LOST in the Shuffle

THE IMPACT OF HOMELESSNESS ON CHILDREN'S EDUCATION IN TORONTO

Phase 3 Report of the
Kid Builders Research Project

COMMUNITY
SOCIAL PLANNING
COUNCIL OF TORONTO
www.socialplanningtoronto.org

Aisling Discoveries
Child and Family Centre

Funded by: United Way Greater Toronto

Kid Builders Research Project - Phase 3

Lost in the Shuffle: The Impact of Homelessness on Children's Education In Toronto

September 2007

Ann Decter
Community Social Planning Council of Toronto
2 Carlton Street, Suite 1001
Toronto, Ontario M5B 1J3

ISBN 1-894199-13-8

COMMUNITY SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL OF TORONTO

Aisling Discoveries
Child and Family Centre

Acknowledgements

This report belongs to the parents, children and staff of Birkdale Residence, Ernestine's Shelter for Women, Family Residence, Julliette's Place, Red Door Family Shelter, The Redwood VAW Shelter, Robertson House, Women's Habitat, YWCA Arise and to the teachers and administrators of Edgewood, Galloway Road, Huron Street, John English, West Hill and Wexford public schools. It is their knowledge gathered in its pages. May it bring changes that improve the situation for everyone involved in the education of homeless children, but especially for the children living in Toronto's shelters.

Tracy Smith-Carrier laid the foundations for this study, designing the research and research instruments with the members of the Project Advisory Committee, securing the permission of the Toronto District School Board and conducting many focus groups. Tracy also gathered together the research on the impacts of homelessness, before leaving the study for a new position. She extends thanks to a number of students, volunteers, contract staff and transcribers who helped her on the project: Jelena Milenovic, Julie Young, Ellen Reid, Zachary Tucker-Abramson, Michelle Cho, Falguni Desai, Erin Rumsby, Navjeet Sidhu, Catherine Melville and Rebecca Melville.

Thanks are due to all members of the Project Advisory Committee (listed in full in the Appendix) for their instrumental role in the study. In the early stages, their encouragement and feedback were especially vital to the progress of the project. Two members of that committee also extended extra help. Mary El Milosh handled the contacts with the schools and attended all of the school focus groups bringing her deep background and fresh insights. Rhonda Roffey stepped up with broad knowledge, timely advice and quick connections to the shelter community.

Armine Yalnizyan shepherded the project, supervised the research and reviewed drafts in detail, poking holes in all the right places, ensuring no statement was unsupported and no analytic stone unturned. Her spirited interventions were challenging, rewarding and much appreciated.

This report would not have been possible without the support of Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre, the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto and the United Way of Greater Toronto. The author would like to personally thank John Campey and Armine Yalnizyan of the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto for the opportunity to work on this engaging study.

Ann Decter
Researcher and Author
Lost in the Shuffle

COMMUNITY SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL OF TORONTO

Aisling Discoveries
Child and Family Centre

COMMUNITY SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL OF TORONTO

Aisling Discoveries
Child and Family Centre

Table of Contents

COMMUNITY SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL OF TORONTO

Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Kid Builders Research Project

The Kid Builders Research Project, examining the educational needs of homeless children living in Toronto and the links between homelessness and school success, is the first major study to investigate the education of homeless children in Canada and begins to address a major gap in the literature. Phase 3 builds on the first and second phases that reported on data collected in Scarborough only, broadening the project across Toronto.

Kid Builders Phase 3 defines school success broadly as:

- academic achievement
- social and behavioural adjustment
- a sense of well-being and belonging.

The focus is elementary schools and children aged six to twelve, inclusive.

Family Homelessness in Toronto

In Toronto, homelessness escalated through the 1990s and into the present decade, and families with children became the fastest growing homeless population.

Family homelessness is largely women and children's homelessness. The entire system of Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters serves only women and children. This study included two family shelters that serve only women and children and did not encounter any family shelters in Toronto that serve only men and their children. The proportion of shelter families that are women-led warrants further investigation.

The Children

Since 1990, the annual population of children living in Toronto's homeless shelters has ranged from a high of nearly 7,000 to no less than 3,500. Thousands of children in Toronto – tens of thousands would not be an exaggeration – roughly the age of children in this study have gone through some version of the experiences described in this report.

The Impacts of Homelessness and of Witnessing or Experiencing Violence

The large American body of literature on the subject of the education of homeless children indicates that they are at a higher risk of a number of emotional problems that can interfere with learning; that continued transience and delayed admission to schools hamper their school success, and that they are more prone to ill health, both mentally and physically.

All children in VAW shelters come from homes that have experienced violence. A national snapshot of shelters in 2004 revealed that 76% of women and 88% of children in all Canadian shelters were escaping situations of abuse. Witnessing or directly experiencing domestic abuse is linked to behaviours that can disrupt learning, such as:

- increased aggression, depression and anxiety
- separation anxiety and mood swings
- symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder
- general mental health difficulties.

The Study

This is a large qualitative study. Between June 2006 and March 2007, focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted with 198 people connected to four homeless family residences, five Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters and six elementary schools in Toronto attended by homeless children including:

- 61 staff connected to nine shelters across Toronto
- 42 parents and 41 children living in the shelters
- 54 teachers and administrators of the Toronto District School Board.

Focus groups and interviews generated over 700 pages of transcripts.

Quantitative data was also collected:
- 8 shelters completed a survey collecting demographic information
- 37 parents completed a questionnaire on their family
- Administrators at three schools completed a review of the school records of seven students residing in a shelter.

Findings

Information gathered from the shelter survey and the parent questionnaire begins to construct an initial profile of life for homeless families living in shelters in Toronto.

Shelter Profile:

Capacity
- Shelters are at or close to full capacity.
- Most shelters, and all VAW shelters, turn away families on a weekly basis.
- One family shelter housed 123 children at one time.

Stays
- 70% of parents were in a shelter for the first time.
- Average length of stay is four to six months.
- 79% of parents identified as single, separated or divorced.
- Almost 60% were 35 or younger.

Status, language, ethnicity
- Proportion of residents who are Canadian ranged from 77% to 5%.
- 40% of parents were Canadian citizens.
- 70% of parents spoke English at home.
- 79% of parents reported they or their children were members of racialized communities.

Income

- All shelters reported the income status of residents as "low."
- 29% of parents said employment was a main source of income prior to coming to the shelter, dropping to 9% after becoming homeless.

Affordable Housing

- 77% were on a waiting list for subsidized housing, the longest wait was nine years.

From Shelter to School

Changing Schools

- Most, but not all, children coming to live in a shelter change schools.
- 58% of children had attended three or more schools, even though 40% of them were in grade 3 or lower, and none had left the shelter yet for a permanent home.
- Nearly half of the children who had only attended one school were still in kindergarten.

Enrollment

- All shelters either provided assistance with enrollment or arranged for assistance
- General enrollment was universally prompt, commonly one to two days
- Enrollment in special needs programs, or accessing special needs programming once in a school, was subject to delays and a serious impediment to education.

Study supports

- The majority of shelters said they offered a quiet place for children to study.
- Parents generally did not agree, finding it difficult, especially in the larger shelters, to settle their children into homework amid noise and activities.
- Computer access can be inadequate to complete homework, especially for older students.
- Most shelters reported a Homework Club operating directly after school at the shelter, from twice a week to five days a week.

Sense of belonging

- More than 70% of shelter children did not participate in before- and after-school programs at the school they attended from the shelter, according to parents.
- All schools had a policy allowing parents to opt out of fees for trips and activities; accessing the policy required disclosure of the family's situation, not always an optimal or comfortable option for shelter parents and children.

The Impacts of Homelessness on Children's Education in Toronto

The broad barriers to school success caused by the impacts of homelessness identified in Kid Builders Phase 3 are:

- transience and consequent disruption
- emotional impacts of witnessing or experiencing violence
- emotional impacts of the stresses and crises that bring a family to a shelter
- behaviours that develop out of unresolved emotional impacts
- the stigma of living in a shelter, internalized or enforced through bullying
- shelters with inadequate quiet space for studying or computer access.

Across the school and shelter systems, teachers, administrators, shelter staff, parents and even children themselves take steps to try and to reduce the impact of homelessness on children's education. Key blockages occur when:

- a child has inadequate access to needed educational support such as special needs programming
- a child does not have an adult who can navigate between the school and shelter.

Impacts on Education

Transience

- Creates a major barrier in the education of homeless children.
- Children who rapidly change schools in different school boards while still in elementary school risk a fragmented education that is not discovered by testing or mitigated by special intervention.
- Children who changed schools and teachers of those children reported:
    - knowledge gaps due to curriculum not covered
    - repetition of material already covered.

Stigmatization, Attitudes and Bullying

- Children living in shelters express fear they will be stigmatized with negative labels. This fear was not expressed by children too young to understand what they are experiencing.
- Children experience bullying framed around living in a shelter, but many more fear the potential of bullying and teasing for living in a shelter than actually experience it.

Witnessing or Experiencing Violence

- Children who have witnessed or experienced violence may be withdrawn and quiet, may act out, act destructively, have difficulty focusing and paying attention, and may make traumatic disclosures in class settings.
- Teachers need assistance coping with these behaviours in order to teach material to these children and to the class as a whole.

Disruption, Trauma and Children's Behaviour

- Shelter children who have not witnessed violence may still experience:
    - dislocation through the loss of familiar settings, structures, friends and belongings
    - the stress of life in a shelter
    - emotions and behaviours that block learning
    - low self-esteem
    - loss of interest in succeeding at school
    - the temptations of gangs.

COMMUNITY SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL OF TORONTO
Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre

Highlights of the Recommendations

Steps can be taken in the short, medium and long term to reduce the negative impacts of homelessness on children's education in Toronto. Some key recommendations of the Kid Builders Phase 3 are:

Advocacy and Support

- Assign a school liaison worker for every homeless student, funded through the Ministry of Community and Social Services and working through non-profit social agencies.
- Create Transient Student Support Administrators at the school board to assist shelters, parents and schools with any and all of the problems facing homeless students.
- Develop a protocol for schools serving homeless students that promotes links between schools and shelters, fosters a welcoming school and implements immediate assessments.
- Offer professional development workshops to teachers on the emotional impacts of children experiencing and witnessing violence.

Transience

- Implement a system to locate and flag highly transient students and ensure they receive the programming they need for school success.
- Reinstate and expand Bill 133 to ensure shelter children who have moved to a permanent home have the right to remain in the school they attended from the shelter without transportation costs.

Access to programs

- Reverse the onus so shelter children are directly admitted to special education programming at the new school when requested by parents, until proof to the contrary is provided.
- Increase funding so special needs assessments happen on a timely basis.

Housing

- Give homeless families with school age children a priority ranking for subsidized housing on the waiting list, behind the priority for abused women.

SUMMARY OF KID BUILDERS PHASE 3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Goal 1: Reduce the Consequences of Transience for Homeless Children

Strategy A: Reduce the Incidence of Transience

Recommendation 1: Re-introduce a Revised Bill 133: An Act to Amend the Education Act to Provide Stability for Students in Transition Housing (p.31)
Recommendation 2: Provide Emergency Housing Subsidy for Shelter Families with School Age Children
Recommendation 3: Implement the Hadley Inquest Jury Recommendations
Recommendation 4: Make Shelter Allowances Correspond to Rental Costs
Recommendation 5: Invest in Family Housing
Recommendation 6: Ensure Priority on Housing for Families with School Age Children

Strategy B: Reduce the Impacts of Transience on Children's Education

Recommendation 7: Assign Transient Student Support Administrators
Recommendation 8: Reverse the Onus for Access to Special Education
Recommendation 9: Flag Transient Students for Special Services
Recommendation 10: Adopt Case Management for Highly Transient Students

Goal 2: Reduce the Barriers of Emotional Impacts

Strategy A: Provide Emotional Support and Respond Effectively to Children's Behaviour

Recommendation 11: A School Liaison Worker for Every Homeless Student
Recommendation 12: Teacher Training on Emotional Impacts and Consequent Behaviours
Recommendation 13: More Assessments, Treatment, and Readily Available Mental Health Services
Recommendation 14: Teacher Training on Emotional Impacts in Bachelor of Education

Strategy B: Build Children's Self-Esteem through Success

Recommendation 15: Set and Re-Set Achievable Academic Goals

Goal 3: Reduce Stigma and Barriers to Belonging

Strategy A: Promote Links between Schools and Shelters and Foster a Welcoming School

Recommendation 16: Develop a School Protocol for Schools Serving Homeless Students
Recommendation 17: Expand Community use to include Shelter Access to Schools

Strategy B: Improve Community Attitudes

Recommendation 18: Launch Public Campaign to Dispel Stigma

Goal 4: Ensure Living Conditions Adequate to School Success

Strategy A: Enhance Shelter Facilities

Recommendation 19: Increase Access to Computers
Recommendation 20: Ensure a Quiet Place to Work

RECOMMENDATIONS

> "We in Canada will continue to ensure quality learning for children regardless of where they live and the particular challenges they face. This will involve learning environments that engage young people in their learning while adapting to their learning styles, unique cultures and needs. We will continue to foster and promote learning environments that are safe, accessible, supportive and caring, and based on the principles of respect, diversity and inclusion."
> A Canada Fit for Children
> Government of Canada, April 2004

This study defined school success as academic achievement, social and behavioural adjustment and a sense of well-being and belonging. Given that definition, the broad barriers to school success caused by the impacts of homelessness identified in Kid Builders Phase 3 are:

- transience and consequent disruption
- emotional impacts of witnessing or experiencing violence
- emotional impacts of the stresses and crises that bring a family to a shelter
- behaviours that develop out of unresolved emotional impacts
- the stigma of living in a shelter, internalized or enforced through bullying
- shelters with inadequate quiet space for studying or computer access.

This report describes a wide range of responses to these impacts. Across the school and shelter systems teachers, administrators, shelter staff, parents and even children themselves take steps to try to reduce the impact of homelessness on children's education. It is clear that key blockages occur in the system when:

- a child has inadequate access to needed educational support such as special needs programming
- a child does not have an adult who can navigate between the school and shelter.

Many of these impacts can be addressed through policies that are achievable in the short-term and medium term. Two obvious, yet elusive, long-term societal changes offer the broadest and most complete solutions and are not re-stated in the recommendations:

- end family homelessness
- end violence against women and children.

There is a wealth of literature that has more than adequately covered direct and specific approaches to reducing family violence and homelessness. This report focuses on children's education, while encouraging all levels of government to act vigorously on both fronts as soon as possible.

Much can be done to foster the school success of children living through the experience of losing their family home. The recommendations that follow are an attempt to describe policies and actions that will better support the school success of homeless children until such time as the political will is developed to ensure families always have access to affordable housing. The recommendations should be read as opportunities to offer support to vulnerable children struggling for an adequate education in difficult circumstances, rather than as a critique of existing practices.

This report carries forward the recommendation from the Kid Builders Research Project Phase 2 report with regard to implementation of the recommendations of the Hadley Inquest Jury (Sherkin: 2006). This clear and comprehensive set of recommendations followed the inquest into the murder of Gillian Hadley by

her domestic partner. The provincial government has yet to act on their implementation. Executive directors of VAW shelters interviewed in this research were emphatic that there is much to be gained from their implementation.

Immediate Actions are those recommendations that can be implemented within a six-month time frame; Medium-Term Actions are recommendations that would take between six months and two years to implement, and Long-Term Actions would require longer than two years for implementation.

Goals, Strategies and Recommendations

Goals:

Analyzing the wealth of information gathered in this research has given rise to four goals to reduce the impacts of homelessness on children's education:

- reduce the consequences of transience for homeless children
- reduce the barriers created by the emotional impacts of stress, violence and witnessing violence
- reduce the stigma and barriers to belonging
- ensure that shelter living conditions are adequate for school success.

Strategies:

Achieving these goals requires the adoption of clear strategies.
To reduce the consequences of transience for homeless children:

- reduce the incidence of transience
- reduce the impacts of transience on children's education.

To reduce the barriers created by the emotional impacts of stress, violence, and witnessing violence:

- provide emotional support and respond effectively to children's behaviour
- build children's self-esteem through success.

To reduce the stigma and barriers to belonging:

- promote links between schools and shelters and foster a welcoming school
- improve community attitudes.

To ensure that shelter living conditions are adequate to school success:

- enhance shelter facilities.

Recommendations: Opportunities for Action

The following recommendations are based on research conducted in Toronto, and are offered as a guide for improving the situation of homeless children living and learning in Toronto. However, as the first Canadian study on the impact of homelessness on children's education, the applicability of this research and the related recommendations is potentially much wider. Any child enduring disruptions in education similar to those described here – whether they are in highly priced Vancouver, oil-boom Calgary, or slipping from town to town across rural Ontario – will likely be vulnerable to the same problems. Children in this study lived and attended school in other jurisdictions both in Ontario and elsewhere in Canada.

The recommendations are addressed to a range of ministries of the Government of Ontario, agencies of the City of Toronto and Toronto district school boards. Recommendations pertaining to changes in school protocols were developed in response to research within the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), but are offered generically to school boards as they may well apply equally in other school districts. Most importantly, these recommendations should be read as an attempt to achieve equitable educational opportunity for children who experience homelessness, and should be adopted whenever and wherever they will work toward that goal.

Goal 1: Reduce the Consequences of Transience for Homeless Children

Strategy A: Reduce the Incidence of Transience

Immediate Actions

Recommendation 1: Re-introduce a Revised Bill 133: An Act to Amend the Education Act to Provide Stability for Students in Transition Housing (p.31)

Bill 133 should be re-introduced to the Ontario legislature after it has been revised to state clearly that in addition to homeless children having the right to remain in their original school regardless of their address:

- school boards must cover the costs of transportation from shelter to school
- shelter children who have moved to a permanent home have the right to remain in the school they attended from the shelter to complete their school year and school boards must cover the costs of transportation.

Medium-Term Actions

Recommendation 2: Emergency Housing Subsidy for Shelter Families with School Age Children

The provincial government should create and implement a "Family Rescue Program" that provides monthly rent subsidies for families with school age children living in shelters to allow them to afford to move to market rent apartments immediately. This program should continue as long as there is a shortage of affordable, subsidized social housing.

Recommendation 3: Implement the Hadley Inquest Jury Recommendations

To reduce transience and support the education of homeless children, priority should be placed on Hadley Inquest Jury recommendations on:

- community based services, including bussing to schools (#39 and 40)
- housing (#23-30)
- education, training and prevention programs (#46 and 47)
- bail for abusers (#9-17)
- global positioning systems for accused abusers released on bail (#53).

Full recommendations are available at: http://www.owjn.org/issues/w-abuse/hadley2.htm

Recommendation 4: Make Shelter Allowances Correspond to Rental Costs

For recipients living in Toronto, the shelter allowance portion of Ontario Works social assistance should correspond to the cost of rental housing in Toronto.

Long-Term Actions

Recommendation 5: Invest in Family Housing

The provincial government should immediately invest in supplying affordable housing for families in Toronto, whether through funding the building of new housing stock or supplementing rent for market rate apartments. Housing should be child-positive and connected to community.

Recommendation 6: Priority on Housing for Families with School Age Children

Appropriate steps should be taken to create a priority ranking on the social housing waiting list for homeless families with school age children behind the priority for abused women and based on the single criterion of being housed in a family or VAW Shelter at the time of application and of an appropriate unit becoming available.

Strategy B: Reduce the Impacts of Transience on Children's Education

Immediate Recommendations

Recommendation 7: Assign Transient Student Support Administrators

School boards should create Transient Student Support Administrators to operate as champions for homeless students, assisting shelters, parents, and schools with any and all of the problems facing homeless students and provide priority linking to special needs programming and support services. The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) should appoint a Transient Student Support Administrator in each of the four quadrants of the district with power to:

- maintain the special teacher allocation for schools with shelter students
- approve individual education plans (IEPs) for shelter children without testing
- maintain an up-to-date electronic database of requests for special needs testing with specific tracking of highly transient students and their needs
- develop specific, innovative programming for highly transient students
- develop and share quick assessment and curriculum review techniques
- access any student's OSR without delay
- liaise directly with school and shelter liaison workers.

Recommendation 8: Reverse the Onus for Access to Special Education

Shelter children with special education needs should not be waiting for access to education. To address this problem in the short term in Toronto, the TDSB should reverse the onus on access to special education for children living in shelters. When parents living in a shelter register their child at a new school and report that the student has been in special programming at the pre-shelter school, the child should be directly admitted to appropriate programming by the new school, until proof to the contrary is provided. A case conference should be scheduled immediately upon registration and the Transient Student Support Administrator notified. In the long term, this problem needs a structural solution including adequate funding for timely assessments for all special needs students and for special education programming.

Medium-Term Recommendations

Recommendation 9: Flag Transient Students for Special Services

School boards need to track and flag highly transient students. The TDSB should adopt a tracking system that can locate and flag transient students who have attended four or more schools by any time in grade 3. Tracking these students and ensuring they receive the programming they need for school success, including addressing the gaps caused by transience, should be the direct responsibility of the Transient Student Support Administrator.

Recommendation 10: Adopt Case Management for Highly Transient Students

School boards should use a case management model for the education of highly transient students – those who are in their fourth school before the end of grade 3 – including a case plan with individualized education plans, information on special needs, remedial programming, and a protocol for ensuring these are put in place promptly wherever the child goes to school. The TDSB should introduce a case management model for the education of highly transient students.

Goal 2: Reduce the Barriers of Emotional Impacts

Strategy A: Provide Emotional Support and Respond Effectively to Children's Behaviour

Medium-Term Recommendations

Recommendation 11: A School Liaison Worker for Every Homeless Student

Through the appropriate ministry or ministries, the provincial government should create a program that funds a comprehensive network of school liaison workers on the models of the Child Development Institute and Aisling's Helping Hands in Schools:

- fund school liaison programs run by non-profit agencies outside of the shelter and the school
- ensure every child in a shelter is assigned a school liaison worker
- develop incentives to ensure parents agree to participate in the program
- seek space in schools for school liaison workers to have offices.

Recommendation 12: Teacher Training on Emotional Impacts and Consequent Behaviours

School boards need to ensure teachers are equipped to deal with children who have experienced or witnessed violence. The TDSB needs to offer professional development workshops to teachers on the emotional impacts of experiencing and witnessing violence, and of homelessness, stress, disruption and loss on children, as well as on how those impacts are evidenced in children's behaviour. Teachers should be offered strategies on how to handle disclosures, as well as withdrawal and acting out. A second level of professional development workshops should be targeted specifically to dealing with children's disruptive behaviours that arise from the same sources. The workshops should be focused on schools with students who have witnessed or experienced violence.

Long-Term Recommendations

Recommendation 13: More Assessments, Treatment, and Readily Available Mental Health Services

The provincial government should increase funding for children to be assessed for special needs programming and for treatment by psychiatrists and psychologists to shorten waiting lists. The provincial government should ensure that children's mental health services are provided locally, linked to schools serving shelter children, and easily accessible for shelter children. The Minister of Education should develop protocols by which school boards can automatically accept assessments conducted by other school boards in Ontario.

Recommendation 14: Teacher Training on Emotional Impacts in Bachelor of Education

Teacher education should include mandatory material on the education of homeless students including:

- the high incidence of witnessing violence among homeless children
- the impacts of witnessing violence
- the behaviours that develop out of the impacts
- strategies to teach children exhibiting those behaviours.

Strategy B: Build Children's Self-Esteem through Success

Long-Term Recommendations

Recommendation 15: Set and Re-Set Achievable Academic Goals

Teachers should program achievable goals for homeless students who are experiencing academic difficulties and re-set those goals as they are achieved so that students can build self-esteem and remain motivated learners despite the disruption of their education.

