Urban Homelessness among Families:

NYC Department of Homeless Homebase Program

Liza Bauzo-Nieves

New York City College of Technology

Abstract

This paper explores the topic of urban homelessness among families and why it is important. The New York City (NYC) Department of Homeless Services (DHS) is attempting to aid with this issue through its Homebase Program. The program has incorporated a targeted group. The impact this program will have on the targeted group will be addressed. This paper displays the barriers and challenges to tackling familial urban homelessness. The references examined will explain the views of researchers and experts, as well as potential interventions. Stakeholders will be identified with cause of interest. Policy recommendations will also be discussed. The shelter system no longer seems to be a suitable solution for homelessness. The issue requires more than a temporary adjustment.

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**Introduction**

Homebase is a program that began in 2004 to assist people with preventing homelessness. With locations throughout NYC, you can seek help with keeping your home, moving elsewhere, obtaining a job, attending school, emergency funds, and other government benefits (NYC Department of Homeless Services, 2016, para. 1-2). Homeless individuals aren’t the only people in need of this aid. Families in New York City are increasingly becoming homeless.

**Importance**

Urban homeless among families is a topic worth discussing. According to the New York City Department of Homeless Services Daily Report for June 23rd2016, the shelter census numbers for families with children was at 12,360. Adult families had a census of 4,905 individuals (2016, p. 1). These statistics are accurate for those entering the shelter system, there is no representation for the families without homes who decide to stay elsewhere for the night. As you walk through the streets of New York City, donation requests from homeless individuals is saddening. This dilemma is effecting us all. As registered nurses, whether working in hospitals, in clinics, or doing outreach, clients are increasingly homeless. We must learn of the psychosocial and physical health issues that are commonly found within this population.

**Targeted Group**

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, the United States encounters homelessness within LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender), veteran, elderly, youth groups, and families (“Issues,” 2014). The Homebase Program however, is geared specifically to low income New Yorkers confronted with a residential impasse.

**Group Descriptions**

**Low income adults**. The NYC Housing Development Corporation (2016) defines low income as an individual making $25,400-$38,100 annually. For a family of four, the annual income limits are from $36,240-$54,360 (“Income Eligibility,” 2016).

**Children.** Homeless youth are defined by the National Coalition for the Homeless as people younger than 18 years of age without a form of caretaking (“Issues,” 2014). Another way to define children is an individual less than eighteen who is with their caretaker, but without a home.

**Impact for Targeted Groups**

**Low-income adults.** Without a stable home environment, low income adults will lose their jobs. The struggles of being homeless such as having a place to bathe, eat, clean, iron, and store clothing, makes job maintenance virtually impossible.If you need a place to stay or food to eat, your health status is no longer a priority.

**Children.** According to Crean (2016), homelessness creates serious suffering for homeless children, making them vulnerable to further damage. The tendency to develop psychological and physical obstacles is problematic. There is interference with their friendships which impedes their social progression. In addition, it may be difficult to maintain regular consumption of food which leads to poor development (Crean, 2016, para. 2).

**Challenges and Barriers**

According to the Coalition for the Homeless, the main reason for homelessness is due to unaffordable housing (“Proven Solutions,” 2014, para. 7). This is a challenge to combat because these buildings take time and money to be built. In a lottery scenario, only a small percentage of those who have applied are actually selected. Also, by the time they are selected, they may have already been in the shelter system for over a year. Instead of converting existing affordable housing to condominiums and coops, they should remain as affordable housing.

According to United to End Homelessness (2016), one of the barriers to ending homelessness is the lack of acknowledging those in New York City displaced from Hurricane Sandy (“The Platform,” 2016, para. 2). Some of these victims lost their houses, belongings, and as a result, their employment. The assistance they needed would have lasted a lengthy duration of time. If you aren’t giving recognition to all groups suffering from homelessness, you cannot thoroughly address the issue.

NYC.gov gets to the root of the problem. Insufficient aid keeps the homeless without a home. People enter the shelter system and exit without the tools necessary to stay out of the shelter (“Prevent Homelessness,” 2016, para. 1). There will continue to be challenges with homeless re-entering shelters as long as they aren’t provided with all necessities for self-sustenance.

A barrier that is difficult when attempting to combat homelessness is the lack of wanting shelter. Some people have lived on the streets their entire lives and do not want to have to go to a shelter to get housing. Shelters for individual adults can be scary. A combination of people trying to steal what you may have left, people with mental conditions, and tuberculosis may cause people to prefer the streets over these living conditions.

**Search of the Literature**

In order to understand homelessness, a racial aspect mustn’t be ignored. According to Carter (2011), Blacks have appeared to be the predominant homeless group. Blacks however, have been represented excessively. Whites tend to go from state to state while homeless and Blacks have been found to remain in the same city (p. 33). This once again reiterates the barrier of misrepresentation of the homeless population. If it is unseen, how can this demographic be heard and properly assisted.

Another aspect of homelessness that hasn’t been mentioned is the homeless student. Within families, there are typically students struggling in one manner or another. According to Miller (2011), a holistic approach is best for assisting students who are being faced with homelessness (p. 308). School is stressful enough by itself, being homeless and dealing with frequent relocation must be challenging.

