



MINIMIZE DISRUPTION TO FAMILIES WHO EXPERIENCE HOMELESSNESS

THE CHALLENGE

The reasons that families approach the city for assistance are as diverse as they are complicated. Yet the historic response to almost any type of housing instability has been shelter. This “one size fits all” reliance on shelter has come at a particularly high cost to children, who are pulled away from their communities, their friends, and their schools.

Nowhere is this more obvious than at the Emergency Assistance Unit (EAU), the family intake center located in the South Bronx. Crowded conditions and late night busing to one-night shelters, for example, take a toll on thousands of families applying for shelter each year.

Throughout the years, the push and pull of well-meaning court orders and administrative policies has created an intake process that does not meet the needs of at-risk and homeless families. As a result, staff’s ability to effectively assess and address the needs of families is undermined. At best, families are merely processed into homelessness.

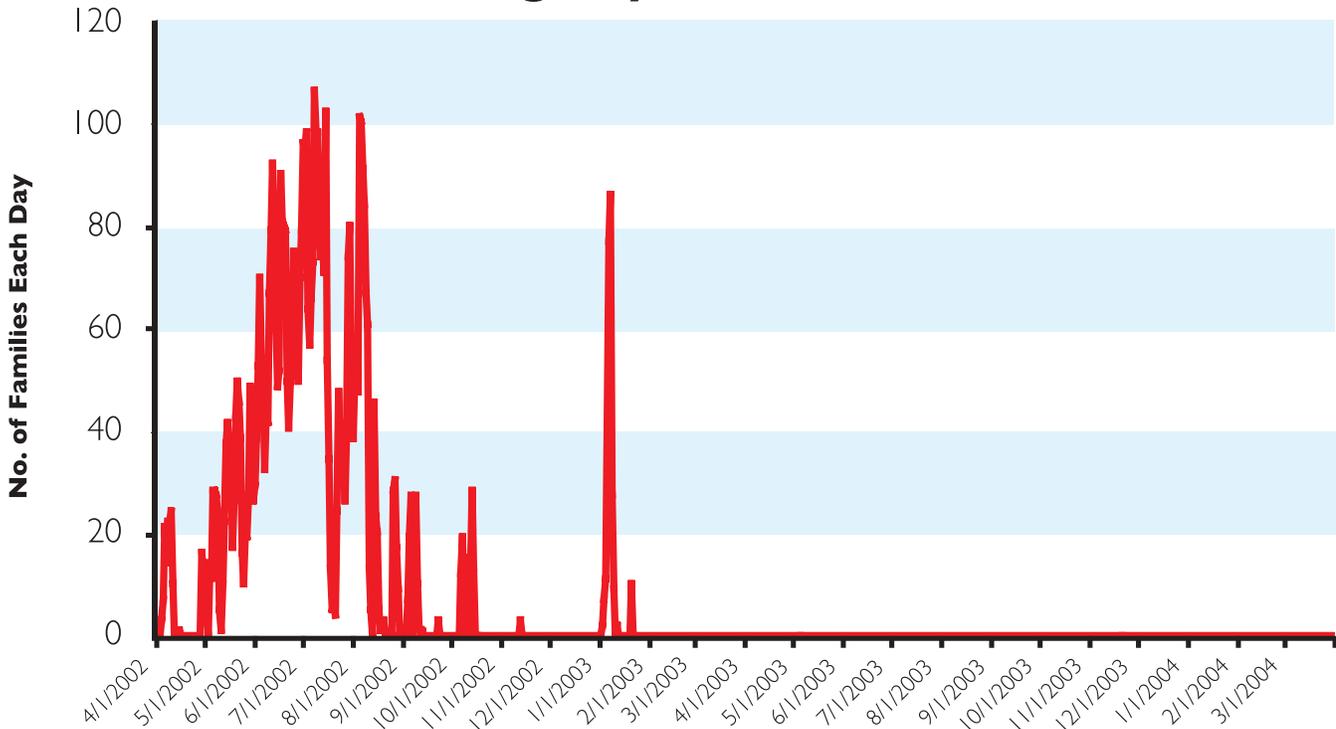
SOLUTIONS

As a result of a landmark settlement in homeless family litigation, a three-member court appointed panel has conducted thorough evaluations of homelessness prevention and the family intake and eligibility processes. The City of New York is committed to achieving reforms in these areas.

The initiatives in this chapter incorporate actions around family intake and eligibility into the city’s long-term strategy. Key areas of focus include increasing prevention at the intake office, streamlining the application process, and assuring that families whose homelessness cannot be prevented are placed quickly into shelters in their home communities, when appropriate.

A system that provides timely, humane, and effective assistance to at-risk and homeless families must embrace holistic and thoughtful policies and practices. The initiatives listed here create that new foundation.