Goal 3: Reduce Stigma and Barriers to Belonging

Strategy A: Promote Links between Schools and Shelters and Foster a Welcoming School

Medium-Term Recommendations

Recommendation 16: Develop a School Protocol for Schools Serving Homeless Students

School boards should have a protocol in place for schools serving homeless children that promotes links between schools and shelters and fosters a welcoming school. The TDSB should develop and implement a protocol for schools serving homeless children that promotes links between schools and shelters and fosters a welcoming school:

- require every teacher working in a school serving students in a shelter to visit the shelter at least once per academic year, at a time and in a manner developed in coordination with the shelter staff
- require principals at schools serving homeless children to take steps to establish that serving homeless children is part of the mission of the school including:
    - implementing the Ambassador's Club program where students become ambassadors welcoming homeless and other mid-year arriving students to the school and assist them to settle in (p.87)
    - implementing a Care Club where teachers can choose to provide additional connection for the highest risk students in the school (p. 84)
    - encouraging teachers to attend homework clubs at shelters where their students are living whenever possible, in coordination with shelter staff
    - implementing Quick Assessments and Curriculum Review for new students arriving in their schools mid-year, on the model of the Reading 180 program (p.83)
    - implementing immediate curriculum review testing to ascertain which modules a new student has already covered and which they have missed in each subject.

The TDSB and, where applicable, other school boards, should facilitate the development and sharing of existing Quick Assessment and Curriculum Review Techniques throughout schools and especially among those with a population of shelter students.

Recommendation 17: Expand Community use to include Shelter Access to Schools

The provincial government should expand funding to the Community Use of Schools program to provide shelters with after school access to the schools their children attend for sports and recreation programs at no cost.

Strategy B: Improve Community Attitudes

Long-Term Recommendations

Recommendation 18: Public Campaign to Dispel Stigma

The Ministry of Community and Social Services should fund a public education campaign to de-stigmatize shelters, conveying a message that homeless families are simply ordinary families experiencing difficult circumstances.

Goal 4: Ensure Living Conditions Adequate to School Success

Strategy A: Enhance Shelter Facilities

Medium-Term Recommendations

Recommendation 19: Increase Access to Computers

Wherever possible students should have access to computers on-site at shelters that is adequate to support their school success. When the City of Toronto is upgrading, surplus computers should be offered to family and VAW shelters at no cost, for student use. City Council should adopt a policy to this effect.

Long-Term Recommendations

Recommendation 20: Ensure a Quiet Place to Work

Shelters should ensure that students have a quiet place to do homework, and shelter standards should reflect this. When renovating, shelters should include this space as a goal, funds permitting, and where possible, should seek renovation funds or assistance to provide this space for school age children. Families with school age children should not be housed in motels that cannot provide students with a quiet place to work outside the unit in which the family is housed.

INTRODUCTION

> "I say that I live with my dad in a mansion.
> Cause he owns one, but I don't go to it."
>
> Family shelter child

Kid Builders Research Project Phase 3 examines the educational needs of homeless children living in Toronto and the links between homelessness and school success. The *Kid Builders Research Project* begins to build Canadian literature on the education of homeless children, looking at who homeless children are and how they experience the school system. The *Kid Builders Research Project Phase 3* assesses how homelessness affects school performance, what programs and services support their educational needs and what program or policy changes are needed. *Phase 3* also provides the beginnings of a profile of shelters that serve homeless families in Toronto, who they serve and what services they provide.

Phase 3 builds on two previous phases of *Kid Builders* research. The first and second *Kid Builders* phases reported on findings of data collected in the Scarborough region of Toronto, where there is a high concentration of shelters serving homeless families. *Phase 3* broadens the scope of the project, collecting qualitative and quantitative data from shelters and schools across the city of Toronto. By widening the sample base to Toronto as a whole, the project identifies trends and issues relevant across the city, and describes the impacts on children of homelessness and of witnessing violence that are applicable regardless of geographical context. There are children in this study who have bounced through a series of shelters – and consequently, schools – across Ontario as their mothers seek safety from a pursuing spouse. Aspects of these children's experiences – repeatedly adjusting to new schools, attempting to learn despite the emotional impacts of witnessing violence – are transferable to other children attempting to learn despite interruptions, restarts, and trauma, regardless of the specific shape and cause. They might well offer insights into the learning experiences of a child who is a refugee of war, who moves countries, starts new schools and carries memories of witnessing violence.

Kid Builders Phase 3 defines homelessness as families currently living in shelters, although this is clearly only one type of homelessness families face. In reporting the findings of this research this definition is used consistently, and all of the families who participated in the study were living in shelters at the time they participated. In Part 2, where the research context is outlined, the term homelessness is also used to describe the broad spectrum of housing inadequacy, as discussed in that section.

The research for this project was conducted with and about families living in the two systems of emergency shelters in Toronto serving families: municipally funded family shelters accepting families who are homeless regardless of the reason and provincially funded Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters set up to serve women and children seeking protection from domestic violence. Together these two types of shelters account for all Toronto shelter beds available for families. The VAW shelters only accept women and children. Some VAW shelters also have restrictions on the upper age of male children who can stay in the shelter. Some of the family shelters serve only women and children, some serve male parents as well.

Kid Builders Phase 3 works from a broad, holistic definition of school success that includes:

- academic achievement
- social and behavioural adjustment
- a sense of well-being and belonging.

The focus is elementary schools, and the homeless children who participated in the study are ages six to twelve, inclusive.

Though this is largely a qualitative study, quantitative data was also collected. Shelters across Toronto (including some shelters outside the qualitative sample) were asked to complete a *Shelter Demographic Survey* (see Appendix 2), collecting demographic information about their residents. Each parent who participated in the study was asked to complete the *Parent Questionnaire* (see Appendix 2) collecting demographic and historical information on the family. The *Ontario School Record Review Template* (see Appendix 2) collected descriptive data from the school records of students residing in a shelter, though it proved difficult to cull a substantial amount of information from this source. [1]

For the qualitative data collection, focus groups and interviews were completed first with 61 staff connected to nine shelters across Toronto. Four of the shelters are homeless family residences and five of them are VAW shelters, though women who had suffered domestic violence were also present in substantial numbers in the family shelter system. Focus groups and interviews were conducted with 42 parents and 41 children living at eight of the shelters. Focus groups were also conducted with 54 teachers and administrators of the Toronto District School Board working at elementary schools that count homeless children among their students. Focus group guides for each sample group can be found in Appendix 2.

Homelessness is a structural problem. When rents rise beyond affordability, families who are just making ends meet on marginal incomes become vulnerable to homelessness. Access to affordable rental housing is affected by both market forces and public policy. The rise and fall of house prices, interest and mortgage rates, private rental construction and even the unemployment rate can determine how many rental units are available in a city and at what cost. On the public policy side, social assistance rates, minimum wage and the availability of income supports determine, for many people, which rents are affordable. Ease of eviction impacts the security of their rental tenure and the level of creation of subsidized housing determines how much affordable housing is available.

This study uses a structural analysis and places the voices of the parents and children who live with the disruption and loss of homelessness, and the shelter staff and teachers who work with them, in the foreground. All contributed generously from their lives and work to the knowledge generated here, providing an abundance of informative and inspiring revelations.

It should be noted that the lead researcher for this project changed during the course of the research. The initial researcher worked with the Project Advisory Committee on the design of the research and the development of the research instruments. She also conducted focus groups in seven of the shelters, secured permission for the school research, and wrote initial material for the early sections of the report. The lead author and final researcher concluded the planned shelter research, conducted the school research with the support of an advisory committee member, conducted additional research into the role of shelter liaison workers and programs, conducted the data analysis, and authored the final report.

[1] The project was designed to include anonymous Ontario School Record reviews of two to five students at five Toronto elementary schools. Seven schools were approached and seven reviews were completed by three schools.

There is a wealth of information offered in this study by parents and children struggling through harsh realities in one of the world's richest countries, a nation repeatedly recognized for its enviable quality of life. The comfortable Canadian quality of life is not in evidence in this report. Instead it shines with the qualities of humanity evinced by those struggling for a positive, productive, and safe life despite severe circumstances, and those supporting them to achieve it. This report should be read under the proviso that for the children of these families to gain access to Canada's much-vaunted quality of life, the root causes of family homelessness must be addressed as fully as possible.

Part 2 THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

Family Homelessness in Toronto

”Unfortunately, very little action has been taken to improve the incomes of people living in poverty – one of the keys to solving homelessness…”

Toronto Report Card on Housing and Homelessness
City of Toronto, 2003

In Toronto, as homelessness escalated through the 1990s and into the present decade, families with children became the fastest growing homeless population. Roughly 5,300 children resided in the Toronto shelter system in 1996, a 76% increase since 1988 (HRDC: 1999). By 2001, that number had reached a peak of 6,727 children. Immigration changes following 9/11 contributed to the fact that the most recent statistics available estimate that this number has dropped to just under 4,000 (City of Toronto: 2003; 2006). See page 22.

Poverty and insecurity of housing are inextricably linked. For thousands of Toronto families, income is stretched and housing precarious. In 2003, 552,300 people, or a quarter of Toronto’s population, lived in poverty, and more than a quarter of tenants had annual incomes below $20,000. More than 250,000 tenant households paid more than 30% of their income on rent, and the same year 20% - or one in five Toronto households – spent more than 50% of their incomes on shelter costs (City of Toronto: 2003). By 2005, the figure had lowered slightly to 198,500 tenants in Toronto spending more than 30% of their income on rent (City of Toronto: 2006).

“You feel like you’re not getting anywhere, you know? I do have kids, I just wanna be in one place and that’s it. I don’t wanna have to go through, do I buy food or do I pay my rent? Because you know what I’m going to do, I’m going to buy food. Even if I don’t eat, they have to. You think, ‘I can pay my rent later,’ and then something comes up later and you can’t pay rent.”

Family shelter parent

Families cite a number of specific reasons for seeking emergency shelter, including:

- lack of good quality affordable housing
- poverty due to inadequate social assistance rates and low minimum wage
- underemployment
- inadequate funding of income support programs (CMHC: 2003; Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC): 1999; Toronto Training Board: 2000).

While the stated reasons vary, they are all income-related and describe, in different ways, the fact that a family does not have enough income to maintain secure housing. Whether it is because rents in Toronto rose 31% between 1997 and 2002, or because the minimum wage in Ontario did not increase between 1993 and 2007, or because there is not enough affordable child care to support mothers working, many families could not secure enough income to pay the rent and keep their housing (Step it Up: 2006). Income is a key factor.

Other reasons for seeking emergency shelter cited by families include physical violence and sexual abuse. Toronto's Violence Against Women shelters (VAW) provide refuge and support for women and children escaping domestic violence. Income is also often cited as a factor for families who use VAW, as with more income, they might have the option to choose another way to change their circumstances and acquire a safe residence. As noted, while all of the women and children in the VAW shelters are escaping violence, there are not enough VAW shelters to house all of the women fleeing domestic violence in emergencies, and many are housed in Toronto's family shelters.

Homelessness exists on a broad continuum that reflects different states of chronic poverty faced by many families. At one end of the continuum is chronic homelessness and life on the street (also termed visible homelessness); at the other end, paying more than 30% of household income on rent constitutes a form of hidden homelessness (Sistering: 2002). Along the middle of the continuum are families residing in an emergency shelter and those housed but living with the constant threat of losing their housing. The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) has identified criteria for those who have housing but are experiencing core-housing need as:

- living in an *inadequate* dwelling unit in need of significant repair
- living in an *unsuitable* dwelling unit without enough rooms for the number of occupants in a household
- living in an *unaffordable* dwelling unit, costing more than 30% of the household's before tax income (CMHC: 2005).

Families who are housed but experiencing core-housing need are part of the hidden homeless, often not counted in the homeless statistics but still not adequately housed. In 1996, 1.56 million households in Canada demonstrated core-housing need. In 2001, this figure was 1.48 million. In Ontario, the figure rose slightly over the same period, from 594,300 in 1996 to 599,700 in 2001, despite a thriving economy (CMHC: 2007). Data from the most recent census – 2006 – which will become available in the near future, may well confirm a continuation of this trend, despite a strong sustained period of economic growth.

A host of structures operate in conjunction with income to determine why people find themselves without adequate housing. Additional factors that impact homeless families include, but are not limited to:

- education and access to language services
- racialization and immigration status
- mental health and addictions
- effectiveness of tenant protections
- physical and mental disability, and access to health services.

The Creation of Family Homelessness in Toronto

"Housing affordability does not occur in a vacuum. Policy decisions in income support combined with those related directly to housing contribute to housing insecurity and increased stress, morbidity, mortality, social exclusion illness and disease."

Canadian Mental Health Association, 2004

In Ontario, the period from 1993-2003 saw dramatic cuts to social assistance, complete government withdrawal from social housing construction, and downloading of social services with insufficient funding. In 1993, the federal government withdrew from funding new social housing and in 1995, the province of Ontario followed suit, cancelling 80 social housing projects in Toronto and cutting social assistance benefits by 21.6% the same year (Wasylenki, 1998). In 1998, the same provincial government eliminated rent controls on vacant private rental units. As a direct consequence, many in Toronto were left struggling to find adequate affordable housing.

With strategic reductions in income supports and social services, severe housing shortages were felt by households with low incomes and newcomers to Toronto, causing what amounts to the ghettoization of residential neighborhoods. These low-income neighbourhoods, often with strong racial and ethnic dimensions, also witnessed an eruption of youth gun violence (Edwards: 2004).

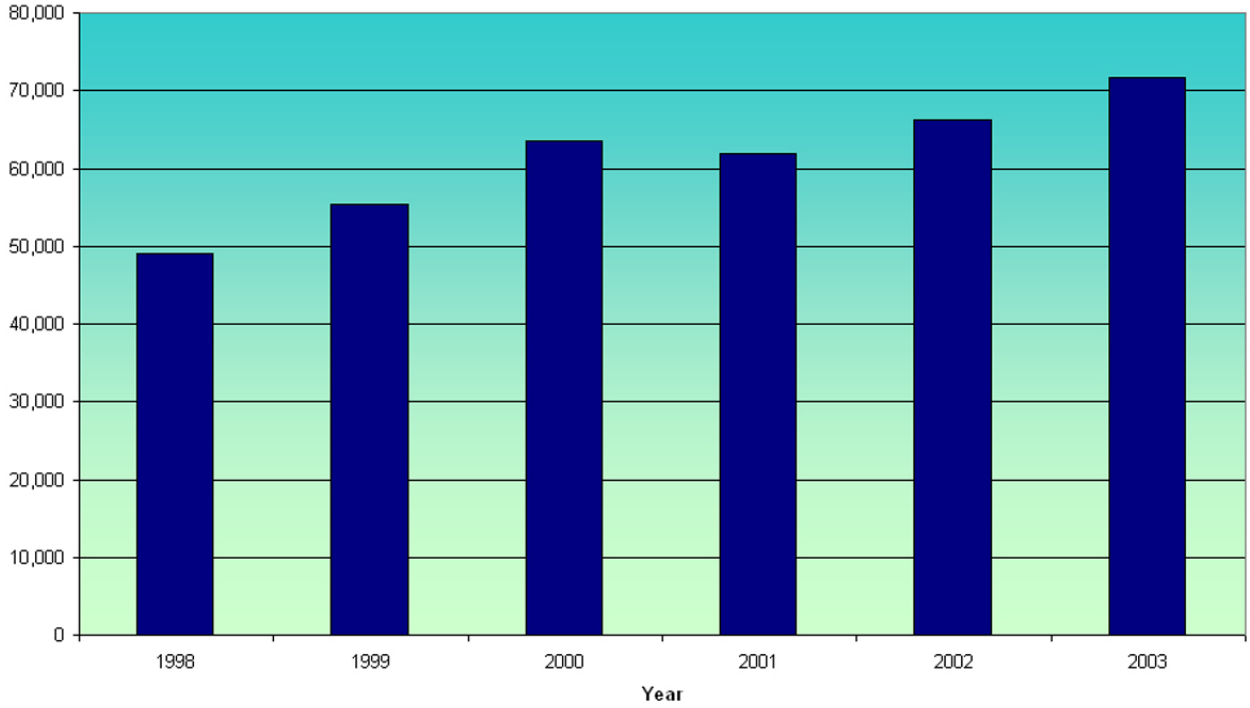
In Toronto, between 2000 and 2002, only 873 new rental units were constructed - amounting to 3% of new housing construction – while 97%, or 28,492 units, were built for the home-ownership market (City of Toronto: 2003). There were 344 private market new units were built in 1999, and about half that in 1998 and 1997 respectively, though 1997 also saw about 800 assisted units completed. No assisted rental units were completed in Toronto between 1998 and 2001 inclusive (City of Toronto: 2006). As dictated by supply and demand, the price of existing rental units rose, accelerating by 31% between 1996 and 2005 while weekly wages in the city rose only 26% (City of Toronto: 2006). In 2003, only 20% of Toronto's private rental apartments rented for less than $800 a month while 71,000 households were on the social housing waiting list (City of Toronto: 2003). Average rents in Toronto leveled out after 2002, with a 0.1% decrease between 2004 and 2005, but remained the highest in Canada (City of Toronto: 2006).

While some of the population has battled chronic poverty and its consequences, higher income Canadians enjoyed prosperous times, experiencing a boom yielding continued economic growth and strong job creation. In 2005, nationally, couples with children remained $9,900 below the poverty line while lone mother families were $9,600 below the poverty line (Campaign 2000: 2005). At the same time, the highest-earning 10% of Canadians saw an 8% increase in their median family earnings between 2000 and 2004, rising from $154,198 to $166,017 (Yalnizyan: 2007). In Ontario, the highest-earning 10% also saw an increase in their median family earnings between 2000 and 2004, rising from $175,864 over $183,189 (Yalnizyan: 2007).

The number of applications to evict Ontario tenants filed at the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal began to climb dramatically in 1998 after the passage of provincial legislation loosening eviction criteria. The number of applications to evict rose 9% in 1998, and another 14% in 1999. In Toronto, applications peaked in 2000, declined slightly in 2001 and rose again in 2003 and 2005. In 2005, 30,628 applications to evict were filed against tenants in the city of Toronto and with 86% of applications based on rental arrears (City of Toronto: 2006).

Thousands of Toronto families are seeking housing they can afford. Between January 1998 and June 2003, a five and a half year period, the total number of applicants on the waiting list for social housing in Toronto rose 46%, from 49,122 to 71,625. Applications from families with dependents increased by 3,806 (City of Toronto: 2003). In January 2004, Ontario had 158,456 households on the waiting list for social housing, 46.5% of which were families (Registered Nurses Association of Ontario: 2004).

Number of Households on the Social Housing Waiting List
City of Toronto, 1998 to 2003



Source: City of Toronto, *Toronto Report Card on Housing and Homelessness, 2003*

By 2005, this figure had decreased slightly – 4,418 households were housed that year and 66,556 remained on the waiting list. If the above chart was extended to 2005, the bar would sit roughly equal with 2003 (City of Toronto: 2006).

In response to this mounting crisis for families, there has been a trickle of social housing construction and acquisition. The number of social housing units built annually in Ontario declined 95% from 24,000 units in 1980 to only 940 in 2000 (Falvo: 2003). Between 2000 and 2002, 1,030 supportive housing units were purchased, renovated and/or leased in Toronto using provincial Ministry of Health and Long Term Care funding. Between 2001 and 2005 1,435 units were completed and occupied in the city of Toronto (City of Toronto: 2006). Under the February 2004 federal-provincial Affordable Housing Program, Toronto received $24 million for the construction of 903 new units and allocated $3.6 million of that to a pilot program offering 400 housing allowances over five years (The Toronto Board of Trade: 2006). A federal-provincial agreement signed in April 2005 would provide $602 million over five years, to supply affordable housing and rehabilitate housing in Ontario (The Toronto Board of Trade: 2006). In March 2007, the provincial government promised to release $392 million in federal housing dollars for social housing. Toronto, with its limited resources and tax base, is unable to fund housing initiatives and support services on its own, and must wait for the actual release of promised federal and provincial funding (Toronto Board of Trade: 2000).

In juxtaposition to the overwhelming demand for additional and new social housing, much of Toronto's existing housing stock is aging and in need of significant repair. An estimated $224 million is needed for immediate maintenance and repair of Toronto's public housing units (Toronto Board of Trade, 2006). The Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program helped to reserve funds for the upkeep and repair of the national housing stock, but the federal 2006 budget contained no commitment to renew the program, which is due to expire in 2007 (Shapcott: 2006).

Unequivocally, government funding is essential to prevent homelessness. Without financial support for affordable housing, the entire population suffers. Additional finances are necessary for emergency shelters, emergency health care, mental health services, education services, and a host of support programs and services for vulnerable children. In the absence of a Toronto or Ontario study, it is worth looking at the results of a 2001 study conducted by the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services in British Columbia that compared the costs of subsidized housing with the cost of emergency shelters. The study reveals that it is more than twice as expensive to house people on an emergency basis than in permanent subsidized housing. Incarceration is even more of a drain on the collective public purse, costing six to ten times as much as subsidized housing.

	Daily Cost	Monthly Cost
Subsidized housing without support services	$25-35	$750-1,050
Emergency shelter	$60-80	$1,800-2,400
Provincial correctional facility	$155-250	$4650-7,500

Source: British Columbia Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services (2001).

While governments know these facts, homelessness escalates, and young families with children are the most rapidly rising homeless population. As the Toronto Training Board noted in 2000, the fastest-growing populations accessing the shelter system at that time were youth under 18 and families with children. The rise in family homelessness in Toronto is a cumulative result of a series of public policy decisions.

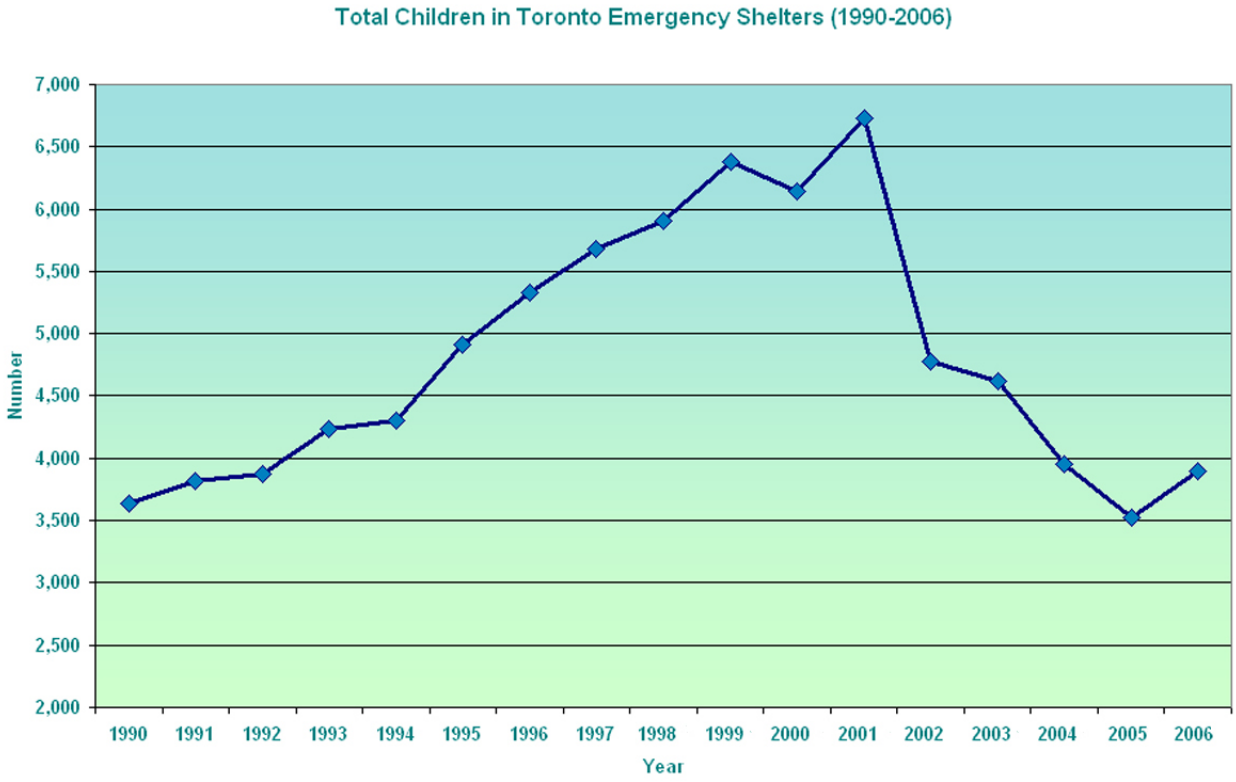
In May 2006, a report from the United Nations' Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights condemned the federal government's failure to meet its obligations to its citizens where housing is concerned and urged the federal, provincial and territorial governments to "address homelessness and inadequate housing as a national emergency" (United Nations: 2006). A crisis created by public policy can be solved by public policy. Governments at all levels – the City of Toronto and other large municipalities cannot do this alone – need to recognize that creating sufficient affordable housing to end family homelessness is in the public interest not only socially and but fiscally.

