. When asked what would assist mothering in shelter, and ultimately help families leave shelter faster they unequivocally said “cash and community”.

From there, the Growing Strong cash plus peers model was born. Families receive both guaranteed income and the support of an assigned peer who has gone through the same crisis, to offer perspective and guidance. While the power of guaranteed income is absolutely transformative, mothers in shelter deserve support beyond money to be able to change narratives and empower themselves to self-determine and self-advocate.

We now have a team of Growing Strong Peers with lived experience, trained to support our participants through the program and the isolating experience of mothering in shelter. We believe that offering material and emotional resources as well as mutual trust will allow participants to mother in the way they want and deserve. This will have reverberating effects on communities and generations to come.

*Because it all starts with mothers.*