One of the obstacles facing the problem of homeless families are the various concerns dealing with each group effected. According to Bredensteiner (2010), these problems include documentation of existence, substance addiction and mental health care issues, and former prisoner security (Working to eliminate, p. 1-3). For women who may escape from a dangerous partner with her children, she may not have proper identification necessary to gain financial or living support. Addiction to alcohol or drugs may lead to losing identification or paperwork necessary to return to work. In addition, it doesn’t look appealing to have an employment gap on a resume. The same situation is present for a prisoner. Most facilities perform background checks that make housing or employment virtually impossible. Hopefully we can get them medical assistance meanwhile.

The Kaiser Commission speaks of the expected alarming increase in Medicaid recipients. We must prepare for the numbers of people who will have access to Medicaid in the years to come. Who will care for this homeless population? According to Bredensteiner (2010), offering incentives for primary care providers to serve the homeless communities will be a virtue (Anticipating the promise, p. 4).

According to Olivet, Bassuk, Elstad, Kenney & Jassil (2010), outreach is beneficial to health and housing results. With the continuity of observing and evaluating this intervention, only then will the care for homeless families be appropriately provided (p. 69).

**Potential Interventions**

According to Cunningham (2016), a resolution for veterans is to make a plan for housing and job search assistance. The least that can be done for those who offered their lives for our country is to ensure that they have a suitable place to stay with a support system.

Personally, I feel that the best mechanism to assist with ending homelessness is the return of Section 8. New York City had success with section 8 housing assistance in the past. If they brought this system back, many of the low-income, but working, families would have a suitable place to live. Homelessness is scary for a family, especially when infants or small children are involved. They shouldn’t have to be forced into a shelter when their parents are responsible enough to keep a job.

According to Crean (2016), the focus would be on the crisis within the family. As opposed to the majority of ideas which offer temporary assistance that fails to truly help, he wants to offer coaching (Crean, 2016, para. 2). When the correct mechanisms are utilized, people can help themselves.

Another intervention should be that of security within the shelter system. There are horror stories of what goes on in these shelters. If they weren’t so intimidating and hazardous, more people would be off the street. It is easier to give the advice to go to a shelter when you, yourself haven’t had to spend a night or two in such an unsafe environment.

The interventions that the Homebase Program does not provide for should also be discussed. There is a large population of people living with HIV/AIDS who have been stigmatized and are on the street without aid. Those of the LGBT community may require assistance as well. Although gay men may have less difficulty renting and finding employment than the other groups, all will face additional judgement prior to receiving these essentials. Homeless veterans are a large population. Many of them return from war physically or mentally disabled and require assistance to maintain. They may even have become addicted to pain medications due to treatment for injuries obtained while serving our country. It is sad to know that these people fought for our lives and we walk past them when they ask for money on the streets. Housing needs to be provided for all of these groups as well as families.

**Stakeholders**

The stakeholders are generally the parties with some sort of investment in a plan. For the NYC Homebase Program, many can benefit.The City itself invests in homeless prevention. Health wise, city hospitals pay for homeless who may just want a day inside and a hot meal served. Instead of paying for a hospital bed, you can invest in prevention services and lose much less financially. The less people on the streets, the more people are available to work and make money for the city.

Another stakeholder is the average person, who at any time, can become that homeless individual. Taxes are taken out of pay to invest in such programs. Should any tax payer come across a crisis, it is of their best interest that an intervention to prevent homelessness can be enacted.

The Partners and sponsors of the Coalition for the Homeless have become stakeholders in the Homebase Program. According to the Coalition for the Homeless (2014), there is a school of law, other colleges, and internship partners who aid in the issues. Many big name corporations have also provided assistance (Sponsors and Partners, 2014).

The most important stakeholder is the client themselves. The low-income facing homelessness are in dire need to benefit from this program. Should they prove the program to be effective, other states will take on the same initiative in hopes for a change. Most importantly, more families can prevent homelessness.

**Policy Recommendations**

There are several policy recommendations that may assist in ending homelessness. According to the Coalition for the Homeless (2016), New York City Housing Assistance (NYCHA), HPD (Housing Preservation and Development), and Section 8 should supply long-term housing (State of the homeless, 2016, para. 9). For those being evicted from housing, an attorney should be provided (State of the homeless, 2016, para. 14). The shelter system is known to be unsafe, so these facilities should be regulated and inspected. This will prevent many favoring life on the streets (State of the homeless, 2016, para. 15).

The Coalition for Homeless also addresses what the State of New York needs to address. Places specifically for the youth need financial backing (State of the homeless, 2016, para. 20). The homeless with mental or physical conditions need funding for placement as well (State of the homeless, 2016, para. 17). The rental rates in New York need to become more affordable. A program that can advocate for the client’s needs holistically should also be developed.

**Summary and Conclusions**

In conclusion, the Homebase program for the homeless families in New York City is a wonderful idea. There are many challenges to solving the problem of homelessness in this urban setting, but some efforts have been made to assist the issue. The children are important to our future and without their well-being being cared for, they will not be capable to take care of our nation. Family values instilled in the youth are important to their development and without proper support, they will be left behind. With the over-crowding of the urban New York City setting, it is easy to have difficulty surviving. With more affordable housing, NYCHA assistance, eviction prevention, and employment assistance, there is hope. The government needs to put funds toward prevention of eviction and safer shelters. In order to perform the research needed to obtain grants, each group of individuals effected by the homeless crisis should be evaluated. The concept of permanence can’t be stressed enough. The issue requires more than a temporary adjustment.

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