Who is at Risk: Toronto's Homeless Children

In 2002, just under 32,000 different people turned to Toronto's emergency shelter system for acommodation, almost 5,000 of them were children (City of Toronto: 2003). 2005 figures from the City of Toronto show little change – 32,700 different people were using shelters that year (City of Toronto: 2006). Those most affected by government cuts to social services and housing have been the most marginalized groups, including sole parent families, older single women, young families, and recent immigrants (City of Toronto: 2003). In 2003-2004, the majority of children in Canadian shelters were with mothers escaping domestic abuse (Statistics Canada: 2005); single mothers with children were identified as one of the fastest growing groups of homeless persons in several studies (Shinn and Weitzman: 1996; Toronto Board of Trade: 2000). Aboriginal people are over-represented in the homeless population by as much as a factor of ten (Registered Nurses Association of Ontario: 2004; City of Toronto: 2006).

The *Toronto Report Card on Housing and Homelessness* (2003) collected data on the number of different children who have stayed in shelters from 1990 to 2002. Their data covered all children staying in shelters, both municipally funded family shelters and provincially funded shelters for abused women and children. As noted, these are the same shelter systems used in the research for this study, and together they include all Toronto shelter beds occupied by children. (City of Toronto: 2003)

According to the *Toronto Report Card on Housing and Homelessness*, in 1990, 3,462 children stayed in Toronto's shelters. By 2001, that figure reached 6,727 and has since declined, standing at 3,894 in 2006.



Source: City of Toronto, *Toronto Report Card on Housing and Homelessness, 2003*; data since 2003 are from unpublished sources from the City of Toronto, Shelter Support & Housing Administration Division

The decline in children was accompanied by a decline in the number of two-parent families using shelters. The authors of the *Toronto Report Card on Housing and Homelessness* attribute this in part to more restrictive federal immigration policies that reduced the number of refugee families. In addition, the *Report Card* authors suggest that support services, like Central Family Intake, have been successful in helping families avoid the shelter system by helping them avert eviction and/or find alternate permanent housing.

Increasingly, shelters have added outreach support workers who provide follow-up support to help families become and remain stabilized in their housing, reducing the rate of return to the shelter system. At least one shelter in this study (Birkdale Residence) reported a decrease in repeat clients after the follow up worker was added. The vast majority of families use shelter services only once before being re-housed but the average size of families staying in shelters increased from three persons in 1990 to four in 2002 (City of Toronto: 2003).

Hwang (2001) identified the average length of stay in Toronto shelters for families as one and half to two months (Hwang: 2001). A single night survey mandated by Toronto City Council in 2006 – the Street Needs Assessment – reported that the average length of family homeless was 0.6 of a year (City of Toronto: 2006). More than 50% of the children living in Toronto's shelters in 2002 were school age, between five and 14 years old. Another 30% were under the age of four (City of Toronto: 2003). So these are largely young families under discussion.

Since 1990, thousands of children in Toronto – tens of thousands would not be an exaggeration – roughly the age of children in this study have gone through some version of the experiences described in this report.

Drawing on the data in the chart on page 22, from the 2003 *Toronto Report Card on Housing and Homelesssness*, since 1990, the annual population of children living in Toronto's homeless shelters has ranged from a high of nearly 7,000 to no less than 3,500. It is estimated that about half of those children are between five and 14 years of age. That would mean that, since 1990, thousands of children in Toronto – tens of thousands would not be an exaggeration – roughly the age of children in this study, have gone through some version of the experiences described in this report. The figure may well be higher, but almost all of those children will be elementary students. As long as governments allow family homelessness to continue, it is necessary to understand the educational experiences of homeless children and to put in place the supports they need for educational success.

What are the Risks

Education and Homeless Children

Scant literature exists on these issues in a Canadian, let alone Toronto, context, though there is a substantial body of American literature. Despite significant research on the issue of family homelessness, its causes and support requirements, few Canadian studies have examined the impact of homelessness on children and their families. This study attempts to reduce that knowledge gap, at least for the country's largest city.

One Canadian study, produced by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation in 2001, found that the most pressing needs of children in shelters were difficulties related to self-esteem and well-being, behaviour, school achievement and social skills. To address these issues, the author recommended that homeless families should have better access to affordable housing and financial assistance when exiting the shelter system. Participants also recommended more funds for counseling, child care, training and employment services (CMHC: 2001). Organizations working with women who are homeless due to family violence stress access to affordable child care as a key support (Step it Up: 2006).

There is a wealth of American literature on the impacts of homelessness on children and on their educational experiences and prospects, perhaps due to the size, age and scope of the problem in that country. Homelessness in the United States tripled in the 1980s and has recently been estimated at 3.5 million persons annually, of which 1.35 million are children (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty:

2004). That Canada's social safety net lasted as long as it did may be the reason that family homelessness is a more long-term and larger fact of life in the United States than in Canada. Differences between the social systems of the two countries are easily seen in health care, where 50% of personal bankruptcies in the U.S. are due to medical expenses, while in Canada, access to health care is universal and free at point of access.

In general, American studies have found high rates of behavioural and emotional problems among homeless children. More than one-fifth of homeless preschoolers demonstrate emotional problems serious enough to warrant professional intervention (Bassuk & Friedman: 2005). The developmental, psychological, and behavioural problems most often identified in homeless children in the United States are:

- short attention span
- separation anxiety
- withdrawal
- aggression
- sleep disorders
- depression and poor social interaction
- delays in gross motor, speech and language development.

In addition, homeless children in America are less likely to receive routine health care (Hicks-Coolick: 2003; Yamaguchi, Strawser & Higgins: 1997). In the U.S., homeless children also have higher incidence of hospitalization and more outpatient visits compared to low-income housed children (Karr & Kline: 2004).

A wealth of research points to the high prevalence of health concerns (both acute and chronic health issues) amongst the homeless population (Miller & Lin: 1988, as cited in Cumella, Grattan & Vostanis: 1998). Children born into homeless families tend to have lower birth weights compared to housed children, experience delayed development in expressive and receptive language, visual motor skills and reading skills (Cumella et al.: 1998). The odds are stacked against these children from birth.

Homeless children confront more formidable challenges associated with residential instability and related family and school disruptions than low-income housed children. School attendance for these children may be the best opportunity for stability in a life filled with change and uncertainty. When children move several times, the risk of emotional and behavioural problems, the likelihood of being expelled from schools or of being retained in the same grade for more than one year, increases. Rubin, Ericson, San Agustin, Cleary, Allen and Cohen (1996) found that homeless children performed at a lower academic level and had a higher rate of grade repetition compared with housed children despite showing no difference in cognitive functioning (as cited in Coates: 2001). Moreover, students who change schools repeatedly can fall behind their housed peers by a full instructional year over a six-year period (Kerbow: 1996, as cited in Sandel, Sharfstein & Shaw: 1999). Despite needing more special education relative to the general student population, homeless children generally receive less special education and over the long term this can have disastrous results (Mann: 1999). The dropout rate for children in lower income neighborhoods is three times higher than the rate for children in higher income neighborhoods (Toronto District School Board: 2000, as cited in Kalinowski: 2006).

Homeless children may experience deficits in academic performance, and social and emotional adaptation (Rafferty & Shinn: 1991, as cited in Torquati & Gamble: 2001). Some develop sleep problems, language delays, withdrawal, aggression, and attention deficits which affect their academic performance (Bassuk & Rubin: 1987; as cited in Torquati & Gamble: 2001).

As a result of being homeless, children may exhibit a number of developmental delays that can impede ability to succeed. Kidd and Scrimenti (2004) found a high prevalence of developmental delays in social, intel-

lectual and emotional functioning among homeless children. High incidences of poor psychological health have been documented as result of the internalizing and externalizing behaviour problems, and anxiety and depression experienced by homeless children (Bassuk et al.: 1997; Rafferty & Shinn: 1991).

Poor reading skills are often a result of limits on education, and in turn, reduce academic success. Without needed supports, homeless children run a higher risk of illiteracy.

Illiteracy has a significant influence on health. Roughly 22% of adult Canadians fall into the lowest level of literacy, and may have difficulty, for example, determining how to administer medication from a written label. Twenty-six percent of adults are at the next lowest rung, meaning they are able to read simple text in familiar contexts that is clearly organized (Public Health Agency of Canada: 2003). A study by the Ontario Public Health Association and Frontier College found a strong correlation between literacy and health: people with poor reading skills tend to have more health problems (Breen: 1993).

Illiteracy restricts access to safe, meaningful and well-paid employment (Breen, 1993). As 85% of jobs require grade 9 or higher reading skills (Frontier College, 1989, as cited in Breen: 1993), literacy is key to the attainment of gainful employment. Moreover, "just as lack of literacy skills is a major cause of poverty, literacy is a basic prerequisite for escaping from poverty" (Public Health Agency of Canada: 2003). Failure to provide access to literacy to homeless children may put them at lifelong risk of poverty and homelessness.

The Impact of Homelessness on Children

Health

"By far the greatest share of health problems is attributable to broad social conditions. Yet health policies have been dominated by disease-focused solutions that largely ignore the social environment. As a result, health problems persist, inequalities have widened, and health interventions have obtained less than optimal results."

World Health Organization Commission on Social Determinants of Health

Health Canada identifies twelve key determinants of health, all of which have a serious impact on homeless children's health:

- income and social status
- employment and working conditions
- social support networks; education
- biology and genetic endowment
- personal health practices and coping skills
- physical environments
- health services
- health child development
- gender
- culture
- social environments

(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003).

Unquestionably, poverty and health are inextricably linked. The social, physical and economic environment plays a pivotal role in shaping the health outcomes of the population. The social determinants of health focus on the fact that, "profound improvements in health in Canada…have primarily been due not to

advances in medicine or health care but rather in the kind of societies in which we live" (Raphael, 2002). In keeping with the social determinants of health literature, health cannot be restricted to only physical and mental well-being, but also must factor in social characteristics such as education and income (Raphael: 2004).

Poverty has a direct effect on children's health. The vast majority of parents in the middle- to high-income range report that their children are in very good or excellent health. Parents from low-income households are more likely to report that their children are in poorer health (Ng, O'Connor, Wade, Fleiszer & Fordham: 2006). Mothers of homeless children are more likely to report their child in fair or poor health as compared to mothers of children who are housed (Weinreb, Goldberg, Bassuk & Perlof: 2005).

High mobility, precarious living conditions and poverty coalesce to present significant health and emotional difficulties for homeless children. Health and emotional difficulties experienced by homeless children are compounded by educational difficulties resulting from lack of peer acceptance, shorter attention spans, shame and poor self-concept (Torquati & Gamble: 2001; Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler: 2006; Weinreb, Goldberg, Bassuk & Perlof: 2005), all of which have been found to hinder academic success (Rafferty: 1999; as cited in Mawhinney-Rhoads et al., 2006). Emotional and physical difficulties are exacerbated when homeless children experience deficits in academic performance and social adaptation (Rafferty & Shinn: 1991, as cited in Torquati & Gamble: 2001).

Some children may also develop sleep problems, language delays, withdrawal, aggression, and attention deficits (Bassuk & Rubin: 1987; as cited in Torquati & Gamble: 2001), which also come to bear on academic performance. Moreover, Kidd and Scrimenti (2004) found a high prevalence of developmental delays in the social, intellectual and emotional functioning of homeless children, as well as higher incidences of poor psychological health resulting from internalizing and externalizing behaviour problems, anxiety and depression (Rafferty & Shinn: 1991; Vostanis et al.: 1997; as cited in Kidd & Scrimenti: 2004).

Determinant of Health **(Public Health Agency of Canada, 2003)**	**Importance for homeless children**
Income and social status	The vast majority of homeless children live in low-income households.
Employment and working conditions	Many homeless parents are not working while they reside in shelters. Only 10% of families accessing shelters earned an income in 2001 (CMHC: 2001).
Social support networks	Frequent disruptions in home life compromise the social support network of children. It is extremely difficult to maintain friendships when fleeing abuse (due to safety concerns).
Education	Education is repeatedly interrupted with continual moves during the school year.
Biology and genetic endowment	Children born into homeless families tend to experience delayed development in expressive and receptive language, visual motor skills and reading skills compared to housed children (Cumella et al.: 1998).
Personal health practices and coping skills	Homeless families experience increased hospitalization rates and increased use of medical care as health risks for asthma, diarrhea and fever escalate.
Physical environments	Many children forced to reside in inadequate housing due to lack of supply of affordable and suitable housing (i.e. in need of repair; unsafe).
Health services	Homeless children are less likely to access health services as compared to their housed counterparts.
Health child development	Low birth weight more common in homeless children (Ng et al., 2006; Cumella et al., 1998).
Gender	High percentages of homeless families are mother-led and have experienced violence; this impacts on role models for children and future behaviour patterns.
Culture	In 2001, roughly 62% of Toronto's children were born outside of Canada. Extended and multi-generational families are more common among immigrants (Milan & Hamm, 2003; Ng et al., 2006).
Social environments	Immigration status can create further problems for homeless families (i.e. some persons with no legal status are not permitted to reside in certain shelters in Toronto).

"My only consolation is I have a place and that gives me comfort. Else I would have been roaming the streets."

VAW shelter parent

Mental health problems of homeless children have only recently become the subject of more systematic research. Homeless children may experience a variety of mental health issues. Many homeless families face frequent bouts of depression and anxiety, some to clinical levels. Studies conducted in the United States document high rates of behavioural and emotional problems in homeless children, with as many as 38% having disorders of clinical significance (Fox et al., 1990, as cited in Cumella et al., 1998).

Becoming homeless is an extremely stressful event. Homeless mothers must typically contend with daily feelings of frustration, sadness, depression and fatigue (Banyard: 1995, as cited in Meadows-Oliver: 2003). Many experience feelings of helplessness and hopelessness (Scherer: 1998, as cited in Meadows-Oliver: 2003). Research shows a high proportion of homeless mothers - 45% - struggle with depression (Connelly and Crown: 1994, as cited in Cumella et al.: 1998). Children are more susceptible to depression if one or other parent struggles with it, particularly if they have been exposed to violence, marital conflict, separation or loss (Cumella, Grattan & Vostanis: 1998).

The majority of mental health problems experienced by children of homeless families are also common among low-income families. The literature is inconsistent when comparing the problems faced by children living in chronic poverty and those faced by homeless children. Although most would agree that both children living in shelters and housed children from low-income families exhibit higher incidence of behavioural and emotional problems (Hart-Shegos: 1999; Anooshian: 2003), there is some debate as to whether homelessness itself is the stressful event which places children at risk for a number of psychological, emotional, social, and academic difficulties, or whether homelessness is one factor along a continuum of stressors which come to bear on the larger problem, that of chronic poverty.

Rafferty and Shinn (1991) found that homeless children were at greater risk of poor physical and mental health compared to children from low-income families. In contrast, Douglass (1996) contends that homeless children tend to score roughly the same on standardized assessments as low-income housed children. The exception was in the scores of children who had attended early childhood education programs, who tended to score better than children not enrolled in these programs (Molnar & Rath: 1990, as cited in Douglass: 1996).

Some researchers found no statistical differences in levels of general developmental delay or incidence of major physical illness when comparing homeless and low-income housed children. Even when children living in shelters became housed, for two-fifths of children (and a quarter of mothers) mental health problems persisted after re-housing (Vostanis, Grattan & Cumella, 1998) demonstrating that homelessness may well fit within a continuum of chronic poverty, and introduce additional stressors to an already distressing life situation.

Violence Against Women and Children

Domestic abuse takes many forms and can encompass physical and sexual violence, emotional abuse, financial abuse, intimidation and neglect (Sharma: 2001). Violence in the home affects people of every economic stratum. However, when women and children in lower economic brackets face domestic violence they do not have adequate financial provisions and run the risk of homelessness. They may not be able to flee situations of violence, leaving them and their children gravely at risk.

.....

"The erosion of social assistance rates in Ontario and across Canada has made it difficult for women to get out of violent situations. Social Assistance rates that are grossly inadequate to address women's needs create a barrier to their ability to leave or avoid abusive relationships."

Mann, Law Times News
June 19, 2006

.....

According to Transition Home Survey (THS), 58,486 women with 36,840 dependent children stayed in 473 Canadian shelters in 2003-2004. The majority of them were escaping situations of domestic abuse (Taylor-Butts: 2005). A national snapshot of shelters taken on April 14, 2004 found that while lack of affordable housing, addictions and mental health issues all caused women and children to use shelters, 76% of women and 88% of children in shelters were escaping situations of abuse (Taylor-Butts: 2005).

Experiencing domestic violence exacerbates the difficulties faced by children residing in shelters. Studies have found that even if children are not directly experiencing the abuse, they are still affected by witnessing or knowing about abuse that occurs in their home (Child Welfare Information Gateway: 2004). Homeless children are often victims of or witnesses to serious violence (Anooshian: 2003). They have a history of major loss or separation, experience high levels of transience, and/or are often deprived of numerous protective factors such as ongoing friendships, continuity of routines, successful school performance, and self-esteem (Torquati & Gamble: 2001).

The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) has documented the life experiences of thousands of Canadian children biannually from 1994 to the present, and includes information about Canadian children and youth exposed to domestic violence (Hotton: 2003). Witnessing or directly experiencing domestic abuse has been linked to:

- increased aggression, depression and anxiety in children
- separation anxiety and mood swings
- symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- general mental health difficulties
- 58% increased risk of juvenile arrest and 38% increased risk of adult arrest

- greater likelihood of being perpetrators or victims in violent relationships themselves in later years.

(Rivett, Howard & Harold: 2006; Moss: 2005; Hotton: 2003; McCloskey, et al: 1995; Lundy & Grossman: 2005; Graham-Bermann & Seng: 2005; Vostanis, et al: 2001; Hughes: 2002).

Children exposed to domestic abuse may also exhibit physical problems such as headaches, over-activity, eczema, eating problems, difficulty in sleeping and bed-wetting, as well as physical injuries directly resulting from being a victim of violence (Doherty: 2002; Sox: 2004; Penfold: 2005; Lundy & Grossman: 2005). All of these emotional and physical consequences can impact children's performance at school. Children who have witnessed or experienced domestic abuse have been found to score lower on IQ tests than children who have not (Koenen, et al: 2003) and have higher incidence of learning difficulties (Lundy & Grossman: 2005). Witnessing or experiencing abuse may increase truancy, and the negative impact of abuse on cognitive development can cause "poor academic achievement" (Penfold: 2005, p. 22; Fantuzzo & Mohr: 1999). Extreme stress can lower cognitive functioning and negatively impact the development of a child's verbal and quantitative skills (Edleson: 1999).

A national snapshot of shelters in April 2004 showed 76% of women and 88% of children in shelters were escaping situations of abuse.

Not all children exposed to domestic abuse suffer academically. For some children, their intelligence and personality combined with social and school supports and effective parenting mitigates deleterious effects on their school experience (Margolin & Gordis: 2004; Condly: 2006). This speaks to the necessity of ensuring that supports are in place to allow children, as much as possible, to overcome the impacts of experiencing domestic violence, and consequent homelessness and life disruptions. Ideally, teachers, schools and shelter staff will not only be aware of the multiple challenges in school achievement faced by many children living in shelters who have witnessed or experienced abuse but will have at their disposal both the classroom skills, school protocols and access to appropriate programming to fully support these children's learning.

Housing as a Determinant of Health

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services."

Article 25.1
The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Indisputably, housing is a determinant of health. Key institutions and covenants, such as the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986), the Commission on the Social Determinants of Health (WHO: 2006), and the Public Health Agency of Canada (2003) recognize adequate housing as a fundamental precondition of health. According to the most recently-published census results – and newer figures should be available within the year – 13.7% of Canadians and 15.1% of Ontarians live in core need of housing which will inevitably affect their health status (CMHC, Statistics Canada: 2001). As noted above, core housing need refers to the affordability, suitability and adequacy of housing. It may be politically acceptable that one in seven Canadians live in core housing need – and more than 80% of those with annual incomes under $10,000

– but this comes at a high cost to the individuals living in this situation and the country at large (CMHC: 2001).

A significant but as yet uncalculated price tag attaches to maintaining such a large proportion of the Canadian population at-risk. Precarious housing – whether housed or homeless – leads to unhealthy outcomes. It is clear that homeless families – and their children - experience increased hospitalization rates, greater need for programs and services placed on the shoulders of already over-burdened schools and social service providers, and increased use of medical care and prescription drugs. The strain on the education system from homeless children suffering developmental delays and their constant mobility impacts not only those children but the system itself.

The Importance of Early Childhood

"The first six years are the most important years in your child's life. In the early years, the brain forms connections that set the stage for lifelong learning, behaviour, and health. By age six, children have a solid foundation for reaching their full potential in their years ahead."

Ontario Early Years, 2003

The literature clearly describes the importance of the first six years of life in determining health and readiness for formal education and long-term life prospect. The Ontario Early Years Study (McCain & Mustard: 1999) identifies early childhood as a time for developmental milestones that lay the foundation for children's health later in life (Ng, et al.: 2006). Children develop the language and cognitive skills required to learn reading and mathematics between birth and age six (Doherty: 1997). Young children living in emotionally nurturing and mentally stimulating environments have better physical and mental health, do better academically, and achieve greater social and economic success as adults (Ramey & Ramey: 1998). For healthy development in early years, children need adequate nutrition and to be protected from neglect, abuse and violence (Doherty: 1997). Given the described impacts of homelessness on children, homeless children under the age of five are clearly at risk of not acquiring the best possible start in life.

While children with secure attachment patterns tend to use the physical and emotional security base to explore things and people in their environment, children with insecure attachment to their caregiver may be reluctant to explore, may develop a general mistrust of others, and/or experience low self-esteem (Doherty: 1997). Disruptions of home, such as are experienced by homeless children, can put the security of these attachments at risk.

Learning readiness is also influenced by early childhood experiences. Conceptualized as school readiness, it refers to a child's ability to meet the task demands of school and to absorb curriculum content (Kagan, 1992, as cited in Doherty: 1997). Homeless children experiencing stress may be fearful and reluctant to engage in new activities, and may miss learning opportunities that a child without such stresses easily absorbs (Doherty: 1997). Lack of school readiness has many deleterious implications. Children who lack the skills necessary to succeed academically tend to resort to behaviours such as physical aggression, bullying, and interruption of other children's activities (Doherty, 1997); behaviours often associated with peer rejection. In turn, lacking school readiness can result in the need for special education services (Doherty: 1997). Academic performance (affected by learning readiness) is considered a significant predictor of whether a child completes high school (McLeod, Boyle, Byrne & Hall, 1994, as cited in Doherty: 1997). In instances where early childhood homelessness impacts school readiness, the reverberations can last many years.

Lack of Adequate Child Care

Early childhood education programs, such as quality daycare programs, can improve school readiness. As

noted earlier, low income children who attended early childhood education programs, tended to score better on standardized assessments than low income children not enrolled in these programs (Molnar & Rath: 1990, as cited in Douglass: 1996). An established and increasing body of research "confirms that access to quality child care provides benefits across all social and economic classes," and that the "earlier we invest in our children, the longer we all reap the benefits" (Child care Advocacy Association of Canada: 2007). The language of Canadian intergovernmental agreements on child care, such as Early Childhood Development Agreement, September 11, 2000, echoes these findings:

> Intervening early to promote child development during this critical period can have long-term benefits that can extend throughout children's lives. Governments and other partners currently provide a range of programs and services to effectively support early childhood development. The challenge is to build on existing services and supports to make them more coordinated and widely available. (Child care Advocacy Association of Canada: 2007)

Although governments acknowledge the benefits of quality child care for children, there is a significant lack of access to affordable child care. In Toronto, for example, the "waiting list for subsidized child care historically averages 15,000 children" (City of Toronto: 2003). As of July, 2007, there were just under 12,000 children on the subsidy waiting list (City of Toronto, Children's Services: 2007).

