

family homelessness | facts

According to the 2011 Homeless Count report, at any given time in Indianapolis, families make up approximately 28% of the local homeless population.

This includes 248 children under the age of 18 who are living in emergency shelters or temporary housing programs. Nearly 2000 of these homeless children are under the age of 12

Marion County schools (www.ips.k12.in.us/) also report that they are serving another 2,925 children who do not have a home of their own. These children are "doubled up" with friends or extended family, living with an adult in hotels or motels, or are unattached. This is *in addition to* the number of homeless children reported in the Homeless Count report.

Family homelessness most often is the result of a **financial crisis**. A general rule of thumb states that no one should be spending more than 30% of their income on housing. For many families living on the edge of a housing crisis, this figure is far higher. Any number of unforeseen or unavoidable issues may occur:

- Lost employment
- Reduced work hours
- Unforeseen expenses, such as medical bills
- Change in family makeup, such as relatives moving in
- A rise in the cost of housing
- Domestic violence

In cases of **domestic violence**, families escaping abusive situations often have nowhere else to turn but a shelter. For most families experiencing homelessness, the crisis is only short-term until their financial and/or housing situations improve. But for families dealing with more severe or complex barriers to success, homelessness may become episodic. For a few, homelessness becomes chronic.

The two most effective direct strategies for helping homeless families are *homelessness prevention* efforts and *housing subsidies*.

Homelessness Prevention

Keeping families from entering the cycle of homelessness and keeping them in their housing is the best and most practical answer to this problem. Assistance in paying over due rents or housing related expenses, such as heating costs or other high utility bills can make the difference between a family staying housed and experiencing homelessness. This type of funding, coupled with Rapid Re-Housing, which can help locate affordable housing options and help pay deposits and first-month rents, is invaluable in two ways. Homelessness is painful and shocking to anyone, especially to families. The disruption in their lives can lead to many problems both in the long and short term. Keeping a family housed prevents this from happening. Secondly, preventing homelessness saves money for the community. Study results from around the country suggest that keeping a family from becoming homeless can save tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars per year per family in service and shelter related costs (NAEH.org). In Indianapolis, the primary providers of Homelessness Prevention funding are the Township Trustee's offices and local Community Centers.



Housing subsidies

Permanent rental assistance is the most effective means for preventing family homelessness. Funds to provide such subsidies are limited and waiting lists are long. Medium and short-term rental subsidies can be effective, and studies show that families exiting shelter with such subsidies can often escape becoming homeless a second time. However, even the available short-term subsidies cannot meet the need in Indianapolis. Waiting lists are long for all subsidy programs.

What you can do

- Contact local leaders in Indianapolis, both at the City and State level, and urge them to provide more funding locally for programs that provide support to homeless families, particularly those programs providing direct Prevention and Subsidies. Programs like the Indianapolis and State of Indiana Low Income Housing Trust Funds use local Indiana dollars to help provide housing supports to local people living on the verge of homelessness. And ask City leaders to make assistance to families, particularly prevention and housing subsidies, a priority for their federal funding allocations.

- Nationally, urge Indiana's Senators and Congress-people to support expanded funding for national programs that help families, such as HPRP (Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program) through the Federal Department of Housing And Urban Development.

Study findings indicate that families with stable housing have better outcomes on an array of measures, including severity of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, and quality of life (NAEH.org)



The best intervention is prevention

Effective intervention will prevent a whole new generation of children from becoming homeless adults.

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Generally, families will try to overcome these issues by moving down the housing ladder to smaller, or less suitable housing options, or moving in with family or friends ("doubling up"). When and if these strategies fail, families begin to seek shelter or resort to living in places not meant for habitation.

Contact CHIP at (317) 630-0853 to help alleviate family homelessness in Indianapolis.