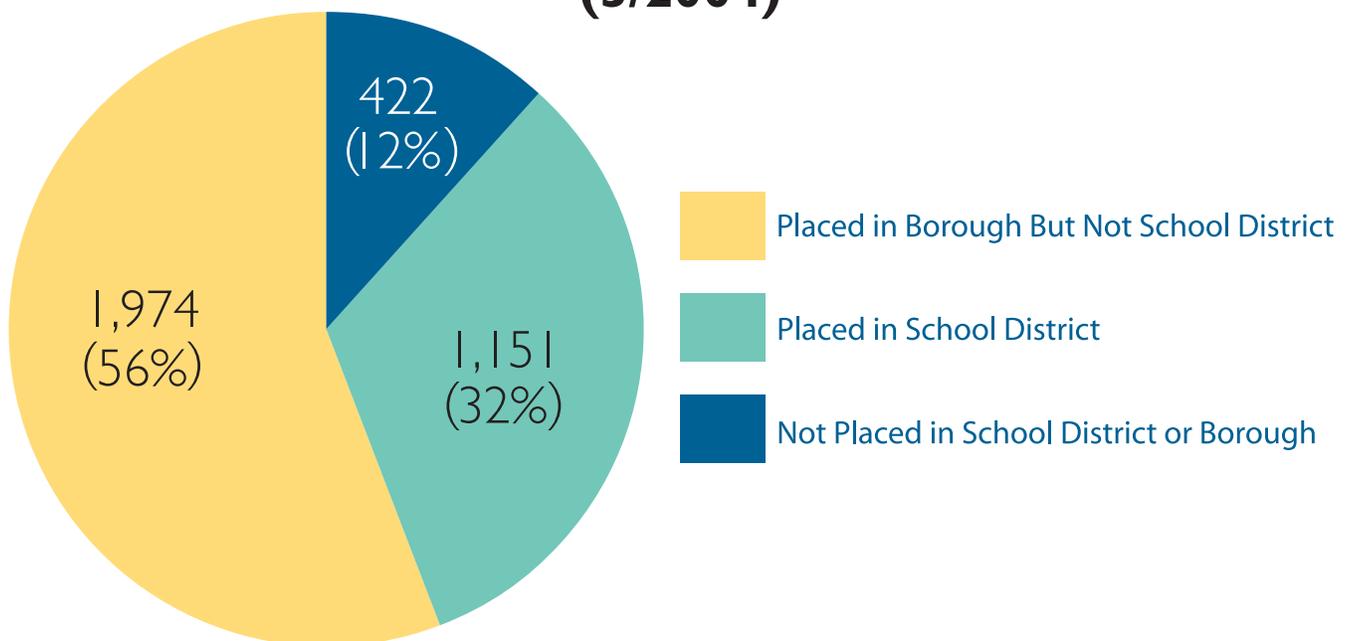
Families Spending a Night at the Emergency Assistance Unit



For the first time in five years, no families with children (that applied for shelter before 10pm) stayed overnight at the EAU last summer. Yet, many continue to experience late night busing to shelter.

Source: DHS Administrative Data

Percent of Families Successfully Placed in Shelters in Their Home Communities (3/2004)



In just eight months since a new placement policy was implemented, DHS has increased in-school and in-borough matches from 12% to 88% of all placements.

Source: DHS Administrative Data

TAKING ACTION

The Next Step	Current Status	Taking Action
<p>Reinforce Prevention and Diversion at Family Shelter Intake</p>	<p>When families leave housing and approach the homeless system, some may still be able to benefit from alternative emergency assistance or prevention services. Today, very few families receive and/or ask for this assistance. In addition, the range and effectiveness of prevention resources does not meet the current need.</p>	<p>The current system of family shelter intake must be reworked to focus more attention on prevention and other forms of emergency assistance. A redundancy of efforts to help families find a way to avoid homelessness will be built into the intake process.</p>
<p>Streamline Application and Eligibility Process at Family Shelter Intake</p>	<p>When a family applies for shelter the process can take two to four days. In addition, the intake office's ability to serve homeless families is challenged because many families who are not homeless attempt to have their needs addressed in shelter when other assistance could work.</p>	<p>The city will implement major reforms to shorten the application process, improve the physical space of an intake center, and direct those families who do not need shelter to more appropriate supports and resources.</p>
<p>Expedite Shelter Placements from Family Shelter Intake</p>	<p>When a family first applies for shelter, they are often placed for one or two nights in a temporary placement. This often results from the fact that many shelters do not accept certain types of families, such as those with adult men or adolescents. In addition, many shelters do not take placements late at night, so families are left to stay in temporary placements until the next day.</p>	<p>A key goal of a reformed process is making a conditional placement on the same day a family applies for shelter. This will require many more family shelters to accept all family types and to do so at any hour of the day.</p>
<p>Place Families In Shelters Near Their Home Communities</p>	<p>Historically, there has been little priority placed on sheltering homeless families in their own communities. This has made it more difficult for some families to maintain community and family ties, while making it hard for children to remain in their own schools. Recent initiatives have begun to reverse these trends.</p>	<p>The city will continue to place homeless families in shelters in their home communities whenever possible and appropriate. In particular, efforts will be made to increase the number of families who are placed in a shelter in the school district of the youngest child.</p>