Getting to the Best Start

In 2006, the Toronto Best Start Network released its *Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children*, an attachment to the 2005-2009 *Child Care Service Plan* (May 2005) and *The Best Start Service and Transition Infrastructure Plan* (November 2005). As part of Ontario's Best Start Strategy, Toronto will receive a total of $125 million from 2006 to 2009. This funding has been set aside for priorities of Toronto's Vision for Children: expanded early learning and child care spaces and subsidies, and community/ neighbourhood hub delivery system for screening, assessment and treatment; child care and parenting programs; and links to mental health services, and speech and language resources (City of Toronto: 2006). Given the impacts noted above, agencies serving homeless pre-school children need access to these resources for their clients.

The Impact of Eviction

"The impact of evictions is quite severe for tenants and often causes a serious disruption to tenants – half of whom have children…"

Linda Lapointe,
Analysis of Evictions Under
the Tenant Protection Act
in the City of Toronto, 2004

Being evicted has a significant emotional toll on families. "Emotional stress, anger, a sense of hopelessness and depression were most often mentioned" in a study conducted on individuals who had been evicted (Lapointe: 2004). A loss of dignity and self-respect were also mentioned as adverse effects of eviction.
Loss of a job is the most significant factor leading to a household becoming in rent arrears, and 85% of eviction applications are for rent arrears. The rapid increase in evictions after the change in provincial legislation in 1998 was discussed earlier. In 2006, the Ontario government introduced new legislation and on January 31, 2007 the *Residential Tenancies Act*, 2006, came into effect. The government's stated intention is to eliminate the unfair default eviction process and ensure fairer rent increases for tenants. The *Act* changes the Ontario Rental Housing Tribunal into the Landlord and Tenant Board to reflect a new mandate that the government sees as improving protection for tenants. Every tenant now has access to mediation or a hearing, and the Landlord and Tenant Board will consider the tenant's circumstances before allowing an

eviction. The impact of this new legislation on evictions in Ontario remains to be seen.

Resisting the Impacts

Building strength and resilience in the child, and legislating the child's right to a supported education, are two approaches that have been taken to resist or moderate the impacts of homelessness on children and their education. More program-based approaches can also work to minimize impacts and sustain children. Many were discussed through the research interviews with teachers, shelter staff and liaison workers, parents and children. They are reported in both the findings and the recommendations of this report.

Building the Child: Resiliency and Hardiness

"The concept of resilience involves the element of risk being mitigated by protective factors to produce a positive, or healthy outcome…"

Stewart, Reid, Buckles, Edgar, Mangham, Tilley & Jackson 1999

It is possible for the ramifications of being homeless to not have a profound negative affect on children's education, health and well-being. Homeless children can benefit from a number of cost-effective, practical interventions that build their internal resiliency and competence (Masten, Miliotis, Graham-Bermann, Ramirez & Neeman: 1993).

Research conducted on resiliency and hardiness points to the ability of some children to live through the harmful effects of homelessness and enter adulthood recovered from their past circumstances. The research indicates that particular social resources facilitate this resilience in children. A supportive family is vital. The parental relationship is a key feature in shaping children's sense of security and psychological well-being (Bornstein, 1995; as cited in Torquati & Gamble: 2001). Ample parent involvement and warmth, as well as strong and supportive relationships with persons outside of the immediate family unit – for example with peers and a wider social network - create conditions that can allow for successful adaptation to the difficulties children may encounter (Masten & Coatsworth: 1998; as cited in Torquati & Gamble: 2001).

Social support can buffer against the multitude of stressors bearing on the child (Torquati & Gamble: 2001). Additional supports in the educational system could assist and encourage parents and children. Solutions that facilitate homeless children's participation in after-school social and recreational activities could provide opportunities to build the resiliency and competence needed to break the detrimental cycle of homelessness (Hart-Shegos: 1999).

The caregiver is at the apex of the child's social support network, and mothers, in particular, are centrally important (Torquati & Gamble: 2001). Parenting style is significant but, as noted, having other relationships is key to developing resilience. Unfortunately, some research indicates that homeless children may develop relationships with parents, siblings and teachers, but have relatively few friends and relationships with extended family members, likely due to their transitory life (Torquati & Gamble: 2001).

The literature identifies resources an individual can mobilize, known as "generalized resistance resources," to resist stress in the surrounding environment. These resources include:

- sense of identity
- intelligence
- sense of control
- social network
- cultural stability
- materials assets
- stable value and belief system
- genetic predisposition (in Almedon: 2005).

Similarly, a number of interrelated constructs have been suggested as necessary to foster the ability of children to successfully endure hardship, including: fortitude and emotional strength, hardiness, resilience, and a sense of coherence (Strumpfer: 1995; Kobasa: 1979; Rutter: 1999). These have been hypothesized as sustaining homeless children.

The literature provides some strategies and programs to tackle the obstacles associated with homelessness, but more often it discusses policies that can prevent homelessness. While preventing homelessness would obviate the need for this research, until governments act to bring an end to family homelessness, homeless children need supports to fully and freely embrace their right to public education. Legislation is a tool that has been used in the United States in an attempt to assure this right.

Legislating Protections

McKinney-Vento

In 1987, Congress passed the *McKinney Act*, renamed *McKinney-Vento* in 2000 by President Bill Clinton. *McKinney-Vento* is the only major federal legislative response to homelessness in America. It touches on many aspects of homelessness, including the education of homeless children and youth. Amendments passed in 1990 specified the "obligations of states in assuring the access of homeless children and youth to public education" (NCH: 2006). In Canada, education is constitutionally reserved to the provincial level of government. This is not the case in the U.S.

The financial authorization for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth was increased and states were required to make grants to local education agencies to ensure access to public education for homeless children and youth (NCH: 2006). In 1996, further amendments added a role for parents of homeless children regarding the children's school placement and required educational authorities to cooperate with housing authorities (NCH: 2006). Funding has been uneven over the years, peaking in 1995. In 2001, Congress re-titled and re-authorized the McKinney Education of Homeless Children and Youth Program as part of the Bush administration's *No Child Left Behind Act*. Lack of funding allocations for the *Act* left application uneven.

Twenty years after its initial passage, *McKinney-Vento*, as it is commonly known, addresses what are still seen as basic barriers to education for homeless children and youth including:

- enrollment requirements (residency, school records, immunizations, legal guardianship)
- high mobility resulting in lack of school stability and education continuity
- lack of access to programs
- lack of transportation
- lack of school supplies, clothing, etc
- poor health, fatigue, hunger
- prejudice and misunderstanding (Duffield: 2007).

McKinney-Vento defines homeless children as those who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and, in a key provision, establishes that every local education authority – the equivalent of Canadian school boards - must designate a liaison for students in homeless situations. The direct responsibilities of those liaisons are to:

- ensure students enroll in school
- ensure students have full and equal opportunity to succeed in school
- ensure children and youth in homeless situations are identified (Duffield: 2007).

Other liaison duties include arranging transportation, posting notice and resolving disputes.

Provisions on school stability require that homeless children and youth are allowed to stay in their school of origin or to enroll in any public school that students living in the same attendance area are eligible to attend, according to their best interest. Transportation is also covered under *McKinney-Vento*. At a parent or guardian's request, local education authorities must provide students experiencing homelessness with transportation to and from their school of origin and must provide services comparable to those provided to other students (Duffield: 2007).

Given the federal-provincial division of powers under the Canadian constitution, comparable federal legislation is not very feasible in Canada, though the federal government has been known to enter into the provincial field of education – e.g. RESPs, Millennium scholarships – through the back door. Effective legislation supporting the right to equal access to education for homeless children in Toronto requires action from the provincial government.

Bill 133, 2006: Providing School Stability

There was legislation in process in Ontario in the spring of 2007, before the provincial election was called, that supported the right of homeless children to stay in their "school of origin" or the school they had been attending prior to losing their housing. On October 12, 2006, Bill 133, *An Act to amend the Education Act to provide stability for students in transition housing*, a private member's bill sponsored by the Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services and the Minister responsible for Women's Issues, passed second reading in the Ontario Legislature. It was not passed into law before the provincial election was called in September 2007, and died in committee.

Bill 133 would have amended the *Education Act* to establish that the parent or guardian of a homeless child or youth had the right to request that the child remain in the school they were attending prior to becoming homeless until the end of the school year or until permanent housing is arranged. The amendment did not specify who would pay for any needed transportation, but stated that the child would be "admitted without payment of fee." It is not clear whether this was intended to ensure that the school board paid for any transportation needed, but that is a possible interpretation.

As this report clearly demonstrates in the findings section, homeless children often attend three schools in a given year due to their housing situation. They start the school year in their home school or school of origin, transfer to a second school close to their emergency housing, and move to a third school when they are rehoused. While Bill 133 recognized that changing schools can have a major impact on homeless children, and could have reduced this impact by keeping the child in the home school until permanent housing is found, a clear, specific provision requiring school boards to provide for transportation from the emergency shelter to the home school without cost to the parent would have strengthened Bill 133's enforceability, rather than leaving parents to rely on local interpretations.

In addition, as statistics cited earlier reveal, a very high percentage of homeless children in Canada and in Toronto are living in emergency shelters because their mothers fled a situation of domestic violence (Taylor-Butts: 2004). For most of these children, safety issues rule out remaining in the home school. To reduce the number of schools these children go to – and this study indicates they may well be the majority of homeless children – Bill 133 needed to grant children the right to stay in the school they attend from emergency housing until the end of the school year.

Bill 133 could have been a first step in the right direction, providing some homeless children with a chance at school stability and, with simple amendments, could have enhanced school stability for many more children. As noted, Bill 133 failed to pass the Ontario legislature before it was dissolved for the 2007 provincial election.

Reversing the Trend

"The IMF likewise recognizes that the size and quality of social spending can affect long-run growth and poverty reduction; that macroeconomic viability must include policies that directly address poverty and social concerns; and that, in order to support these objectives, social sector spending should be focused on improving the education and health status of the poor…"

International Monetary Fund, 2001

Put the Social Safety Net Back in Place

There is growing international recognition that a strong social safety net is critical to the economic prosperity of a nation. Perhaps recognizing the long-term economic costs of the social consequences of reducing the net, numerous publications – only a few are cited below – document the need for poverty reduction to foster widespread economic and social vitality.

The *World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty* (World Bank, 2001) notes that there is evidence that economic growth corresponds to the education and life expectancy of a nation, particularly as felt by individuals in the lower income levels. This is particularly important as "better health and education outcomes contribute to faster economic growth" (World Bank: 2001). Moreover, social exclusion, defined as a "multi-dimensional socio-economic conception of deprivation," must be overcome as a necessary precondition for economic growth (World Bank: 2006). Social inclusion, whether described narrowly in terms of ensuring the population has access to full-time paid employment, or more broadly encompassing a range of institutional arrangements, including adequate housing, health care and access to social services, is the subject of widespread debate across OECD countries (World Bank: 2006).

In May 2006, the U.N. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights convened to discuss the reports of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on Canada. The Committee cited a long list of concerns, echoing recommendations given in 1993 and 1998, which have yet to be implemented. From the extensive list, the Committee stressed these issues as requiring action in Canada:

- The absence of a legally enforceable right to adequate social assistance benefits for all persons in need on a non-discriminatory basis and the negative impact of certain workfare programmes on social assistance recipients.
- The Committee regrets that domestic violence as a specific offence has not been included in the *Criminal Code*…The Committee notes with concern that women are prevented from leaving abusive relationships due to the lack of affordable housing and inadequate assistance.

- The Committee reiterates its recommendations that the federal, provincial and territorial governments address homelessness and inadequate housing as a national emergency by reinstating or increasing… social housing programmes for those in need, improving and properly enforcing anti-discrimination legislation in the field of housing, increasing shelter allowances and social assistance rates to realistic levels, and providing adequate support services for persons with disabilities. The Committee urges the State to implement a national housing strategy for the reduction of homelessness that includes measurable goals and timetables, consultation and collaboration with affected communities, complaints procedures, and transparent accountability mechanisms…
  (Economic and Social Council, United Nations: 2006).

Within Canada as well, respected economists and financiers are promoting poverty reduction and greater social spending to advance the well-being of all Canadians. The TD Bank Financial Group argues that Canadian households have not realized the forecast economic well-being that was once envisioned (TD Economics: 2005). To do so requires is a strong health care system, not just a more costly one; increased spending on education, crucial to raising productivity and the standard of living; and greater spending on infrastructure for replacement and repair (TD Economics: 2005).

The Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults (MISWAA), formed in 2004, engaging a large number of civic leaders from every sector of society. Fundamental tenets of their "principles for a modern income security system" are:

- all Canadians should have access to basic necessities such as food, clothing, shelter and personal hygiene
- individuals working full-time should not live in poverty
- children should not impede a parent's ability to participate in the labour market
- all Canadians should have the means to improve their situation via the appropriate employment supports and skills training, job opportunities, and community involvement (Task Force on MISWAA: 2006).

Structural Causes, Structural Solutions

As discussed earlier, the causes of family homelessness nationally and in Toronto are structural and can be addressed by structural solutions like greater tenant protections, increased social assistance rates, raising the minimum wage, increasing funding for programming that prevents and addresses violence against women and children and, of course, creating more affordable housing. Unfortunately, for a decade or more, policy moved quickly in the opposite direction, creating a crisis in family homelessness and the need for clear information on how it affects children and their education.

Almost none of the research conducted in Canada to date on the impacts of homelessness on children examines their academic success. The *Kid Builders Research Project* is the first major study to specifically investigate the educational performance of homeless children in Canada, and as such begins to address a major gap in the literature. Given the level of family homelessness in Toronto and the lack of Canadian source material on the educational impacts for elementary school children, this paper attempts to begin the development of a comprehensive profile of homeless children.

This study builds on preliminary findings from *Kid Builders Phase 2* (Sherkin: 2006) and seeks to identify options for action to address this issue. Echoing *The Best Start Plan, Toronto Vision for Children*, it is necessary that:

- All children have adequate income, health, housing, food and nutrition, care and education, safety and security, recreation, leisure and cultural experiences
- Families with young children have timely access to a range of universal, high-quality, developmental and affordable programs which support them, throughout the family-life cycle, in their roles as parents, workers and urban citizens
- All governments, authorities and organizations involved in programs for young children and families work together to plan, develop, administer, fund, regulate, deliver and are accountable for a new service system built on goals and targets for quality, expansion, accessibility and effective use of resources… (City of Toronto, 2006).

Kid Builders Phase 3 seeks protection for children from the negative impacts of homelessness on their education. To recommend appropriate supports requires a clear understanding of the experiences of homeless children in schools, the challenges and barriers they face, and strategies for removing and overcoming those barriers. This research was designed to elicit this information from those closest to the issues.

Part 3 RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

Design

Kid Builders Phase 3 research was designed to approach the subject - the school experiences of elementary school age children living in homeless shelters - from a range of perspectives in order to describe the experience as fully as possible. Information was to be elicited from a cluster of sources connected to homeless children living in a particular shelter including:

- the children
- parents living in the same shelter
- staff at the same shelter
- teachers and administrators at an elementary school attended by children from the shelter
- Ontario School Records of homeless students attending elementary school
- a demographic survey of the shelter.

The intention of the design was not to collect information about a specific child from many sources but rather to use the cluster of sources to paint the most accurate picture possible of the educational experiences of homeless elementary school students in Toronto.

The Project Advisory Committee

A knowledgeable and energetic Project Advisory Committee provided guidance and direction to the project, helping design the research and the research instruments, assisting with connections to shelters and programs and helping carry out the school-based focus groups. The Advisory Committee included a leading economic researcher, representatives of the sponsoring agencies including initial researcher Tracy Smith-Carrier, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (to November 2006); Armine Yalnizyan, Director of Research, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto; Paula Carrie, Manager, Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre; Liben Gebremikael, Child and Family Therapist, Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre, and Christine Davis, Community Planner, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto. Advisory Committee members from outside agencies engaged with homeless children included Dr. Lee Ford-Jones, Pediatrician, Hospital for Sick Children; Lynda Marshall, Children's Program Supervisor, Family Residence; Leslie Jardine, Manager, Family Residence; Rhonda Roffey, Executive Director, Women's Habitat; and Mary El Milosh, retired Vice-Principal, Toronto District School Board. The final researcher and author of this report, Ann Decter, joined the committee and the process halfway through and completed the work.

Methodology

The Sample

The sample consisted of four groups of people: parents currently residing in a shelter; children between the ages of 6 to 12, inclusive, currently residing in a shelter; shelter staff of select shelters across the City of Toronto; teachers and administrators of select elementary schools in the Toronto District School Board chosen because they have shelter children in attendance.

Shelters

Eleven shelters participated in the *Kid Builders Research Project, Phase 3*. There were four ways for shelters to participate in the research:

- focus group or interviews with staff
- focus group or interviews with resident children
- focus group or interviews with resident parents and completion of the *Parent Questionnaire*
- completion of the *Shelter Demographic Survey*.

Nine shelters originally agreed to participate in all aspects of the study – five VAW shelters and four family shelters. In addition, two VAW shelters were asked and agreed to complete the *Shelter Demographic Survey* after the focus groups had been completed, in order to enhance the shelter profile portion of the report. The following Toronto shelters participated in the study, though not all were involved in all phases of the research:

- Birkdale Residence
- Ernestine's Shelter for Women
- Family Residence
- Julliette's Place
- Roberston House
- The Redwood
- Women's Habitat
- Woodgreen Red Door Family Shelter
- Woodgreen Red Door Violence Against Women Shelter
- YWCA Arise
- Yorktown.

Five of the shelters completed all four aspects of the research. Three completed everything but the *Shelter Demographic Survey*, one completed the staff focus group and the *Shelter Demographic Survey* and, as noted, two completed only the *Shelter Demographic Survey*. The turnover of families in shelters and the focus on school age children necessitated return visits to conduct additional focus groups.

Shelter liaison workers and school and community therapists connected to shelters and schools in the sample were also interviewed. These staff are crucial components in the support system for homeless children living in shelters, and are employed by outside agencies, either Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre or the Child Development Institute.

Schools

Prior to entering the schools, the proposal for the project was carefully scrutinized by the External Research Review Committee of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). The TDSB External Research Review Committee officially approved the *Kid Builders Research Project, Phase 3* on October 12, 2006. *Kid Builders Phase 2* had been given approval the year before, so the proposal for Phase 3 received an expedited review. The TDSB External Research Review Committee abides by protocols and guidelines to ensure that all studies conducted within the Board are ethically sound.

Upon receiving approval, requests were made to seven schools to conduct focus groups with teachers and administrators (principals and vice-principals) over the staff lunchtime. One school declined to participate and a second school did not have any teachers on staff with experience teaching homeless children at that moment in time. Two additional schools were approached. One agreed readily and at the second, where the principal was on unexpected leave, arranging a date for the focus group proved impossible. In the end, teachers and administrators at six TDSB elementary schools that serve homeless students participated in focus groups.

The intention was to have administrators at five schools with students residing in a shelter in their catchment area complete *Ontario School Record (OSR) Review Templates* on two to five anonymous children from shelters who attended their school. Of the reduced school sample of six, one principal declined, citing time constraints; another had only Junior Kindergarten students at the time the request was made; and a third school no longer had homeless students because the shelter had been closed by the government between the time of the shelter focus groups and the school focus group. The remaining three schools all completed the *OSR Review Template* on at least two students. A total of seven *OSR Review Templates* were completed and returned.

It is important to note that OSRs are regarded as highly confidential documents, and are rarely used in research. Sensitivity to their use is common, despite clearance of protocols. Concerns in this regard were expressed by one of the principals although the templates were anonymous and the TDSB External Research Review Committee had approved the research. Some principals checked with the TDSB External Research Review Committee to verify that *Kid Builders Phase 3* had permission for the study before responding to any inquiries, others asked to see a copy of the letter arranging for the focus group. The *OSR Template* is attached, along with the other research instruments in Appendix 2.

As noted, a total of six elementary schools of the Toronto District School Board participated in the study. Focus groups with teachers and administrators were held at Edgewood Public School, Galloway Road Public School, Huron Street Public School, West Hill Public School, Wexford Public School and John English Public School. OSR reviews were completed at three of those schools.

Timeline

The selection of shelters to participate in the study was a significant task of the Project Advisory Committee and the initial researcher. Ensuring adequate representation of shelters from across the City of Toronto, while seeking parity between Violence Against Women (VAW) and homeless family shelters, was fundamental to shelter selection. A total of nine shelters were originally selected to participate, striking relative parity balance with five VAW shelters and four homeless shelters. This was considered an equal balance as family homeless shelters tend to be much larger than VAW shelters, allowing more participants to be recruited with a smaller number of shelters in the sample. Shelters were forwarded a brief information sheet outlining the purpose of the study and what was expected of them. The *Information Sheet* appears in Appendix 2.

The Project Advisory Committee determined that the focus groups would be conducted in three waves. The first wave of focus groups was conducted with shelter staff by the initial researcher, commencing at the end of May 2006 and continuing through October 2006. One additional focus group was conducted with shelter staff in February 2007 by the final researcher.

The second wave of focus groups was conducted with parents and children at selected shelters. These focus groups commenced in late June 2006 and were staggered in order to include parents and children in focus groups at the end of the school year, during the summer, and the commencement of the school year in September. Parents were asked to sign informed letters of consent for their participation in the focus group, as well as informed letters of assent, permitting their children to participate in a focus group. Parents were also asked to complete a *Parent Questionnaire* (see Appendix 2) to collect quantitative demographic data to be used in furthering the development of a profile of homeless families in the city of Toronto. Parents and children were recruited via the staff at the shelter where they resided. A flyer was posted on the bulletin boards of these shelters to advertise the focus groups (see Appendix 2). The final researcher conducted two additional focus groups with parents and two additional focus groups, plus an interview, with children in February and March of 2007.

A third wave of focus groups was conducted with teachers and administrators of the Toronto District School

Board (TDSB) by the final researcher. The study proposal was approved in October 2006 but due to the departure of the initial researcher, focus groups with teachers and administrators commenced in February 2007 and were completed in March. During the third wave of focus groups in the schools, administrators of selected schools were provided an *Ontario School Records (OSR) Review Template* and requested to collect descriptive data from school records of students residing at a shelter within the school's catchment area. As noted above, school administrators at three schools participated.

Through a member of the Advisory Committee the final researcher was able to attend a meeting of executive directors of VAW shelters in Toronto in April 2007 and chat informally about ways to support the education of children in their shelters. Through the same member of the advisory committee, a tenth shelter was recruited to complete only the *Shelter Demographic Survey*.

As the importance of the shelter liaison role became evident through the research, the final researcher was able to arrange interviews with shelter liaison workers from two different programs in Toronto (see Appendix 2 for interview questions).

Ethics

The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto has its own ethical protocols for research with vulnerable populations. These protocols are in keeping with Schedule B: *United Way of Greater Toronto Social Research Grant Checklist for Ethical Acceptability* and the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (established by the Canadian Institute of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada).

The researchers ensured that all ethical protocols have been carefully followed in all aspects of the study, including the recruitment and completion of focus groups and/or interviews for the *Kid Builders Research Project, Phase 3*. This was particularly important working with this vulnerable population.

Part 4: FINDINGS

The Demographics of the Family Shelter Population

While quantitative methods measure the size and scope of a problem, qualitative research investigates lived experience. It is not surprising, then, that to understand the experience of homelessness, researchers have opted for qualitative methods (Sistering: 2002). Qualitative research requires listening to and documenting lived experiences and offers the possibility of establishing hypotheses from data. These hypotheses are characterized as grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 in Tesch: 1990). This is a useful approach for the *Kid Builders* research because the knowledge gap it addresses is in the educational experiences of homeless children housed in the Toronto shelter system.

Focus groups and interviews, like those conducted in *Kid Builders Phase 3*, are key tools of qualitative research. Here they are used alongside three quantitative instruments: a *Parent Questionnaire* completed by 90% of the parents in the focus groups, a *Shelter Demographic Survey* completed by two-thirds of the shelters that also participated in the qualitative side of the study, and the *Ontario School Records Review* completed at three schools. The focus groups generated over 700 pages of transcribed conversations. All of the comments in this report attributed to children and parents living in shelters, shelter staff, and teachers are drawn from these transcripts.

