

Community Snapshot

Hennepin County



July 2005

THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS

Progress in Ending Homelessness

The origins of the dramatic decline in family homelessness in Hennepin County, Minnesota can be traced to 1993. Because of a “right to shelter” policy, Hennepin County faced a sharp increase in homeless families that quickly outpaced the number of shelter beds and overflow motel space in the community. The county could not build an adequate number of shelter beds in time to accommodate the growing demand for shelter – particularly given the opposition around location of homeless shelters. To solve the problem, Hennepin County administrators worked cooperatively with the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency to develop a state policy that ultimately received strong bipartisan support. The result is the Minnesota Family Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP), a program that provides local communities with flexible funding to meet specific goals including:

- Preventing homelessness from occurring;
- Shortening lengths of time homeless and in emergency shelters; and
- Preventing repeated episodes of homelessness.

Key Initiatives

Hennepin County implemented a number of key initiatives in response to the increasing demand for shelter and the need for permanent housing:

Rapidly Rehousing Families. Starting from the time a family enters shelter, staff from the shelter system prepare the family to access permanent housing. Most families are referred to the county’s Rapid Exit Program. As a part of this program, local non-profit agencies under contract with the county help families find housing in the private market and then provide follow-up services for up to six months to promote housing

From 2000 to 2004 family homelessness in Hennepin County declined by 43 percent.

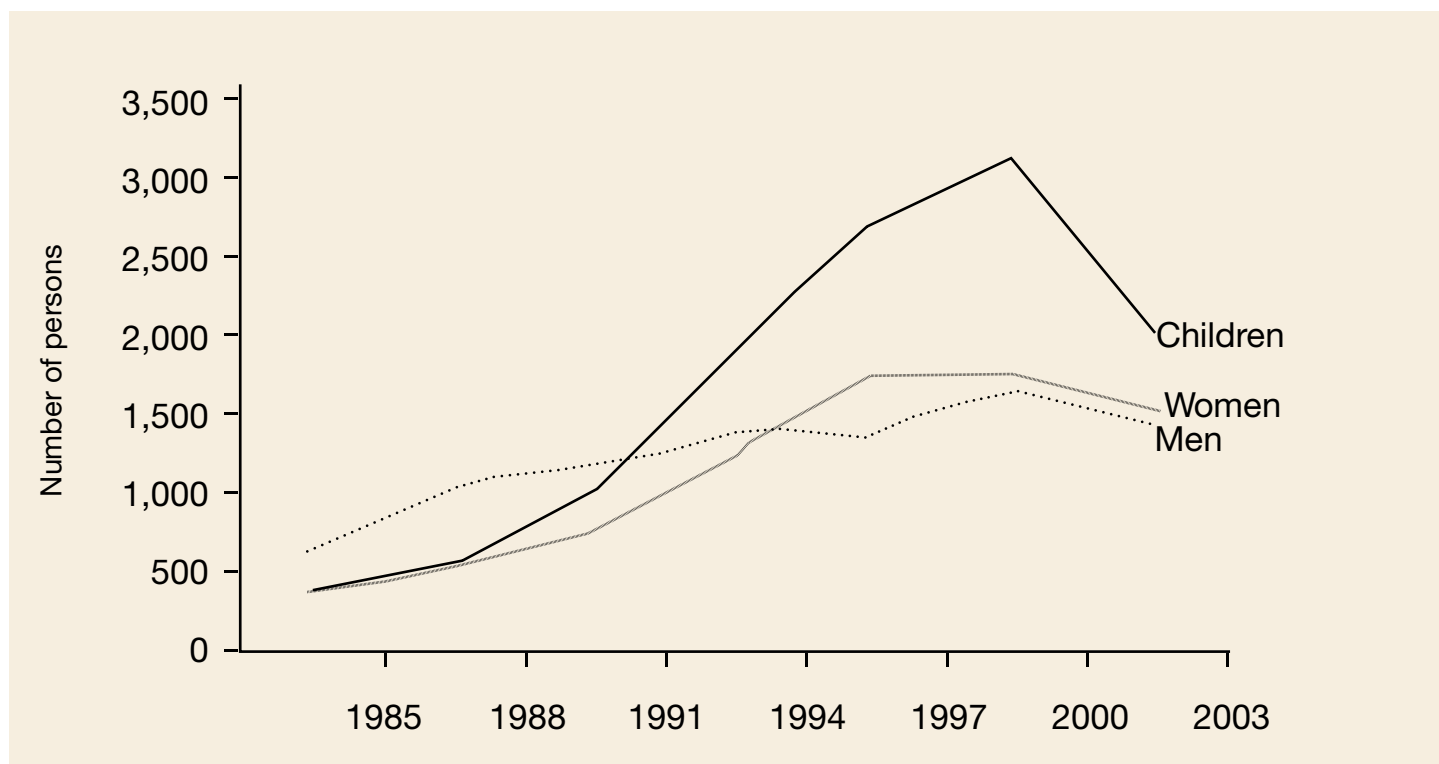
stability. Because the county lacks an adequate number of federal housing subsidies, most families are expected to quickly assume the full cost of rent, although the county provides some financial resources, which can be used flexibly by the agencies to help families access housing (for example, security deposit assistance, first month’s rent, etc.). The program’s success in finding housing relies on the agencies’ ability to cultivate relationships with landlords in the private sector. Since 2000, the county has incorporated the success of Rapid Exit into mainstream county programs. Rapid Exit is now a mandatory requirement for all sheltered families. The county has a copy of each family’s Rapid Exit plan, which it uses to monitor progress and consistency between Rapid Exit and TANF eligibility requirements (so families will have some income to pay rent). The county continues to make such refinements to the program based on outcome measures that assess the performance of the program as a whole as well as the work of contracted nonprofits.

Targeting Resources Based on Needs. The staff refers families to services based on information from housing barriers assessment, which identifies the family’s service needs and assigns them to a service track. This assessment allows staff to target services more effectively. Families with minimal barriers receive minimal services and quickly exit shelters on their own. Families with moderate to severe housing barriers receive Rapid Exit Program services (described above). The most intensive service delivery models serve families with multiple barriers to housing stability.

Emphasizing Prevention and Shelter Diversion. The cost of eviction is expensive, for the county and for the family. To prevent housing loss, the county funds an array of geographically based, outcome-focused homeless prevention initiatives — the average cost of which is only 10 percent of the cost of a typical shelter stay



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Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services, Quarterly

and re-housing placement. In addition, a shelter team explores alternatives to entering shelter and helps families resolve crises without entering the shelter system.

Outcomes

Because of these efforts, Hennepin County is making progress in achieving the goal of ending homelessness. Homelessness among children is declining significantly. According to data from the county, in 2000, 1,583 children in Hennepin County experienced homelessness; less than two years later, in 2002, the number of homeless children dropped by 28 percent to 1,145. During that same period, homelessness among children increased in the rest of Minnesota. Homelessness among families also declined from 1,819 in 2000 to 1,046 in 2004, a decline of 43 percent.

Across the country, communities are making progress in ending homelessness. The National Alliance to End Homelessness *Community Snapshot Series* highlights strategies, programs and innovations in these communities. To learn how to end homelessness in ten years, visit www.endhomelessness.org.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a nonprofit organization dedicated to solving the problem of homelessness and preventing its continued growth. Our mission is to mobilize all sectors of society in an alliance to end homelessness.