The Sample

The total sample for *Kid Builders Research Project Phase 3*, including parents, children, shelter staff, shelter liaison workers, teachers and administrators, was 198 people. Information was largely gathered through focus groups, though the option of interviews was also available and occasionally selected by the participant. The survey questions were the same in either situation. The sample breakdown by group is in Table 1. Table 2 shows school participation.

Table 1: Total Participants

Focus Groups and Interviews	
Sample	Number of Participants
Shelter Staff and Liaison Workers	61
Parents	42
Children	41
Teachers & School Administrators	54
Total	198

Table 2: Total Teachers and Administrators

School	Number of Participants
Edgewood Public School	10
Galloway Road Public School	11
Huron Street Public School	7
West Hill Public School	9
Wexford Public School	7
John English Public School	10
Total	54

As noted, a total of six elementary schools in the Toronto District School Board participated in the study. Some children living at shelters in the sample attended the schools in the sample. All schools regularly teach homeless students.

The Shelters

The shelter system in Toronto is, as discussed earlier, essentially two systems that are linked. Family shelters provide emergency shelter services for families who are homeless regardless of cause. Some family shelters accept families of men, women and children, some only accept families of women and children. Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters provide refuge, and emergency and follow-up services to women and children who are homeless as a result of domestic violence.

VAW shelters are funded by the provincial government, sometimes with additional funds from United Way. They receive annualized funding. The family shelters are funded by the City of Toronto and operated by City of Toronto staff. Some family shelters receive annual funding, others receive a blend of annual and per diem funding. The latter is based on use of the shelter and can vary within the year, based on the number of users reported. There is flow through funding from the provincial government to City of Toronto for these shelters, but no monies received by the shelter come directly from the provincial government.

The state of repair of the shelter buildings ranges from dilapidated and aged to renovated and well decorated. VAW shelters maintain smaller, more home-like environments, and are often located in houses. During the course of this project one VAW shelter moved into a newly-renovated residence and another opened a new administrative building.

In contrast, homeless family shelters can be extremely large, often a multi-story dwelling housing well over 100 people at a time. When family homelessness exceeds family shelter capacity, the City leases a series of motel units. In the motels, entire families live in one motel room, without separation by gender. From these, children attend neighbourhood schools and attempt to achieve stability and a sense of belonging as their parents work with shelter staff to find a solution to their housing crises.

Central Family Intake serves both the two systems. Central Family Intake is a central referral service that does intake and disperses clients to the shelter system, operating 24 hours a day and seven days a week by telephone. It also does homelessness prevention work assisting families to stay in their homes. Families seeking shelter in municipally run family shelters must go through Central Family Intake. Women seeking shelter in a VAW shelter may approach through Central Family Intake but, according to VAW shelter staff, due to VAW shelters largely operating at full capacity, they are more likely to be admitted if they contact the VAW shelter directly. VAW shelter staff also expressed concern that when women fleeing domestic violence call Central Family Intake, the Children's Aid Society is notified of the situation.

When shelters reach capacity or have residents who have stayed past the limit of length of stay – though few shelters now have a set time when residents are expected to leave – Central Family Intake will re-direct clients to other shelters in the city. One shelter in this study, Birkdale Residence, is an overflow family shelter for women-led families. It houses up to 160 women and children, and was at 95% capacity on the day the *Kid Builders Shelter Demographic Survey* was completed. Families also overflow to Family Residence, and when that is full, to leased rooms in nearby motels. The number of families in motels varies, but according to family shelter staff, the use of motels is currently a constant in the system.

Table 3 shows the *Kid Builders* sample breakdown by location for shelter staff, and parents and children residing in shelters. To protect confidentiality, shelter liaison workers have been included in shelter staff

where they provide services, although they are not on the staff of a single, specific shelter. Rather, they are employed by outside agencies and may work with families from several shelters and schools. These are non-profit social agencies funded by a mix of different levels of government, the United Way, and grants from foundations and donations from individuals.

Table 3: Shelter Participation in Focus Groups

Shelter Name	Typer of Shelter/Population Served	Focus Group	# in Group
Family Residence	Family shelter	Staff	4
	Serves men, women and children	Parents	6
		Children	8
Red Door Family	Family shelter	Staff	12
Shelter	Serves men, women and children	Parents	5
		Children	4
The Redwood	Violence Against Women shelter	Staff	8
	Serves women and children	Parents	6
		Children	4
Robertson House	Family shelter	Staf	6
	Serves wome and children	Parents	4
		Children	10
YWCA Arise	Violence Against Women shelter	Staff	4
	Serves women anc children	Parents	3
		Children	3
Women's Habitat	Violence Against Women shleter	Staff	9
	Sserves women and children	Parents	8
		Children	5
Birkdale Residence	Family shelter	Staff	4
	Serves women and children	Parents	8
		Children	6
Julliette's Place	Violence Against Women shelter	Staff	6
	Serves women and children	Parents	2
		Children	1
Ernestines's Shelter	Violence Against Women shelter	Staff	8
	Serves women and children		
Total			144

All participation of shelters, their staff and their residents - both parents and children - was voluntary. The initial researcher approached all of the shelters in the table, plus Anduhyaun Emergency Shelter, which serves Aboriginal women fleeing violence. Anduhyaun declined to participate in the study, and although shelters reported use of their services by First Nation families, this points to a potential gap in demographic representation in this research. Ernestine's, which moved locations over the course of the study, was only able to complete the staff focus group and the *Shelter Demographic Survey*. All the shelters participating in the focus groups except The Redwood, Red Door Family Shelter and Family Residence completed the *Shelter Demographic Survey*. As noted, Yorktown Shelter for Women, and Red Door VAW Shelter, were asked to complete the *Shelter Demographic Survey*, after the qualitative research was completed.

The Surveys and the Focus Groups

The information gleaned from both the *Shelter Demographic Survey*, the *Parent Questionnaire*, the *Ontario School Records Review* and the 25 focus groups conducted with shelter staff, parents and children begins to create a profile of Toronto shelters and the families that use their services. Copies of both surveys and of the focus group guides appear in Appendix 2. Table 4 shows the list of shelters, surveys completed and focus groups conducted. The numeral "3" in the focus group column indicates that focus groups were conducted with staff, parents, and children. Also, as noted, two shelters were asked to complete the *Shelter Demographic Study* late in the research, and had not been asked to participate in the focus group qualitative research.

Table 4: Profile Sources

Shelter Name	Shelter Demographic Survey	Parent Questionnaire	Focus Groups
Birkdale Residence	Yes	Yes	3
Ernestine's Shelter	Yes	No	Staff only
Family Residence	No	Yes	3
Julliette's Place	Yes	Yes	3
Red Door Family Shelter	No	Yes	3
Red Door VAW Shelter	Yes	No	None
The Redwood	No	Yes	3
Robertson House	Yes	Yes	3
Women's Habitat	Yes	Yes	3
Yorktown	Yes	No	None
YWCA Arise	Yes	Yes	3

As Table 4 indicates, all of the shelters that completed the *Shelter Demographic Survey* serve only women and children. This was not intentional. The two shelters in the study that serve families with male parents did not respond to requests to complete the *Shelter Demographic Survey*. Researchers assume this was due to the busy and stressful environment of frontline service provision.

Parent Questionnaires

Forty-one parents participated in focus groups or interviews for *Kid Builders Phase 3*, and 37 of those, or 90%, completed a *Parent Questionnaire*, though not everyone completed every question. Percentages presented are based on those completing the question, rather than on the number of total surveys completed. The actual "n" value varies from 27 to 37 over the questions. Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Table 5: Parent Questionnaires by Shelter

Name of Shelter	# of Parents Completing Parent Questionnaire
Birkdale Residence	7
Family Residence	7
Julliette's Place	2
Red Door Family Shelter	5
The Redwood	6
Robertson House	4
Women's Habitat	3
YWCA Arise	3

An Overwhelming Incidence of Single-Parent, Women-Led Families

Though it was not the intention of this research to focus solely on women and children, 100% of the surveys were completed by women, and all of the parents who attended focus groups were women. This could be, in part, because a higher percentage of women-led, and especially single-parent women-led, families experience poverty and homelessness. Specific statistics on the gender breakdown of parents in homeless families in Canada do not appear to be available, but informed speculation is that "most homeless families are headed by women" which is the pattern in the United States (Begin et al: 1999).

The research design was not intended to create a woman-only study, but factors in the design may also have influenced this outcome. Like all VAW shelters, the five VAW shelters serve only women and children, as do two of the family shelters, Robertson House and Birkdale. This means 77% of the shelters where parents participated in the study served only women and children. Only two of the shelters – Family Residence and Red Door Family Shelter – house families with male parents. In the focus group discussions, Family Residence shelter staff commented that they were "one of the few shelters that actually take male children over the age of 12…or a single dad." From the initial researcher's observation, the vast majority of families in the shelters visited by the researchers were women with children, although some men were present. The initial researcher, who arranged and conducted the focus groups in the two shelters that served families with male parents, speculated that the men may not have realized they could participate or that when shelter staff advertised the focus groups to residents, men weren't specifically encouraged to participate.

As noted above, a quick review of indicators would seem to point to the rough conclusion that family homelessness is largely, but not entirely, the homelessness of women-led families. The entire VAW system, for example, serves only women and children. And while this study included two family shelters that serve only women and children, it did not encounter any family shelters in Toronto that serve only men and their children. What proportion of all shelter families is women-led certainly warrants further investigation. For the time being, the language of the design will largely be maintained, with the understanding that where it is used, the word "parent" could read "mother" with no reduction in accuracy.

Profile of Shelters, Parents and Families

Demand for Services for Homeless Families

As Table 6 demonstrates, a high proportion – from 75 to 100% – of those served by these shelters are families with children, with five of the eight shelters at 90% or higher. At the time they responded to the survey, the shelters were close to capacity. One was over capacity, two were virtually full, another two were over

90% capacity and the other three ranged from 85 to 88% full.

Table 6: Shelter Capacity and Occupancy

Name of Shelter	Capacity	Number of Current Residents	Families with Children as a % of Residents
Birkdale Residence	160	152	98%
Ernestine's Women's Shelter - VAW	35	32	85%
Julliette's Place - VAW	36-38	36	90%
Red Door VAW Shelter	50	44	75%
Roberston House	90	80	100%
Women's Habitat - VAW	25	28	90%
Yorktown Shelter for Women	30	30	80%
YWCA Arise - VAW	27	23	90%

In addition to operating at or close to capacity, most shelters are also turning away families looking for their services on a weekly basis. Of seven shelters that answered the question on turning away people looking for services, five are turning people away. All five VAW shelters in this study are turning people away. The two shelters that did not turn people away are family shelters operated by the City of Toronto. This would appear to confirm the reported information that VAW shelters are operating at capacity and women and children who are homeless due to family violence are overflowing into family shelters on weekly basis and in significant, measurable numbers. Data from the *Parent Questionnaire* and the focus groups also grounds this hypothesis.

A strong majority of parents – 70% – who responded to the questionnaire were in a shelter for the first time. One woman reported she had been to a shelter "numerous" times, 8% were there for a second time, another 8% for a third and a final 8% for the fourth time.

Table 7: Shelter Stays

Name of Shelter	Average stay for families with children	Specified length of stay and reason	People turned away due to overcapacity
Birkdale Residence	3 months	Yes, case management	0
Ernestine's Shelter	4-6 months	No	10-15 per week
Julliette's Place	3 months	Yes, immediate needs addressed	5-10 per week
Red Door VAW Shelter	4 months	No	1 per week
Robertson House	77 days	No	0
Women's Habitat	4-6 months	No	not supplied
Yorktown Shelter for Women	4 months	No	2 per week
YWCA Arise	4-6 months	No	4-5 per week

Thirty women answered a question on why they were at the shelter. Seventeen, or 57%, reported leaving an abusive domestic situation, including one woman being stalked by a spouse who tried to shoot her. Another

three used language that appears to point to domestic abuse of some sort – "marital problems," "father had addiction issues," "not good environment," which might bring that figure as high as two-thirds. Two, or 7%, directly mentioned eviction, one mentioned the "spouse in the house" rule, another two mentioned money issues directly, and another said her "landlord moved into his house." These would appear to point to financial problems and the lack of available affordable housing as the reason for seeking shelter for 20% of women. Four parents did not give a specific reason, saying only "don't want to say," and "can't go home."

"We turn six women away for every call we let in"

VAW Shelter staff

Most shelters do not have a time limit on length of stay, and most described the average length of stay as four to six months. All but one shelter fell into the three to six month range for average length of stay. The responses to the *Parent Questionnaires* indicate this is generally consistent with the reported experiences of the women with families staying in the shelters. Parents reported that they had been in the shelter anywhere from two days to 11 months. Four women, or 13%, had been in the shelter less than a month, a third had been in the shelter one to two months, and 17% had been staying there three to four months. Almost 40% had been there five months or more. Shelter staff indicated that occasionally families are referred on due to safety reasons, for example, when the abuser has discovered their location.

Age and Marital Status

Parents ranged in age from 21 to 62. Almost 60% were 35 or younger. Fourteen per cent were 25 or younger. Another third of the parents were between 26 and 45 years old. Twenty-one per cent of parents identified as married or common-law, the other 79% as single, separated or divorced. The 21-year-old parent reported having a seven-year-old child; she became a parent around age 14.

Shelter Funding

"…every week I have to figure out what part of my job description I am not going to get done."

VAW Shelter staff

As noted earlier, VAW shelters are funded by the provincial government through the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS). Family shelters are funded by the City of Toronto, the local municipal government. Shelters that reported indicated they had received either marginal increases in funding in the last three years or no increase.

Table 8: Funding

Name of shelter	Source of funding	Duration of funding	Change in funding over the past 3 years
Birkdale Residence	Municipal government direct	Annualized	% not known
Ernestine's Shelter	Provincial - MCSS	Annualized	3%
Julliette's Place	Provincial - MCSS	Core-renewable	Increased
Red Door VAW Shelter	Provincial - MCSS	Annualized	Not reported
Robertson House	Municipal government direct	Not reported	Stabilized
Women's Habitat	Provincial - MCSS	Annualized	3% increase in 2004
Yorktown Shelter for Women	Provincial - MCSS & United Way	Core-renewable	No increases
YWCA Arise	Provincial - MCSS	Annualized	Some increase

VAW shelters were clear that, with more funding, more could be done to support women and children. Stress "burn out" was reported as a common feature of working life for shelter staff, who cited not only dealing with crises and the emotional drain, but continually "doing more with less" when it comes to funding. Given the differences in funding sources and operating structures, VAW and family shelters have different pay scales, compensation and benefit structures for their staff.

Status in Canada

"We had kids on deportation orders and the [school] liaison worker was creative in the documentation. Children have a right to education with or without status. The kids ended up staying in school."

VAW shelter staff

Shelters reported a range of immigrant status of residents, with Canadian citizens making up as much as 77% of shelter residents in one shelter and as little as 5% in another. Every shelter shows a percentage of residents without legal status in Canada, ranging from a low of 4% to a high of 20%. These women will have considerable barriers to surmount to bring stability to their children's lives.

Three-quarters of the shelters also reported residents with refugee status - ranging from 3% to 30% - who left their home countries under either life or health-threatening circumstances, adding to the burdens of homelessness. Three-quarters of the shelters also show a reportable percentage of First Nation families, ranging from 2% to 10%.

Supplementing the information in Table 9, on the *Parent Questionnaires*, 40% of parents reported that they had been born outside of Canada, which points to a conclusion that the majority of shelter users are Canadian-born. In contrast, Table 9 indicates that the percentage of Canadian citizens in the shelters ranges form a low of 5% at Ernestine's to a high of 77% at Yorktown. Only two shelters - Yorktown and Julliette's reported that a majority of residents were Canadian citizens. The data does not offer a definitive answer.

Table 9: Citizenship Status from Shelter Demographic Survey

Name of Shelter	% Canadian Citizens, Landed Immigrants and First Nation Status	% of Refugees, Permanent Residents, Visas, No Status	Majority Arrived in Canada within:
Birkdale Residence	24% Canadian citizens	20% Refugees	Past 5 years
	50% Landed immigrants	4% No legal status	
	2% First Nation status		
Ernestine's Shelter	5% Canadian citizens	5% Refugees	Last year
	40% Landed immigrants	20% Permanent residents	
	10% First Nation status	20% No legal status	
Julliette's Place	72% Canadian citizens	3% Refugees	Past 5 years
	3% Landed immigrants	20% No legal status	
	3% First Nation status	5% No legal status	
		3% Work or student visa	
Red Door VAW Shelter	40% Canadian citizens	10% Permanent residents	Past 3 years
	30% Landed immigrants	20% No legal status	
Robertson House	60% Canadian citizens	5% No legal status	Past 10 years
	35% Landed immigrants		
Women's Habitat	30% Canadian citizens	20% Refugees	Past 3 years
	20% Landed immigrants	20% No legal status	
	10% First Nation status		
Yorktown Shelter for Women	77% Canadian citizens	3% Refugees	Past 3 years
	3% Landed immigrants	15% No legal status	
	2% First Nation status		
YWCA Arise	30% Canadian citizens	30% Refugees	Past 3 years
	15% Landed immigrants	10% No legal staus	
	10% First Nation status	5% Work or student visa	

On the *Parent Questionnaires*, 31% of parents reported that they had been living in Canada more than ten years, 9% had been in Canada five to nine years and 20% had been in Canada four years or less.

Newcomers often face significant additional challenges. One grandmother living in a family shelter with her granddaughter explained her motivations for emigrating in relation to her granddaughter's health and education. "For my granddaughter, coming from a background in Zimbabwe is not a very stable place. A dictator, everybody's running away from that. Zimbabwe had one of the highest rates of HIV in children and, like, 500 people died a day. The teacher and the headmaster said, 'If any child gets hurt on the playground, the field, don't touch the child, run and go tell your teacher.' But a child is a child, and if it's a friend, then you pick that child up, you know? I didn't want that for my granddaughter." This grandmother was waiting for her immigration status to be resolved and then planned to find work and housing for herself and her granddaughter. "My goal is obviously to have a home," she said, "and for my granddaughter to go to a public school."

Languages and Ethnicity

With significant percentages of residents who were born outside Canada, who have recently arrived or

have landed immigrant, permanent resident, or refugee status, it is not surprising that shelters report many languages spoken by residents. Ernestine's reported the highest number of languages spoken by residents: 19. This is not surprising as Ernestine's also reported 80% of residents born outside Canada: 60% as landed immigrants and permanent residents, and 20% of residents as without legal status.

On the *Parent Questionnaire*, 72% of parents reporting said they spoke English at home. That means almost 30% of these shelter residents functioned most comfortably in another language. Five per cent were Chinese-born and spoke Mandarin. Another 5% were born in Pakistan and spoke Urdu at home. Nineteen per cent were born in Africa and 11% in Caribbean countries. Thirteen per cent of residents were born in Latin American countries and 11% of residents spoke Spanish at home.

In response to the language needs of residents, shelters provide services in a range of languages. Some use interpretation services, and some have a broad range of language capacity on staff, but all offer some translation of their services. Table 10 outlines the language services of the shelters.

Table 10: Languages of Residents and Services

Name of Shelter	Number of languages spoken by residents	Number of languages services offered in	Applies to which services
Birkdale Residence	8	Interpretation service	A few
Ernestine's Shelter	19	12	Most
Julliette's Place	18	7	All
Red Door VAW Shelter	4	2	Most
Roberston House	2	Translation provided	N/A
Women's Habitat	18	12	Most
Yorktown Shelter for Women	6	11	Most
YWCA Arise	6	Interpreters as needed	All

Racialized Communities

Almost 79% - 26 out of 33 - of parents who reported on ethno-racial background reported that either they or their children were members of racialized communities. As is frequently reported, these are communities facing discriminatory barriers in society based on socially constructed concepts of race. This is highly significant in the face of recent studies confirming race as well as single motherhood as bases for discrimination in housing (Mwarigha, CERA: Undated).

Parent's Education

Forty per cent of parents reported that they had attended high school. Another 38% had attended either college or apprenticeship training, and of those, almost 11% had completed college. Eight per cent of parents had attended university, and just fewer than 3% graduated from university. The majority of those who attended university did so outside of Canada, whereas the majority of those attending college did so in the country.

Income

"It is amazing, what Ontario Works gives you for shelter, living expenses, just rent. It is like double that to rent anything. That is what my problem is. Finding something I can afford."

VAW Shelter staff

All shelters reported the income status of their residents as "low." As one VAW shelter staff said, "They are all below the poverty line." VAW shelters indicated that occasionally they have middle class women who have been cut off from shared assets, and at the time they are in the shelter are without financial means.

Parents were asked about their main sources of income before and after coming to the shelter. Most indicated more than one main source of income in each instance, illustrating how they struggle to put together a livelihood from several sources. Prior to coming to the shelter 29% of parents described employment as a main source of income, equally split between full-time and part-time. Thirty-seven per cent said Ontario Works was a main source of income, and 43% also characterized the Child Tax Benefit as a main source of income. There was considerable overlap in the latter two categories. Main source of income shifted for many after coming to the shelter. Those receiving income from employment fell from nearly 30% to 9%. Ontario Works also figured less prominently in income, dropping to 18%. Most of those who moved off Ontario Works moved on to the Personal Needs Allowance available to shelter residents. Forty-three per cent of parents characterized the Personal Needs Allowance as a main source of income while living at the shelter, while 51%, again with overlap, said the Child Tax Benefit was a main income source. Homelessness clearly has a negative impact on employment.

Table 11: Main Sources of Income from Parent Questionnaires

Income Source	Before living in shelter: % of parents reporting as main source of income	After living in a shelter: % of parents reporting as main source of income
Full-time employment	14.25	5.9
Part-time employment	14.25	2.9
Employment total	28.5	8.8
Ontario Works (social assistance)	37.1	17.6
Personal Needs Allowance	N/A	42.8
Ontario Disability Support Program	8.6	8.8
Ontario Student Assistance Plan	5.7	2.9
Child Tax Benefit	42.8	51.4

Affordable Housing

> "We need homes. We are on the waiting lists for such a long time."
>
> *VAW shelter parent*

More than three-quarters – 77% – of parents were on a waiting list for subsidized housing. Some had just put their names down recently, others had been on the list for as long as nine years. One noted that she had been waiting more than 10 years for subsidized housing. Several others simply vented frustration on the questionnaire by writing "Too long!"

Facilities at the Shelter

At all of the shelters, families have their own room and children of both genders are housed together as a family. Some shelters have maximum sizes for the family in the room. Almost all have computer access of some kind for children, though, as families reported in focus groups, in some shelters access may be far from adequate to support education, especially for older children. Some shelters allow children to have visitors, but shelter staff and children reported that by and large they did not invite anyone from school to the shelter. Several of the VAW shelters did not allow children to have friends over for safety reasons. They are also not allowed to give out the phone number and are taught not to let people know where they live, all in the interests of safety. In discussions, shelter staff noted that, in addition to missing the friends they had left behind, difficulties with having friends over and shelter secrecy are stressful. As one VAW shelter staff said:

> They miss their friends…and they wanna have their friends over or visit their friends. Older children, teenagers are used to a bit more freedom, social freedom than they can have while they're here. And not being able to give their phone numbers, not being able to say where they're living now…

Table 12: Shelter Facilities

Name of shelter	Children allowed visitors at shelter	Own room for family	# of bathrooms	Onsite computers for children
Birkdale Residence	Yes, designated area	Yes	1 bathroom/room	Yes
Ernestine's Shelter	Yes, except fathers	Yes	2 people/bathroom	Yes
Julliette's Place	No, safety reasons	Yes, 3 children/ room	6 people/bathroom	Yes
Red Door VAW Shelter	Yes	2 adults/ 2 children/room	5 total	Yes
Robertson House	Yes	Yes	2 families/ bathroom	Yes
Women's Habitat	Yes	Yes	8 people/bathroom	No
Yorktown Shelter for Women	Yes	Yes	14 total	Yes
YWCA Arise	Yes, with notice	Yes	6 total	Yes

Though it is a common rule in shelters serving single adults, families with children are not asked to leave during the day at any of the shelters.

Accessibility Accommodations

Accessibility for residents with disabilities varies widely from shelter to shelter. Both YWCA Arise and Red Door VAW Shelter reported they were not accessible at all. Ernestine's, a VAW shelter that had just moved into a newly renovated space, reported the greatest range of accommodations. The accommodations of each shelter are detailed in Table 13.

One parent reported that inadequate computer access at the shelter had become an accessibility barrier for her daughter. As she explained, "One of the problems for my daughter, because her disability is a problem with the actual mechanics of writing, is computer access." Her daughter's disability affects her ability to write by hand, but if she has access to a computer, she can do her homework and complete her studies. The fact that the shelter offered computer access for only one hour a day in a busy dining room became an accessibility barrier to education for this child.

Table 13: Accessibility for Residents with Disabilities

Name of Shelter	Mobility features	Accessibility features
Birkdale Residence	Wheelchair accessible	
	Barrier-free washrooms (limited)	
	Designated parking	
	Elevators	
Ernestine's Shelter	Whellchair accessible	Braille
	Barrier-free washrooms	Service dogs accomodated
	Designated parking	Sign language
	Physical supports	TTY
	Elevators	
Julliette's Place	Wheelchair accessible	Braille
	Barrier-free washrooms	Sign language
	Designated parking	TTY
	Physical supports	
	Elevators	
Yorktown Shelter for Women	Wheelchair accessible	
	Barrier-free washrooms	
	Designated parking	
	Physical supports	
Robertson House	Wheelchair accessible	Service dogs accommodated
	Barrier-free washrooms	
	Designated parking	
	Chair lift	
Women's Habitat	Barrier-free washrooms	Service dogs accommodated
	Chair lift	TTY

Shelter Services

Both family and VAW shelters offer residents a range of services to stabilize their lives and support their transition back to housing. All shelters that responded to the survey offer their residents these core services:

- crisis intervention
- counselling
- children's programming
- information and referrals
- advocacy for individuals
- housing support
- case management.

All shelters also use referral services to connect residents with services not available at the shelter. Table 14 shows the services that shelter staff find are most commonly needed by residents at the shelters participating in the survey.

Table 14: Shelter Support Services and Programs

Name of Shelter	Services most commonly needed at shelter
Birkdale Residence	Crisis management, counselling, children's programming, outreach and support
Ernestine's Shelter	Employment, housing, proper OW, money
Julliette's Place	Housing, counselling, legal, immigration
Red Door VAW Shelter	Child care, housing, outreach, support groups
Robertson House	Housing, legal, health care
Women's Habitat	Crisis intervention, advocacy, residential services
Yorktown Shelter for Women	Housing, immigration, counselling
YWCA Arises	Legal aid & services & accompaniment to them, individual and group counselling

The case management model, which all shelters in the study indicated they use, adopts the approach of meeting a resident "where they are" and working to put in place the services they need to move to secure and stable long-term housing. As one family shelter staff explained:
Basically, when they come they are in some form of crisis and so you meet them where they are at and see what the immediate needs are that need to be taken care of. Things like safety, or medical, or some of them don't have sufficient ID, or don't have status and need to put a claim in for a status. Whatever the immediate need is that will allow them to go back into the community and be able to thrive on their own with limited support - anything that will help them to successfully live outside of emergency shelter support is what we put in place for them.

In the case management model, shelter staff are case managers. They don't do therapeutic or clinical counselling with residents. Instead, they connect women and children to resources in the community or bring the needed services in to the shelter. Table 15 shows the additional support programs and services that shelters make available.

Table 15: Additional Shelter Support Services and Programs

Name of Shelter	Legal Info and Support	Support Groups	Allowance Products	Mental Health Support	Substance Abuse Counselling	Groups for Women and Children
Birkdale Residence	x	x	x	x		
Ernestine's Shelter	x	x			x	
Julliette's Place	x	x	x	x		
Red Door VAW Shelter	x	x	x	x		
Robertson House	x		x	x	x	
Women's Habitat	x	x	x	x		
Yorktown Shelter for Women		x				
YWCA Arise	x	x	x	x	x	x

Shelters indicated that they have begun to offer residents continued support after they move into long-term housing. One shelter reported that this had greatly reduced the incidence of repeat users, which is consistent with *Parent Questionnaire* responses indicating that most families are in shelters for the first time. Table 16 shows programs and services that shelters run to support families through the transition to long-term housing.

Table 16: Shelter Programs for Stability and Transition

Name of Shelter	Outreach	Transition Support	Systemic advocacy (policy)	Employment Service	Volunteer	Literacy Programs
Birkdale Residence	x	x	x	x	x	
Ernestine's Shelter	x	x	x		x	
Julliette's Place	x	x	x		x	
Red Door VAW Shelter	x			x	x	
Robertson House		x		x		x
Women's Habitat	x	x	x		x	
Yorktown Shelter	x	x				
YWCA Arise	x	x		x	x	

Children

Parents reported that the number of children they had ranged from one to six, with 36 mothers reporting total of 96 children. Slightly more than 82%, or 79 of those children, were born in Canada. Ten parents, or 28% of those reporting on the question, had four or more children, 22% had three children, 30% had two and 19% had one. One of the "parents" who reported is a grandmother caring for an 11-year-old granddaughter. Children (and grandchildren) ranged in age from seven months to 22 years, though not all were necessarily staying in the shelter.

Though many children made very negative statements about how they felt about living in a shelter – a definitive "It sucks" was heard many times in discussion groups – other children also had very positive reactions.

It's "the best," said one 11-year-old living in a VAW shelter, explaining what was best was "mainly the kind people." Asked to describe the shelter in one word, a group of five- to 11-year-old children living in a family shelter said:

> Child 1: Happy.
> Child 2: Safe.
> Child 3: Free.
> Child 4: Cool.
> Child 5: Fun.

Parenting in a Shelter

"I think if the government could give us shelter, or provide more housing, that would give us the peace of mind to focus on the children's education."

VAW shelter parent

Parents offered a variety of comments on parenting while living in a shelter. Many said their children were happy to have other children to play with and at all shelters both parents and staff reported that children from different families played together. They reported concerns about food and nutrition in some shelters, and praised the food in others. Some parents felt very supported, others reported feeling supported but controlled. Some reported that it was less stressful living in the shelter than in their previous situation, others said the shelter was more stressful. "More stress, less fear," one mother said.

Parents also noted that with many children living under one roof – there were 123 at Birkdale Shelter on the day the staff focus group was conducted – it was hard to stick to the routines of home. As one family shelter parent reported:

> Bedtime hour changed. Because they want to be with their friends at times, so they can't always go to bed early. And it's hard for me with my daughter because in here I cannot punch home a schedule. She don't listen to me when she's here.

Another VAW shelter parent reported that the family habit of reading together became difficult to maintain at the shelter:

> The noise level - we read books together, but living here, we found that difficult. I basically kept my routine from home for the kids, but when you are living with different families, it is difficult. No matter how well you are able to adjust to a situation, community living is very, very difficult. It is a lot of hard work on my part, keeping the routine in place, but I think doing it keeps me sane, keeps them sane.

Some parents also expressed concerns about their children's health, describing how, with many people in one house, illnesses often moved quickly through the shelter. One family shelter parent described a virus outbreak:

> There was the time when everybody was going around with a terrible cough in the chest and lung. It was like a vicious circle. It was bad and took a long time to shake off, you know? And we'd all taken our children to doctors and everything and they just said, "Oh, it's something that's going around." But when one person gets it, obviously everybody's going to get it. And it is a health concern for me.

Staff also pointed out that parents arrive at the shelter in a crisis – whether it is because they have been violently attacked by a spouse, evicted from their home or fled their home country – and they have many things to contend with that jump ahead of their children's education. "Literally the last thing they think about is academics," said one family shelter staff, "because they have so many other things that they are upset about. They are worried, and they also want to get through themselves."

Trends

Shelter staff were asked if they had discerned any recent trends in the type of families seeking shelter. Almost half of the shelters said they are seeing younger women and more pregnant young women. A third said they were seeing homeless families with more complex problems, such as mental health issues and addictions, and family shelters were seeing more women coming from abusive domestic situations. Shelters in the west end of the city reported a trend toward more newcomers, and more parents without legal status in Canada. Shelters in the east end of the city reported a decrease in newcomers since changes to immigration laws were enacted in 2001. This latter statement is consistent with City of Toronto reports that indicated a decrease in immigrant families in recent years. More recently, the City stopped leasing three motels for shelter overflow in Scarborough, which largely housed newcomers to Canada upon arrival.

Housed in Motels

The City of Toronto leases motel units to house homeless families when family shelters are over capacity. It should be noted that for those living in motels, much of the above discussion may not apply. Onsite facilities may be substantially different, and some services and support only available at a much greater distance. Family shelter staff said programs, such as homework clubs, were available at the motels, but shelter staff would not be onsite 24 hours a day. Teachers at one school felt the motel environment was different from the main shelter, as they explained:

> Teacher 1: Most of our shelter children are coming from three local motels. And those motels have some standard rooms that are available for public who drive in but they also have a given amount of rooms that are set aside by the government for assistance.
> Teacher 2: Some families do the motel circuit. They just moved from motel to motel and then came here.
> Teacher 3: Most often what I've heard is pretty negative. The biggest is always the privacy issue. The fact that they have to share this room and it is usually two siblings sharing with a parent or parents. And you know, issues with regards to a playground, there is no access to those things.
> Teacher 4: Like three of four kids in one room, different sexes.
> Teacher 1: They usually have a hot plate.
> Teacher 4: They have a general common room, but again, you are back and forth with food and they are eating in their rooms.

As reported, in other shelters, families also stay all in one room, but in the families participating in this study, there were no adult males present in the shelter and sharing the room.

From Shelter to School

Children in School

Parents reported that, in total, their children were attending 32 different schools, ranging from elementary to high school, and one university. The schools were in both the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto District Catholic School Board. Several children were also enrolled in daycare onsite at a shelter. Almost half of the school age children – 43% - were in grade 3 or lower. Another 36% were in grades 4, 5, and 6.

Sixty-five per cent of parents reported that their child had been in the current school less than a year, which is consistent with the reported pattern of most homeless children moving to a new school when they move to a shelter. Fifty per cent of parents reported that their children had been in their current school less than six months. Another 15% reported that their children had been in their current school between six months and a year, and the same percentage had been there one to two years. Only 18% had been at their present school more than two years.

Changing Schools

"Children move to three different schools. They move from the school they are in, and come to the school that's near to the shelter, and when they leave here they go to a different school. In a short space of time – six months - that's three different schools. That takes a toll on their education, and emotionally."

VAW Shelter staff

The majority of school age children moving to a shelter change schools. Sometimes a parent is able to keep their child in the same school she or he was attending prior to losing housing, but more often this is not the case. Some parents reported that their children had changed schools many times. As reported on the *Parent Questionnaires*, two children had been to 14 schools, and another three had been to 10 schools. The most advanced of those students was in grade 9.

It was very common for children to have been to multiple schools since kindergarten. Parents reported 35% of children had been to four or more schools, and another 23% had been to three. That means 58% of these children had already attended three or more schools, even though 40% of them were only in grade 3 or lower. Only 18%, or 13 children, were reported as having stayed in the same school since kindergarten. At least six of these were kindergarten students, which means that nearly half of the children who had only attended one school were still in kindergarten.

Like other parents, mothers living in shelters show strong concern about their children's schooling, including where they go to school. "My daughter travels an hour and half to school," one parent reported. "She goes to a really good school and I refuse to pull her out, so she travels from Scarborough all the way to the west end to go to school. That is one of the top schools in Toronto. She said, 'Mom no matter what happens, promise not to take me out of my school.'" This mother was on a waiting list for subsidized housing in her old neighbourhood, and intending to return to it as soon as possible. She had kept a young child back from starting school, intending to start that child in school on her return to her home neighbourhood.

For other parents, the temporary nature of shelter residence affected whether a child went to the new school. Another mother, who had a child in senior kindergarten before she came to the shelter, explained that she now kept her daughter out of school, and in daycare. "My youngest isn't in school right now because I refuse to put her in a different school, because [her old school] is a good school and I plan to put her back in that school." For this mother, the shelter is a transient situation, an interruption in regular life, so, given the daughter's young age, she foregoes starting her at a new school.

Parents reported that children cite losing friends as a key reason not to move schools, and children's comments on moving schools were consistent with this. "My son wanted to keep his friends, he wanted to write in the school paper. He loved school before we moved here. He would go to school on the bus. Now, he's like 'I miss all friends, can I go back to my old school?'" one VAW shelter parent reported. One family shelter child's lament, "I miss my friends at my old school," was a common refrain, as was a VAW shelter child's terse "It sucks, cause we keep on moving to different types of schools." Children who moved schools told similar stories:

> Everybody in my class, like I am in French immersion and there is two classes in each grade, one French and one English. So I have friends in the French class and the English class. They went to one school – and I went to another. And I was sad that I had to change schools and move from Brampton. And I am not lying.

Some children expressed fear at having to change schools, as this exchange between two children living in a VAW shelter and the interviewer illustrates:

> Interviewer: How did it feel to leave your old school and come to a new one?
> Child 1: Scared.
> Interviewer: What were you most scared about?
> Child 1: Meeting new people.
> Child 2: Bad.
> Interviewer: Bad?
> Child 2: Yeah, because I left all my friends, and I didn't know anyone at the new school.

Although only one or two children in the study had anything positive to say about changing schools, teachers noted that some children fare much better at it than others. As on teacher commented:
Maybe they have the skills from practice. Some kids adapt and they are really good at being the new kid. And other ones, it is really hard for them.

For some children, changing schools was such a frequent experience, it could almost be characterized as a constant:

> Teacher 1: I found when I was at another school we had a lot of children that were in the hotels in the area. They would be there for a while and then they would disappear for a long time and then they would come back, and it kept going that same pattern all year. They would be gone for a few months, and then they would come back and then we would be told, "Okay this child cannot go with this person so you have to be careful. If you see this person, call the office."
> Teacher 2: Ours would do the same. There would be some who would appear, go to a different school and then reappear in the shelter environment. They would have been in school but it was always that very patchwork education. When you looked at the OSR there would be eight, 10 schools for a child who was in grade 4 or grade 5.

A principal at a school that regularly has a substantial population of homeless children – particularly those inadequately housed in motel rooms – summed up the situation:

> If you look at the homeless children and compare them with the rest of the population, the number of school changes they have had is tremendous. We had a grade 3 student this year, this is her twelfth school and again, if all else is equal, the transition from one school to another has a direct impact on academic success. It is very, very difficult for a child having these school transitions to come in at ground level with the rest of the group.

The difficulties imposed on homeless children by their transience are elaborated in more detail in the discussion of the impacts of homelessness.

School Enrollment

Table 17: Enrollment of Children in Schools from Shelter Demographic Surveys

Name of Shelter	Role of shelter in helping to get children settled in new school	Possible improvements
Birkdale Residence	Accompany to enrollment and assist with process	More staff time funded for this
	Attend school meeting	
	Support from school liaison worker	
Ernestine's Shelter	Accompany to enrollment and assist with process	More staff time funded for this
	Attend school meetings	School staff funded to assist
	Follow-up	Funds for school liaison worker
Julliette's Place	Accompany to enrollment and assist with process	Funds for school liaison worker
	Attend school meetings	
	Support from school liaison worker	
Red Door VAW Shelter	Accompany to enrollment and assist with process	Funds for school liaison worker
	Attend school meetings	
	Support from school liaison worker	
Robertson House	Accompany to enrollment and assist with process	No improvements necessary
	Attend school meetings	
	Support from school liaison worker	
Yorktown Shelter for Women	Accompany to enrollment and assist with process	Funds for school liaison worker
	Attend school meetings	School staff funded to assist
YWCA Arise	Support from school liaison worker	Funds for school liaison worker
	Attend school meetings	School staff funded to attend

Seven shelters were asked on the survey about their role in assisting parents to register their children at schools accessible from the shelter. Six of the seven responded that a staff member goes to the school to help enroll the child and assist with the process. The seventh shelter relied on a school liaison worker employed by an outside agency to assist with school enrollment of children newly arrived to the shelter.

Shelter staff also attended meetings at the school to discuss children's individual education programs. When asked what could improve the enrollment process for shelter children, five shelters – or almost three quarters – said funds for a shelter liaison worker, two added that more of their staff time should be funded to assist with enrollment, and two felt the schools should have staff funded to assist with the process. The role of liaison workers is perceived as very helpful and emerges in more detail later in the report.

Shelters often provide extensive supports for getting children into the new school and as settled as possible. Staff at one VAW shelter described their role as providing "whatever is necessary" which includes going to the school, talking to teachers, talking to the principal, taking the children to school, and helping with homework.

Length of Time for Enrollment

Enrollment for regular schooling and students with identification was universally reported as prompt. Staff and parents' time estimates ranged from one day, to 40-80 hours, to three to five days. This was not the case

for special needs programs, or for accessing special needs programming once in a school, where delays are the norm.

Learning Disabilities

Twenty-nine parents responded to questions on the Parent Questionnaire about their children and learning disabilities. Of these, 12 parents had been approached by a teacher or school administrator with regard to diagnosing a child for learning disabilities, some for more than one child. Thirteen children in nine families were formally diagnosed with learning disabilities.

Special Needs and Changing Schools

Delays in getting special needs students registered and into the programs they needed and were accessing at the previous school were a common and serious problem recognized by parents, shelter staff, and teachers. All had tried a range of strategies to try and ensure that transient children with special learning needs get access to the programs they need, but this appears to be difficult to accomplish under the current structure. The school board structures in place appear to hinder, rather than help the situation of children with special educational needs who are also transient. Putting transportation in place for a special needs student is also subject to delays.

The combination of needing an assessment – or proof of one - prior to accessing programming, the waiting time for assessment and moving schools, appear to cause the delays. "The assessment can take a random amount of time," one family shelter staff reported, "especially if they are coming from out of province. Or even out of Toronto. We had one that came from Peel, and that was months and months that we had to wait."

Without an assessment, the school board does not officially provide special needs programming. When assessments take long to arrange, students, who spend an average of three to six months in a shelter, may have moved on to the next school without having been assessed or accessing needed programming. The request for an assessment also may or may not move with the student to the next school. Highly transient students may go years without accessing the help they need to really learn. They are attending school but not receiving the support they need to succeed.

The OSR Protocol in Cases of Domestic Violence

The protocol for transferring Ontario School Records (OSRs) for families fleeing domestic violence can also cause delay. The OSR, a paper document, records previous testing and any determination that a child needs and has been approved for a Special Education Program. Until the OSR that provides the record of special needs assessment and admission to the program arrives at the new school, a child cannot access previously approved programming. When children are homeless for reasons other than domestic violence, OSRs are transferred directly from school to school. The student goes to the new school to register, they are asked for the name of their previous school, the OSR is requested directly by the new school and sent directly without delay. For safety reasons, this is not the case in instances of domestic violence.

If a child is in a VAW shelter or in a family shelter that serves many of women and children fleeing family violence, to protect the location of the mother and child(ren), the old and new schools follow a protocol whereby they have no direct contact. On registration, the OSR is requested centrally, and it is transferred from the old school to the TDSB central administration and then on to the new school. A school administrator explained the process:

> A board policy states that we have to request the OSR centrally, that is solely for the child's protection so that they can't be tracked. There is a 15-day wait for the OSR. Because of the number of children

> that we have been receiving that have special needs, this can slow down their finding an appropriate placement considerably. So, we are right on it right away. Our Office Administrator will put in a call to the individual who is [centrally] responsible, so that they actually verbally contact the principal right away and find out if there are any a) safety concerns, and b) special needs concerns. Often times the information that the parent has, due to their circumstances, is very blurred.

This school has figured out a way to minimize the delay that does not endanger anyone. The same school administrator explained their practice more fully in conversation with two teachers:

> School Administrator: As soon as the 15 days is over, the Office Administrator gets on the computer to find out whether the child has a label in the TDSB, and that gives us another piece of information in trying to sort out what type of placement they were in. And we end up bringing them to our meeting, with our staff to decide what it is we can provide for that student.
> Teacher 1: We always try to pick up where the last school left off in terms of referrals.
> School Administrator: We do have a number of kids that come in with standing referrals for psychological assessments or social work and we try to pick those up right away to make sure that they are transferred into our system.

Frequent Moves and Delays in Testing

At a different school a teacher expressed her concerns about how frequent changes of schools can prevent needed testing:

> Sometimes they may need testing but never seem to stay in the same place long enough to get testing. We have children that had they been more stable might have been assessed somewhere but – do we put them on the list - when they are going to be gone soon? Even when you put them on the list they have moved on. They tend to be more transient over their school career. Quite often they don't get the assessment and testing that is required.

With frequent moves, teachers may become hesitant to list children for the tests they need, and by the time the tests are set up, the student may have moved on to another school where the process may have to be restarted.

One family shelter staff reported "a huge delay to get [students with special needs] transferred cause their transcripts don't always come with them. It takes three months to get them into something, even at the local school. And by that time they could move…"

Teachers often try inventive strategies to put needed programs in place despite the transience of the student. One explained how a student arrived at her school with a note from the previous teacher about programs:

> I saw this year a child that came in, who I guess can be classified as homeless, who was living at someone else's house because of a financial and domestic situation. And there were notes from a previous teacher. "Please be aware that we have tried to start this, this and this, but haven't had time." So we tried to get it going but then they unfortunately moved again so we couldn't follow through. So then we left another note.

Different Programs at Different Schools

Other issues arise when the program that the child has been in is not offered at the new school. As a school administrator explained:

> We have had students that have come from self-contained classes that do not exist in our quadrant, and in that case we have two half-time special needs assistants which we will move around from room to room depending upon the needs of the student, to help support the student and the teacher.

At another school, a teacher described a situation "where one of the students who qualified for reading recovery moved." She speculated that "they might move to a school where they don't have that particular service" and that would mean another program would have to be substituted, if possible.

Education Delayed becomes Education Denied

Delays in assessments effectively bar students from education for a period of time. When the student moves on before testing is completed and the OSR doesn't quite catch up with them, they may go a long period of time without getting the program they need in order to learn. One shelter parent expressed frustration with the impact of lengthy delays on her son's learning:

> Well, my son, every teacher he's had has said, "He's having trouble concentrating." Well, why does he have to get tested in order to put him in the special classes? He has to wait until his health card gets reactivated for him to get assessed, in order for them to say, "Ok, now he can go into special ed." I just, I don't get it. It's a waste of years. We're going through summer school for our third year in a row.

This student needed a health card because his assessment was being undertaken through the health care system, rather than within the school board.

Shelter Services for Children

Shelters housing families generally offer support services for children and youth. Recreation programs may depend on facilities in the neighbourhood, but as the focus group information reveals, most have homework clubs and children's advocates or program workers who program activities on a daily basis including cooking, arts and crafts, and trips to the local library, as well as longer outings. Table 18 outlines shelter programs for children and youth.

Table 18: Shelter Programs for Children and Youth

Name of Shelter	Youth	Child Care	Recreation
Birkdale Residence	x	x	x
Ernestine's Shelter	x	x	
Julliette's Place	x	x	x
Red Door VAW Shelter	x	x	x
Robertson House	x	x	x
Women's Habitat	x		x
Yorktown Shelter for Women		x	
YWCA Arise		x	x

Services for Children Sought by Parents

On the *Parent Questionnaires*, parents indicated that their children needed and used a variety of social, psychological and educational services including psychologists, social workers, special education, speech pathologists, remedial support, youth workers and breakfast programs. English as Second Language (ESL) was also in demand. Of 27 parents who responded to questions on services for their children, 13 parents, or

48% of those reporting, said that their children needed and used special education programs. Youth workers were the next most utilized program at 26%, then speech pathologists and remedial support programs at 22%, followed by ESL programming at 18%.

ESL

Staff at one VAW shelter, where many languages are spoken by the families, discussed difficulties in accessing English as a Second Language (ESL) programs due to a time limit imposed by the school board:

> Staff 1: If a family has been in transition, they may not have had enough time to get the proper ESL approval from the school. Or may not have been enrolled because an abuser is keeping the family outside of the school system. We have had that situation. That child may lose their right to have their ESL because the two-year period has gone by.
> Staff 2: The teacher may recognize that a student is in need of ESL but may not try because the deadline for registration is past, or they assume that the past school did the registration.
> Staff 1: We worked with a student who was not working at the academic level she should have been. We said to the school, "Don't let her lose her ESL rights, you are giving her a failing grade for the upcoming year, not only this current year, but the upcoming year too." Socially it was very degrading to her as well because she knew what program she was doing, very infantile kind of work. She lost any sense of active participation in school.

School Attendance

By and large parents and shelter staff reported that school attendance was good. In every shelter, staff indicated that children were expected to go to school unless they were sick or had an appointment, and that generally this was what happened. That said, it was also acknowledged that with older children – youth in high school – it was much more difficult to ensure that they attended school.

Shelter staff noted that attendance was sometimes an issue. One shelter staff said, "It really depends on the issues that brought the family here and you find oftentimes if the children weren't attending before they came to the shelter, that pattern is going to continue." Trauma issues related to the crisis that brought the family to the shelter may impede regular school attendance for some children. A VAW shelter staff cited the example of a child who resisted going to school, a pattern that started before coming to the shelter and was rooted in witnessing violence. As that VAW shelter staff explained:
Recently we had a child very reluctant to go to school. We checked back into the history before coming the shelter, and it was almost the same behaviour. Reaching the school and really crying, simply crying, not wanting to go to school. Just that. And really not able to identify why the child is crying, the child herself or himself not identifying what it is, but it is because of extreme trauma of the abuse the child has witnessed.

Before and After School Activities

On the *Parent Questionnaire*, parents in 10 families, or 27%, reported that their children had participated in before and after school programs at the school they attended from the shelter Activities included drama, dancing, choir, basketball and soccer as well as after school daycare and general programs. Over 70% of shelter children did not participate in before or after school programs at the school, according to their parents. This is consistent with comments from some of the teachers, especially for children who arrive part way through the school year:

> They can't get involved with the groups because they know they are going to leave. And they are coming late compared to the regular class.

The characterization of a "regular class" that the shelter children are not part of jumps out of this teacher's statement, implying, as it does, a sense of separation or "non-belonging" and the possibility of labeling.

Support for Studying

A Quiet Place to Study

Shelter staff reported that the majority of shelters offered a quiet place for children to study, ranging from foldout desks in the family's room to a program in the playroom or resource room. Parents generally did not agree. Some parents, describing life in a large family shelter insisted that, "with the TV out there blaring and kids running up and down there is no quiet" in the shelter at all, adding that "you wake up to announcements and kids screaming up and down the hall." At other shelters parents acknowledged that there was a quiet room, "but it is hard to get quiet working time in it" and children used the kitchen and dining room as well to complete their homework.

These apparently conflicting views may actually arise from the degree of quiet and attention that some shelter children need in order to complete their homework. As one VAW shelter staff reported, "We have a large number of children who have a hard time sitting still, or focusing, listening to an adult." A child who can't sit still because of embedded emotional distress will need a very quiet environment in order to complete homework. The quiet space that shelter staff describe may be not be sufficiently calm or far enough removed from the ongoing activity in the shelter to allow these children to settle and concentrate. For those children in most distress, sitting and concentrating on school work may be impossible until they have begun to recover from the traumas they have witnessed or endured.

Homework Support

Most shelters reported that they had some kind of homework club operating directly after school at the shelter. Frequency ranged from twice a week to five days a week. The length of time ranged from an hour to two hours. In some shelters, teachers from the neighbouring schools were welcome to attend and assist. In one school discussion, when some teachers asserted that the shelter children did not have support to get their homework done. Another teacher interrupted to say he had been to the shelter, participated in the program and disagreed. As he explained:

> I think I disagree, because we have a great program that we actually go to the shelter and I have been there. And I was amazed because I have had lots of shelter kids and their homework is hardly ever finished, hardly ever completed or handed in. When I went there, there was only about five or six kids participating in this program. At the shelter they have a time after school, I think between four and five and one of our teachers goes there and helps out. They have lots of staff there to help out. They have all sorts of supplies. I went and one of my students wasn't there and I knew that I sent out homework. So they actually paged her and she came down there and she sat with me and we did the homework and it was done the next day. But they have a great program there, they have a big sticker chart and they get rewards if you participate in the homework club every single day.

Parents also reported difficulty in ensuring that their children did their homework, as part of the general loss of family routine on moving into the shelter. "They can't bring their friends home to play with them and it is not the same routine either," said one parent in a family shelter, "Certain people have a routine for their children and certain people don't. You can't really say to your child, you know, it is time to sit down and do homework. 'Well, they are not doing it' she'll answer."

Some teachers also take on a bridging role, trying to keep children on track with their homework despite the difficulties of the situation, including, as one teacher explained, "calling home to the parents just to

make them aware of what homework has been sent home so they know what is coming home, although that doesn't always help." Teachers also reported that they encouraged older siblings to assist younger ones with their homework, because they understand that the parents have other problems to solve. One teacher described talking to an older sibling:

> You know, "Can you sit with your brother or sister and read for 10 minutes or help with this math?" Because the parents sometimes are having other issues.

Shelter staff also pointed out that families arrive at the shelter in crisis, not focused on school. If they have suffered eviction, they may have lost most or all of their possessions. If they are in flight from an abusive partner, as most of the families in this study were, they may be lucky to have arrived with their identification.

Parents also advocated for their children to have the study support they needed. As one parent in a family shelter explained, "My son has a tutor and she comes over Tuesdays and Thursdays. I think with a lot of things, if you want something, voice it out. If you put it out there then you will get the help. If you want the extra help you have to put it out there, it is available but you have to be out there and involved."

Library Access

Some shelters took children to the library on a regular basis to study or take out books. At others, the library was not accessed as part of the shelter programming. Proximity to the shelter was generally a major factor in whether library visits were part of shelter activities.

School Costs and Fees

Universally, schools reported that fees for trips are waived for shelter children, that all the schools had a policy where parents who could not afford fees for trips and activities did not have to pay. But shelter parents reported that accessing the policy was not that straightforward, especially if they are trying not to disclose their situation because their child is afraid of being teased and bullied. One parent, whose daughter stayed in the pre-shelter school and had not told any of her friends or the school where the family was living said, "I have to buy everything, and the school trips! I mean you are in a shelter and the ski trip is $30, and then fundraisers every month, and pizza luncheon." Some parents reported that they would not ask, saying, "I am not going to embarrass my kids." But other parents, especially those with young children who may not even understand where they are living, reported they had accessed the policy and fees were waived.

The Impacts of Homelessness on Children's Education

"School success really relates to health, well-being socially, emotionally and physically. There's so many gaps."

Teacher

School Success

In the focus groups, teachers were asked for their thoughts on the school success of homeless children. Was it different from housed children? What factors would support their success? One teacher responded:

> I would say for most of them, they have a disadvantage in terms of realizing their full potential because of the instability, the constant moving around, and factors like being in an overcrowded situations. They have a definite disadvantage in terms of realizing potential.

A group of teachers said:

> Predictability, reliability, consistency. Home school partnerships, social circles, social development. More activities.

Teachers discussed the qualities that they felt assisted shelter children to succeed at school and identified connection, stability, parental involvement, a style of case management approach that meets the child where they are academically, and attitude. Belief in themselves, self-esteem, and resiliency were considered key to success:

> Teacher 1: I think they connect with someone. Maybe a connection with a teacher who shows some interest in that child, and tries to help them see that things can be stable, at least at school. I think if the teacher can make it stable as it can be at school. And keep it structured at school for that child, so they know exactly what is going to happen when they walk through the doors at the school.
> Teacher 2: We try to get more parental involvement. Support structures available for the students.
> Teacher 3: I think if the teacher can recognize those disadvantages and meet them without making the child ever feel like they are being singled out in anyway.
> Teacher 2: They have to have an "I can" attitude. Self-esteem. They have got to be resilient.
> Teacher 4: Very resilient.

Asked what they see as the difference between the academic success of homeless children and housed children, one teacher pointed clearly to expectations, motivations and support:

> There are some kids that at home are being motivated by either mom or dad, grandma or grandpa. But when they are in the shelter, I find that the children are, more or less, the adults. They say, "My mom forgot to check," or "I couldn't come to school yesterday because my mom woke up late." So, if this child doesn't wake up to wake mom up, he or she can't go from that motel, if they are in grade 3 or 2, to walk down by themselves. It comes down to, who is the adult in that family?

At another school, a teacher told the story of a grade 4 student living in a shelter whose mother had temporarily left the shelter, and no one noticed for almost a week, because every night he set the alarm, and every morning he arrived at school, "on time, appropriately dressed with his lunch and his homework done." One morning the child slept through the alarm, at which time the shelter and school found out his mother had disappeared six days earlier. "Very adaptable, very self-sufficient," said the teacher, "and totally devastated that he couldn't continue to live alone at the shelter. He felt it was a safe place. And was just heartbroken when Children's Aid said he couldn't continue."

OSRs

The information from the review of Ontario School Records of seven homeless elementary school students completed by school administrators adds to the portrait of homeless students and school success. It is offered with the caution that this is by no measure a statistically significant sample.

The seven students attended three different schools in Toronto. All spoke English as a first language and were born in Canada. Of the seven children, only one had been suspended once, even though Ontario has had a very strict Safe Schools Policy that mandates immediate suspension for a wide variety of behaviours – for example any instance of hitting – for all ages of children. None had ever been expelled. Only one student had a custody issue that teachers and administrators had to be aware of. The OSR indicated that the father was wanted by the police.

The two children showed more incidents of lateness and absence, but each only in the preceding year, which, given the average length of shelter stays, was likely before they moved to the shelter. Student 4 had been absent 30 days and late 32 times in 2005-06; Student 7 was absent 27 days in the same school year, and late 13 times. Student 4 had only been absent one day in the 2006-07 school year by the time the form was completed in late February, Student 7 had been absent 9.5 days. All of the other students had been absent or late fewer than 12 times each year, with most in the 3-5 day range for absences and late around the same number of times.

Table 19 shows the students' ages and the grade they were in, the number of schools they have attended, and, where the information is available, any scores on the EQAO as well as the grades.

Table 19: Schools and Grades Ontario School Record Information

	Grade	Age	# of Schools	EQAO Level	Grades Range Previous Year	Grades Range Current Year
Student 1	2	7	2	n/a	n/a	n/a
Student 2	2	7	3	n/a	n/a	n/a
Student 3	4	9	2	2	C+ to B-	C- to B-
Student 4	4	9	4	n/a	B- to B+	B- to no grade
Student 5	5	10	2	3	C- to B-	C- to B-
Student 6	6	11	2	n/a	C- to B	C- to B+
Student 7	7	12+	8	n/a	D to B+	R to no grade

The EQAO is a province-wide testing that occurs in elementary school in grades 3 and 6. The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) describes this multi-day testing as assessments "to measure student achievement against curriculum expectations." It is graded out of four, with four being the highest level and one the
lowest. The grades range columns show the grades for the current and previous year. The letter grade "F" is no longer used by the Toronto school system and has been replaced by "R." TDSB elementary report cards state that "R" means "The student has not demonstrated the required knowledge and skills. Extensive remediation is required."

The OSR Review Template asked for information on special needs and special educational programs. None of the students had been formally diagnosed with a learning disability, four of the seven had Individual Education Plans, which means they have been identified as having special needs and an individualized learning plan was developed to suit their needs. Student 2 has special needs in the areas of auditory memory, factual learning skills, expressive language, receptive language, basic numeracy and problem solving. Student 7, who is clearly having trouble scholastically, is a high transience student accessing no special programming and may well be an example of the problem discussed earlier: a highly transient homeless child who is moving schools too quickly to gain access to needed programming under the current system.

Table 20: Special Needs Ontario School Record Information

	Individual Education Plan (IEP)	Remedial Program	Social Worker	Speech Pathologist	Notes or Comments
Student 1	No	No	No	No	Conflict resolution needs improvement
Student 2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Remedial literacy learning
Student 3	Yes	Yes	No	No	Requires much structure
Student 4	No	No	No	No	
Sudent 5	Yes	Yes	No	No	Participates in Learning Centre
Student 6	No	No	No	No	More active participation needed
Student 7	Yes	Yes	No	No	Needs work on writing and math skills

Transience

"It's not even living in a shelter, it's chronic homelessness or chronic moving that becomes the major issue."

Family shelter staff

Transience is a major issue in the education of homeless children. It is seen as the number one challenge for homeless children by some shelter staff. For those who are homeless only once, and change schools twice in the same school year to accommodate moving to the shelter and then to a new neighbourhood, transience can lead to repeating the same material while completely missing other sections of the curriculum. For children who attend many schools in different school boards during their short career in elementary school, their education may become fragmented and, as discussed previously, they may be too transient for testing to catch this. They may be moved forward grade to grade without learning the material, or they may become so detached from school that they don't put in the effort. As one family shelter parent explained:
Their marks improved once they knew that they weren't leaving that school. At first it was, "Why do the homework? You know, we're not going to be here that long."

The child's question reveals the importance of attachment to school achievement. "They're too transient to lay down any solid roots for a time," said one VAW shelter staff, "and that's a huge barrier because attachment is so important to a child. When they come to the shelter they tend to form attachments to the staff because mom and dad were always in such turmoil. That's a huge leap for them."

Shelter staff expressed concern that the government should recognize they are dealing with very transient children who move quickly. "A lot of the kids we see here remain transient in the community," said one VAW shelter staff. "They fall through the cracks, because they don't stay in their school long enough to be tested. They might be in grade 3, grade 4, grade 5, grade 6, and go through their whole first term and are not identified. We see them and we have three months to six months to work on what level the child is at, how can we get them in the system." As discussed, if testing cannot be accomplished at the current school, staff try to ensure that when the OSR arrives at the next school, it indicates the student needs assessment, so that the waiting period is not restarting every time they arrive at a school, and still running after they have left. The continual movement of these students puts their education in serious jeopardy.

One VAW shelter staff said that a shelter "isn't always their first stop after they have left their home." If 70% of families are at the shelters for the first time, as reported above, then 30% of families are either returning to the shelter after losing housing again or moving from shelter to shelter seeking safety. The children of these families are at risk of a fragmented education that goes undetected, or "falling through the cracks." One VAW shelter staff reported that "We currently have a family, the children have been in four or five schools in the last year. Without continuity, it is hard to be successful. And when at your last school you didn't get to say goodbye, there is no closure, you are moving to a new school, you have to get new friends." One teacher described watching a child return to her school to clean out his locker, and his elation at having some of his things returned, and being able to bring them with him.

Some VAW shelter staff advocated for government to take a fresh, open-minded look at the entire response to domestic violence against women and children. Staff at several shelters noted that it is the mother and children who flee, often with nothing more than identification, and the father who stays on in the family home. While the system of VAW shelters is obviously necessary in the current climate, re-housing everyone but the abuser on an emergency basis is a costly solution that impacts heavily on children's education. A case in point is a mother of three living in one of the VAW shelters. All three of her children are autistic. They do not speak and have special needs. They are bussed from the shelter back to their original school, so they have maintained their special needs programming. While the mother and three children live in the shelter, waiting for affordable housing, the father occupies the family home by himself.

Falling Behind, Missing and Repeating Material

Children reported that changing schools meant that they hadn't covered material that they were suddenly being tested on. "In math," one child reported, "in the beginning they were telling us how to answer certain questions and I missed that when I came. They were switching questions and whatever, and I never got to understand it." Asked if he received any extra help to catch up he said, "No." Another student explained that when he first arrived in a school part way into the year, he had trouble with tests underway:

> Child 1: I hate when they are doing tests. Like tests every week. I can never understand any of them.
> Interviewer: Did you do okay on the tests?
> Child 1: Not really, when I first came none of them were good and then I got better.
> Interviewer: Did somebody give you extra help?
> Child 1: No, I just started to understand

Children who attended more than one school in a given school year also reported that they had been taught the same unit of material more than once:

> Interviewer: Since you have been in a few schools have you ever had the problem with doing the same work over again?
> Child: Yes.
> Interviewer: What do you do about that if you have missed some things?
> Child: I ask the teacher if she already has done that, so she tells me they have already done that then I go for extra classes. I got that from my mom. She told me how, any school stuff she taught me.

Teachers agreed. As one explained:

> Some are very transient, you get gaps in knowledge and it takes you a long time sometimes to figure out where those gaps are. Or they are doubled up on things, they show really well for one unit and you don't realize until you get to the next unit that they are actually fairly behind, [they did well] only

because they had doubled up that particular unit.

Another teacher described a student who has moved so often her academics have collapsed below a level at which she would normally have been given a high level of support, yet support has not been forthcoming. As the teacher explained:

> I have a student right now who I guess that has happened to. All through grade 1 she got R's in every subject, and through part of grade 2, where she was before, she got R's. Usually, if you are in the same place for long enough period of time, you will be put on an individual education plan before you are just given R's every single term. Clearly she has not been in one place for quite a while.

Stigmatization, Attitudes and Bullying

> "They seem to be acutely aware of the situation and not in a positive way. By that I mean, thinking 'kids are making fun of me because I am in the shelter.' It is always at the back of their minds."
>
> *Teacher*

> "The most important is the fear of the stigma."
>
> *VAW shelter staff*

By and large children living in shelters appear to experience fear that they will be stigmatized with a variety of negative labels. It is not true of all children, and certainly not true for those so young that they do not understand what they are experiencing, let alone fear, how others will respond to their living situation. It generally seems to become more of an issue the older a child is. And it is not just a fear – there are children who have experienced bullying that is framed around living in a shelter. But there appear to be many more children who fear the stigma than who actually experience it. Children, parents, shelter staff and teachers all reported it.

At one family shelter the children individually explained to the researcher that every one of them lied about where they live. None of them admitted to living in a shelter. At another, the children insisted gamely that, "no one knew":

> Child 1: No one knows.
> Child 2: No one knew.
> Child 3: No one knows, yeah.
> Child 4: We don't talk like stuff about stuff like that at school.
> Child 1: Cause they're going to make fun of us.

Parents, teachers and shelter staff all understood the children's fears. As one parent explained:
The perception out there is people will look down on you. They will label you lazy. People sometimes will say why doesn't she go to work instead of going to a shelter. Sometimes the kids are really young and you can't go to work.
Shelter staff reported that children will go so far as to "lie to their best friends" and have "their parents drop them off at the corner and pretend to go into another house." Another staff reported that when one boy's friend knocked on the door he said to the staff, "Tell him I don't live here."

Teachers also understood that the fear is rooted in the attitudes children perceive in the larger community, and that specifically addressing fear through programming can help. As one teacher said:

> There's a lot of fear of others finding out. The children are like, "Oh someone is going to find out I live in a shelter and they are going to think I am poor, I am homeless." They are almost shameful at times. If we, as educators, find out ahead of time, we can possibly try to do more social programming, self-esteem programming, conflict resolution programming, things that might help these students, who witnessed who knows what.

Students, parents and shelter staff all reported incidents of bullying over living in a shelter. No teachers reported actual bullying, though parents felt some must be aware of it. As one parent said:
She did mention getting teased, a lot. Not consistently, I think the teacher put a stop to it. But she did say that someone said something.
One child living in a VAW shelter – who described the shelter as "the best" – reported serious bullying that required his mother's intervention at the school. It had happened the day before he was interviewed for the study:

> I don't know how they found out I lived here, but kids were picking on me. Yesterday, for one day. And then this kid said something about my father; I felt so angry I was about to fight him. I went to tell a teacher but the teacher, he just told us, "Don't do that." And he didn't do nothing. Today my mom came to talk to the teacher. So today it was calm, today they didn't bully me but yesterday they did. One kid tripped me. I was like right there and I was like, ugh!

Teachers reported that generally shelter children would not talk at all about where they lived, but, there is always the exception, as this teacher explained:

> Except for one of my kids last year. He just thought it was great, he thought it was a hotel. He would talk about it like, "Oh, it is great, we get to go to a restaurant, we watch movies on Friday." He would talk about it everyday with the kids.

Barriers to a Sense of Belonging

Transience and embarrassment about living in a shelter act as barriers to a sense of belonging at school. Not only are most of the children who are 10 or older self-conscious about where they live, many of the VAW shelters keep their locations secret, requiring children not to disclose the address where they live or give out the phone number. Most of the VAW shelters do not allow children to have friends over. Shelter staff understand the burden this places on the children. As one shelter staff said:

> You know what would that do a child's soul, when you can't even say, "Oh, that's my house!" You can't have a friend to come and play in the backyard.

Some parents also reported little or no contact with the school. They are occupied with solving their crisis, and often don't become part of the school community, another facet of belonging at school for the child. One parent described feeling very self-conscious around the school:

> No, the parents kind of single you out as who's that, you know, we got to watch that person, make sure that person comes back for a couple of weeks.

Extra-curricular activities like sports and clubs can give a child the sense of belonging at school that is part of the broad definition of school success. At two schools teachers were clear that shelter students participated in after school activities, particularly sports, that if they were in the school they had the right to

participate and allowances would be made for their shorter stay in the school. This was not the case at the majority of schools. It was far more common to hear that short stays at the school barred shelter children from after school activities:

> Teacher 1: They never seem to be here at the right time for tryouts. Because like somebody coming in half way through the year, they just don't take the opportunities. I think part of it is just getting settled, they don't hear of any things that are going on, but if you are not here in the right week for tryouts then you are not on a sports team. And very rarely do these children participate in our sports, I can think of very few.
> Teacher 2: They can't be in the school play that is being held at the end of the year, we don't know if they are going to be around then.

While the first teacher is clear that the shelter students can't be on a team if they miss the tryouts, the second teacher appears to be barring shelter students from the school play because they might not still be at the school. What begins as a consequence of their circumstances appears to slip into becoming a barrier based on past experience and a failure to adjust the process of the school play to permit transient students to participate as much as and for as long as they can.

Some teachers worked diligently with shelter students and missed them when they didn't attend the big events, like a school concert. At the same time, they realized the family was living through problems. As one teacher said:

> And sometimes they also don't come to the Christmas concert or that sort of thing. When you have practiced and you have worked with them and it is kind of heart-breaking. I guess my feeling is, priorities of parents over there are a little different. Maybe they are dealing with other bigger issues.

Staying in the same school after moving to the shelter is a great advantage in terms of maintaining a sense belonging, openness and being part of a larger community, as one parent explained:

> The teachers know my situation. The principal and teachers know. I had a chat with each of them, I mean they have known us seven years. For me it has helped, having the kids in the same school, having them with people they feel comfortable with. The teacher said to me, "If we have any concerns we will come to you." That was great for me, I could get other things done, without having to worry, oh are my kids okay, are they emotionally shattered? I didn't have to worry about it. So for me that made my life a lot easier.

Witnessing or Experiencing Violence

> "Like a cycle of grieving they need to go through all the stages, they need to go through the fear, the guilt and the shame, and the rage and the empowerment and the surviving. We may not see all those stages but that is the course of healing."
>
> *VAW Shelter staff*

Consistent with the literature, shelter staff, parents and teachers described a variety of behaviours exhibited by children who have witnessed or experienced violence. They may be withdrawn, and quiet, almost as if they are afraid to draw any attention to themselves. The may also act out, drawing attention to themselves constantly. They can be destructive. They can also have a hard time focusing and paying attention, and need extra help to be able to focus on doing their homework. In a violent home, school and homework may not have been the prime focus. All of these can and do impact the school success of children who are made

homeless by violence.

Some children are simply still living in fear, carrying with them what they experienced in the home. As one teacher related:

> I had a boy who you could see he was nervous, at recess and after school. He was afraid that his father would show up. Finally, I showed him that I had a picture of his father and I knew that his father could not come to the door. You could just see the look on his face was like, "Oh good, she knows." He seemed to relax. How can he really worry about a fraction, when he is concerned as to whether or not his father is going to be on the playground after school?

The teacher was also clear that this kind of worry can easily prevent a child from focusing on classroom learning.

Children who have witnessed domestic violence can also be very afraid about what might happen to their mothers. One shelter worker noted how stressful it would be to be worrying whether your mother would be "alive in the morning." Another noted that, "A lot of kids are really protective of their moms. Really quite terrified, and afraid to leave her. They can't even venture out."

Teachers talked about withdrawal backfiring as a tactic for a child who wants to keep attention away. As one teacher noted:

> Sometimes, instead of being aggressive, they actually withdraw. They don't talk to anyone, they don't talk to you, they don't do anything. They are trying to blend into the wall but everyone notices, because they aren't doing anything. And it is hard to talk to them after that. You have to really engage them to bring them out a little bit.

Teachers also described children suddenly disclosing difficult information from their lives. One teacher related how, on a school skating trip, a young girl started talking about violence she had witnessed:

> She put her hand up and said something rather graphic about violence that happened at home. Some parents volunteered for skating, they were there and most of the kids' jaws just dropped on the floor, they were like, what is she talking about. It was like really shocking. And I was like, okay, what is the best way to deal with this? I think I handled it fairly well. But it was in public and everyone heard it; she just kept going and going and we couldn't stop her, she was just venting or whatever. How do I handle that, with the other kids who have now heard it and will go to their parents and say so and so said such and such?

The teacher felt unprepared for the disclosure and muddled through the situation not sure what else she could have done to handle it, and what the future consequences would be.

A remedial language teacher reported that she had students who seemed to dwell in fantasies, and then told a story about a child who talked about a knife and a violent attack, and the police being called, and said it had happened the night before. When the school staff checked with the shelter, no such event had happened the night before. This teacher appeared to be describing children re-living traumatic experiences.

Both these examples raise the question of what is needed to support the education of these children. Teachers need to focus on academics and yet the children's emotions must be dealt with appropriately for that to be possible. Clearly, if the social and emotional needs are not taken care of elsewhere, then teachers are

of necessity focusing on that in the classroom. They often acknowledge that this leads to lowering the academic expectations they place on shelter children, and into a negative learning cycle for the children.

Children also feel physical symptoms of stress. One child explained how hard it is to leave his little brother in the shelter and go visit his father:

> Sometimes when I go to my dad's, I hear my little brother crying from the elevator. It is so loud I get a headache.

Physical symptoms of stress can interfere with learning, as one VAW shelter staff explained:

> For a child who has come from an environment where they can't anticipate what is going to happen next, that has got to create a huge amount of stress. Our kids have the physical symptoms – they get the headaches – it is hard to be at school when you don't feel well.

Letting anger out is recognized as part of the journey of healing from trauma. A VAW shelter staff explained that getting angry is "when their real emotions come out" but anger is not something that works in a school setting. As noted earlier, Ontario has had a strict Safe Schools policy that anger easily runs afoul of. Anger is also very disruptive to a classroom, and not something that can easily be taught around. One VAW shelter child talked about his strategies for controlling his anger:

> Sometimes it is good to not be angry. You have to be with people; if I am going to get in trouble with a kid, I am leaving. That is what my dad and mom taught me. I have this friend who is quiet and smart and stays away from problems, so I chill with him.

Disruption, Trauma and Children's Behaviour

Even shelter children who have not witnessed violence have come from, and may still be living in, a stressful situation. Parents have many problems to solve. When they are homeless and in crisis it is very difficult to make their children's education the first priority. At the same time, the period of transition is key to keeping the child on track with their education. Moving to a shelter is always precipitated by a crisis of some sort, whether domestic violence, eviction or sudden emigration. Children, along with their parents, experience the stress of various kinds of loss. As one family shelter staff explained:

> So coming into the shelter puts them into a really high stress mode. Especially the kids, they are leaving their friends behind, their family, their teachers, some stability, they are going into a new school system and have to start all over.

Loss

If they have fled a violent domestic situation children will often have no possessions. "These kids have left everything," said one VAW shelter staff, "they are coming to a shelter, no matter how pretty the walls are, it is still a shelter." School supplies, for example, would not be a priority, as a shelter worker explained, "It is a crisis that has precipitated them coming, they are not thinking about school supplies. They are thinking more ID's or clothing." Teachers also noted that homeless children have to abandon possessions, and that receiving some back is a very positive emotional experience:

> The other thing is the kids leave all of their stuff behind at the other school. For the first time this year, a teacher sent stuff on. I gave her the envelope and she was just like thanks, she was so happy, here is all my stuff, and she put it all in her desk. It was the first time I saw her so happy, and a sense of

relief. She was like, "I got my stuff, here is my stuff."

Living in the Shelter

Part of the stress may simply be living in the shelter, a new unfamiliar environment, and one that carries a stigma for most children. In the large family shelters, where rooms are all on an intercom system, children complained of being unable to sleep due to noise.

VAW Shelter staff discussed how children feel stress on arrival, but also how they change over the course of their stay:

> Shelter Staff 1: They don't understand why they are here, it is embarrassing. The myths, the children come with that. In the long run they still have that piece of "Why do I have to be here?" but there also is relief. There is hope.
> Shelter Staff 2: We also see children leave feeling way more power than when they come in.
> Shelter Staff 1: There are two different scenarios, when children come in versus when they leave. Very, very different.

Researchers asked a group of shelter children who they turn to when they are sad, and received a set of answers that reveal a range of emotional states:

> Child 1: My mom.
> Child 2: I talk to my teddy bear.
> Child 3: No one.
> Child 4: People at school, we have a thing to talk about our problems at school and I talk to my stuffed animals.
> Child 5: My friends.
> Child 6: I talk to my monster.
> Interviewer: Your mother?
> Child 6: No, my monster.
> Child 7: I am never sad.
> Interviewer: You are never sad?
> Children: No. She is never sad!
> Child 8: My friend CJ and he moved.
> Child 9: Sometimes I talk to myself and then sometimes I talk to adults.

Some children feel comfortable to rely on their parent, others need a monster to support them through sad times. Still others cannot admit to sadness.

Family shelter staff noted that the children will carry the precipitating event with them as they start at a new school. As one family shelter staff explained:
And again whatever precipitated in coming to the shelter is what adds to the stress at school.
They are also very attuned to their parents – in this case mothers – and their mother's emotional and mental state will be reflected in their behaviour. A VAW shelter staff said:

> If the mother is severely in crisis, it is often reflective in a kid's behaviour in the classroom or their levels of stress or ability to concentrate.

Behaviour

Shelter staff, teachers and parents describe a range of behaviour from homeless children that can block their

learning or support it. As one teacher said:

> I have also seen the behaviour range from being really, really resilient to being overly aggressive. I have not seen it in between, it is either really withdrawn because they know it is only temporary, or overly aggressive, and some of them really, really try hard to fit in. The ones who are aggressive, they try really hard to fit in. I teach phys ed so I get to see them playing and interacting in a situation that should be fun for them. The ones who are really resilient want to take part. They are actually accepted by a lot of the kids.

One teacher commented that the young shelter children seem to seek more physical contact than non-shelter children:

> The younger ones tend to be more physically attention-seeking, they want more, they will sit on my lap, or hold my hand.

It can be a challenge for teachers to control a classroom and focus it on academic learning if there are too many children in need of attention on emotional issues. As one family shelter staff explained:

> We had a number of children who were placed in the same class with the same teacher and literally 85% of her time was managing behaviours. She couldn't even get to the teaching. It was such a horrible situation involved to be in and I think it really highlighted that you can't teach until they are emotionally ready.

Behaviour Blocking School Attendance

Some behaviour can make it difficult for a child to attend school, as one parent lamented. She described how her son, with a history of suspensions, is no longer allowed to stay at school for lunch:

> My son's behaviour really makes it difficult for me to find babysitters who are willing to take care of him at lunchtimes. Because of incident after incident happening, he cannot stay for lunch. On top of that it costs me money, and finding the person who can actually put up with his behaviour. Some things have gotten better, he hasn't been suspended since being here. It's at the point now, if someone bugs him, that's when he seems to be hurting somebody. If he can't get his point across to leave him alone, he retaliates and hits them. But, since we've been here it's only happened a few times, it is not every day anymore. At one point it was every single day.

Another parent described school problems for a son who was acting out by lighting fires:

> My son was in public school, he's now going into grade 9, but he was a fire-starter, because they took away all his sports after school. He's a sports kid. And now I switched him into another system, he's doing great. All the fires have stopped and everything. That's where the cutbacks lead, that's what it's doing to kids, you know, they got more time to get into trouble.

Acting out can take these aggressive forms that bar a child from school. Yet treatment can be a long way off. As one parent noted:

> Sometimes kids who live in shelters need special attention. Sometimes it's difficult to get the appointments with psychologists or therapy. You have to wait until about a year. And that's pretty hard.

Emotions Blocking Learning

Emotions can also block individual learning, even if they are not disrupting the class in any way. Teachers noticed that some students are simply distracted, and the first task of learning is to try and assist them to focus. As one teacher explained:

> One thing I find is that some of them are distracted or seem to be distant, you know their mind is somewhere else. And it is a lot of trying to get them back to do whatever it is, whatever you are working on. They tend to have that focus on possibly what caused them to be in the shelter. And they take on a lot from their parents; you know just discussing with them, they might tell you that, they are that way because of what is happening at home. They focus a lot on what their parents should be focusing on.

One parent was very concerned to teach her daughter how to calm down so that she could absorb the lessons in class, and be determined about getting the help she needs. She described talking to her daughter:

> I just tell her don't bother getting frustrated, just calm down because you lose… you get worse when you get angry with it like that. You can't think properly. And usually when she calms down, she says, "Mommy you were right." She's been getting some help from the teachers at school because I tell her if you don't understand the concept don't leave the classroom until you understand. Just ask for help, make sure you understand what it is all about.

Self-esteem

Inability to succeed at school due to emotional and behaviour problems can easily lead to a loss of self-esteem, even though the emotional and behavioural problems are a result of enormous burdens of stress placed on children. Parents expressed concern that children's behaviour was being mislabelled, and their children fell into a trap of meeting low or negative expectations. As one parent said:

> That's how some of these kids fall through the cracks or they get labelled ADD. If they had a little extra help and didn't feel singled out in front of everybody, like some teachers like to do, it would be so much easier. It affects your self-esteem. My older son, they did the same thing, they said he was ADD and it came to the point where he would just be bad because they expected him to be bad. You know? And I would ask him, "You know why did you do that?" "Why not? If I'm good they don't notice."

Family shelter staff also worried that children were losing their confidence and acceding to notions of stupidity. A family shelter staff explained:

> You can see from talking to them that they say, "I am just dumb, you don't know how dumb I am." This is the reason for not even trying, because he doesn't understand that all these other factors contribute to him being behind. He associates it with him being dumb and that is the biggest barrier.

Loss of Interest in Achieving at School

As noted above, low self-esteem and lack of achievement, even when it is caused by outside circumstances, can lead to a loss of interest in school and low motivation. One parent was very concerned about her son, who before moving schools twice in one year had been a cheerful and motivated student. She said:

> My son said today, "Mom, I don't feel that I want to be a good student. I don't care if I get a D, I don't care if I have to go to the office." I have to work hard to make him try.

The same child told the researcher that he would like to be a doctor or an artist when he grows up.

Staying Away from Gangs

A child who loses motivation at school may seek achievement elsewhere. At the high end of this age group – the 11- and 12-year-olds – gangs begin to come into play. One 11-year-old boy talked about violence at his school and at his older brother's school and spoke of his own resolve not to get involved in gangs in his area of Toronto:

> This kid in middle school, he fought with the teacher and five teachers came in and had to stop it. He couldn't stop, so they called the police and then they stopped the kid. Three police and five teachers. And the same thing happened in my brother's school. You know the Asians, Crips and Bloods. My brother told me millions of people came and started fighting and in the end the leader guy got cut with a knife. That was sad. And I saw him once in the car, we were going and we stopped at the red light and I saw him and I thought, "I hope he changes." The light went green and we left. I guess it made me realize what gangsters are like. That is why I don't like gangs, I don't want to be in one. I think who I am is what I am, so I never get in trouble.

This boy's story is consistent with information from the executive director of a VAW shelter in another part of the city who reported that the 11- and 12-year-olds were vulnerable to heading toward gangs.

"We have kids that have witnessed family violence. Emotional issues can be everything. I see a lot of kids who are really scared still. They are scared or very sad, withdrawn. They need a lot of emotional support."

School liaison worker

Shelter staff bemoaned the gap in funding that leaves out programming for six- to 12-year-olds. With the focus on the first six years and then again on the teen years, this age group is now overlooked, and in need of programming to head off gang involvement. As one shelter staff explained:

> It is as if it is too late for them. They have this huge movement for under six years, then all of a sudden you are not in your first six years so you don't really matter…We especially have a problem when you are looking at gang involvement. It is that age group that is vulnerable. That is where we are getting issues with our younger mothers and our children that aren't getting by. There is a gap, there is nothing to address it and then what happens is they get involved with the wrong things.

Educators Understanding Shelter Life and Homeless Students

There is a range of attitudes to shelter and shelter children among teachers, and many are very positive, even suggesting that community attitudes are part of the problem:

Teacher 1: One of the things I was thinking about was stereotypes about homelessness. A lot of stereotypes, people see the Family Residence they think about violence in the family, broken families, that kind of thing, laziness-
Teacher 2: The attitude that "they brought it upon themselves."
But, it is also easy for stereotypes to develop over time in institutions. At one school, the librarian explained she had an ad hoc policy of not letting shelter children borrow as many library books as non-shelter children. She used the term "irresponsible" to describe shelter children, saying her experience was that, as a group, they do not return library books:
Librarian: Like irresponsible, yeah. If [shelter children] take a library book they will not bring it back. Right, so if there are some children I will only give one book, and they are like "Why do they get three and I get only one?" Because I know the books are not going to come back. But they say, "Why do they get three?"
Teacher: And that kind of leads to the disadvantage to in terms of creating the opportunities for [shelter children].

Staff in some shelters expressed concern that teachers and administrators did not know enough about what actually happens in a shelter:

Staff: That image and myth is still out there. We offer to come in any time and do a little bit of an education piece.
Interviewer: Have they ever taken you up on that?
Staff: Not really. I think training, especially for schools that deal regularly with shelters, that would be very beneficial.

Some shelter staff also felt there was "a barrier with the teachers in school." One worried that teachers would give up to easily because "sometimes the kids are so agitated that they can't learn and I think the worst thing for our kids is for someone to give up on them." Other shelters reported excellent relationships with schools.

Parents expressed similar worries that teachers wouldn't be able to go the whole distance for shelter children:
Maybe if they could reach out to the kids that are in the shelter a little bit more. Cause they are going to school acting like everything is normal and the teacher doesn't know, but the teacher does.
Parents also felt that teachers needed to be more aware of the impacts of trauma and domestic violence on children and the shape of what that looks like in their behaviours, so that children are not wrongly labelled, but instead, get the learning support they need. One parent explained:

It is very easy to label a child and I think teachers need to be educated on different situations. Not being able to sit in class is not attention deficit. And I think they need to be much more aware how when they label a child how that affects a child's self-esteem and it just doesn't last in that class it goes on, until they find a teacher who will focus on the child, not so much on the problem. The school board needs to educate staff on domestic violence, because it happens. Teachers need to be educated, because a lot of the times the mom is in an abusive situation, the only person that person has to contact is the children's teachers, if they aren't open-minded or aren't aware of some of the problems, it makes it very difficult. What happens at home affects the child at school. Everybody just needs to be aware. There need to be changes to accommodate everyone. I could go on like this.

Transcending a Student's History

Another parent raised a concern that her child would not be allowed to recover from a period of disruptive

behaviour at school and transcend their history. As the parent explained:

> My son already had the name going into the last school, his file was that thick from the first school and they automatically assumed that something would happen. Nobody else's kid ever did anything wrong but mine. And he came home and said, "Mommy, I told them the truth and they still didn't want to believe me." And it was over and over and over again. And I asked, "Did they even talk to the other kids." "No. Cause they said they didn't do it." And it doesn't matter if the other kid hit him, it mattered because my son had gotten in trouble in the past. But here, at the new school, because they're not doing that to him, he's been amazing. He's been totally amazing. At this school, they didn't give him a name as soon as he went in. He's been treated just the same as everybody else, and it's made a big, big difference for him. He's gotten his first A. An A-, and a whole bunch of B's, all on one page.

Lack of Support from Government

Both the school board and the provincial government came up in focus groups as institutions that teachers felt could be doing more to support shelter children:

> Teacher 1: The fact is we do it because we want to, but we do wish there was more in place and that we didn't have to juggle all of this. At the end of the day, you are running to the gym to coach the kids. And you are organizing your games and doing your schedules; you are also the core teacher developing programs all day. But now you are not in the class giving extra support to the kids who need help after school with their work. You just can't do it all. You get tired and it is a juggling act. And you don't say to a kid, "I don't have time to talk to you."
> Teacher 2: I think as the years progress, it becomes, not worse, but I think the teacher's role becomes greater. It is not just about academics. It is about the social work, it is about the psychology.
> Teacher 1: We even give them breakfast. We even feed them.
> Teacher 2: And we feed them. And we have a government in place that keeps taking more and more from us.
> Teacher 3: Because they do not respect what is being done in schools. They don't understand it, they don't respect it. And I am not talking about the curriculum.

These teachers clearly understood, and worked from, the broad, holistic definition of school success that includes well-being, sense of belonging and behavioural adjustment as well as academic achievement.

Supports Currently in Place

The study heard about a range of supports for the education of homeless children currently in place in schools, shelters and the community. They come in many forms, ranging from preparation by individual teachers and administrators, to school-wide programs, outside agencies offering school liaison programs and shelter staff working in the shelter, the schools and the community.

In Schools

From Individual Teachers

In addition to those who are attuning to emotional needs, some individual teachers also make sure that children have the supplies they need. As one teacher explained:

> I remember a few years back, always having to have packages pre-made for those kids who were walking in. You always had four or five Ziploc bags with resources they need and then planning for

their homework. Because when they went home you don't know if they had a quiet spot to sit or if they had interaction with an adult or a pencil or crayon or anything to do their homework, so you were always prepared for the unknown for when they went back to the shelter.
Other teachers and administrators mentioned keeping extra food on hand that children could have, plus collections of mittens, boots and gloves and collecting donations from the surrounding community, especially winter clothes for newcomers.

A teacher in his first year at a school that teaches children from shelters expressed his admiration for the way the other teachers had adjusted:

> Coming in here new and coming from where I've never had to deal with this issue before, I find here our teachers and our students are very used to it. It is not a big deal, everyone is accepted. Even kids in grade 1 are very accepting and there is sometimes different rules for different things here, and I think it makes a difference. Everyone helps each other.

The same school took a very positive attitude to shelter children's participation in after school sports:

> Teacher 1: No, if they are here they are here.
> Teacher 2: Yeah, if they are here, they try out. I got a lot of them in sports.
> Teacher 1: You wouldn't even know.
> Teacher 3: I was just going to say, at this level, too, if they are going to move it is not a problem.

School-Wide Programs

Program for Quick Assessments

One school, with a historically high percentage of shelter children – up to 20% of the student population – developed a technique that permits very quick assessment of the language capabilities of new students. This school served the families that were housed in motels as family homelessness rose rapidly and commonly had students for only two to three weeks, with as many as 150 homeless students in and out of the school over the course of a given school year. The principal explained the technique, called Read 180:

> Here we have a full team family-type approach to language, so we have a common time during the day where all teachers are involved in instruction of language for kids. And in many cases, we are teamed up in every single class and numbers are down significantly into small groups based on ability. Because it is set up that way, we very quickly get an idea of exactly where a child is at in their learning process and can program for them quickly. And when I say quickly, particularly within the junior intermediate division where we have a special program called Read 180, I mean in 20 minutes of the child arriving, we can find out exactly what reading level they are at and program for them that same day.

The principal went on to explain that, once assessed, there is also small group instruction:

> Every child from grade 1 through grade 8 is, for 40 minutes a day, in a group no larger than half a class size with instruction geared at their learning level within the reading program. So, when you walk around between 10:50 and 11:30, you will often be passing classes with no more than 10 to 12 students. And at that time you see every one of the teachers in the school teaching something.

Other schools have shown an interest in this model. The principal reported that in the last year "three or four schools" had toured the reading program.

The Care Club

The same school that used Read 180 also developed a program they call the Care Club. This is a program that essentially enhances the degree of connection for children at the school who are most at risk. They did not specifically target the shelter children, but shelter children who appeared to be at risk would have been identified for the program. A teacher at the school explained:

> Care Club was about taking the kids that we felt were most at risk. We came up with this list of kids that we felt were most at risk - it could be academically, emotionally, socially, and a lot of times, all three. And we said okay, we are all going to kind of adopt one child or more. It was completely voluntary. Some took three kids, some took five, some took one. But the whole idea was that we tried not to choose kids in our class. Everybody gave what they could. For some people it was making sure every time they saw that kid in the hall they said hello, took the time to notice them. For other teachers it was specifically to give help in academic areas where they needed support. Or it might be shooting hoops with a kid for a half an hour, once a week. We picked our own times when it was convenient because we thought those relationships would grow naturally on their own as the people that were involved saw fit. And it really was a positive experience. It was part of a road to the understanding that all kids were important. This whole idea of the school knowing all the kids and being responsible for all of them.

The positive impacts of the program range from enhancing a child's sense of connection to the school by being noticed and building a relationship with a second teacher, to extra help with academics and skills building for success in sports and extra-curricular.

Expectation of Success

Some teachers are clear that it is necessary to maintain an expectation of academic success for homeless children, regardless of the emotional and behavioural problems that may get in the way of their learning. This can be done by setting and re-setting achievable targets:

> Teacher 1: There is an expectation of success for all of our kids. Just the very fact that we expect it from them tells them that we believe they can do it and I think gives them confidence they can do it. And we also make sure that we are structuring our instruction to these kids in such a way that they can be successful. We are not trying to stretch them, we are trying to take them from here to here. And we reassess all the time and then move them to here, to here, and here, and so on. All we are trying to give them is that safety net, that they are secure. That they are building on what they know and not trying to take a kid who just arrived in grade 3 and have him at grade 5 reading level in two weeks.
> Teacher 2: I think what it comes down to, and it is very cliché, but we don't want A's, we want you to do your best. If it is a B, so be it. You know, you have to keep reminding the kids, "All I want from you is your best, it would be nice if it was an A but even if it is a C and I know you have given 100% on this assignment, than that is fine."
> Teacher 3: They work harder over time.

Maintaining academic expectations for the school, despite all of the social and emotional work that must happen for educational success, is key for their principal:

> I would argue that with any principal out there. If this school is not academically successful, I am not doing my job, period. If the kids are not academically successful, nothing else matters. Like you said earlier, the kids can be happy as clams and wonderful kids, but if they leave this building as academic failures, we haven't served them well and we haven't done our job. So I need to always focus the

staff, and as a school. Our job is to teach kids. That is the only job I do here that matters.

Bridging Shelter and School: Liaison Workers

"Well, there is this guy named [school liaison worker's name], he helps me out a lot."

VAW shelter child

"They – the school liaison workers - are doing that front line work in the schools and the work that they do is phenomenal, we are so lucky that we have them."

VAW shelter staff

School Liaison Workers

School liaison workers bridge the gaps between shelter parents and schools and support the education and emotional health of shelter children, particularly shelter children who have witnessed violence. Although there are several kinds of liaison workers, those under discussion here are school liaison workers who are not on staff of the shelter or the school but are employed by non-profit social agencies. Staff from both the Child Development Institute, which runs the School Liaison Program, and Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre, which operates Helping Hands in Schools, was interviewed for the study after teachers and shelter staff spoke of their importance in supporting the school success of children living in shelters. As teachers at one school said:

> Teacher 1: I'd hate to think what their experience would be without [the school liaison worker]. We really haven't had to deal with anything.
> Teacher 2: We know [the school liaison worker] is talking to the kids and we know they have lunch, small little details but important details. And [the school liaison worker] gives us descriptions of the fathers, and whether or not we have to call the police right away. All that information that the teachers need.

One school liaison worker described the role they play as "designed to take the stress and the fear out of going to a new school for kids who weren't expecting to have to change schools. It is a hard role to describe because there's so many different parts. When I introduce myself to kids and to families, I describe what I do as everything from helping with schoolwork to help with making friends, to help with any problem solving that comes up for kids that they may need support with, with their teachers or other kids at the school."

School liaison workers fill the gaps in terms of dealing administratively with the school for parents who are dealing with crises. As one school liaison worker said:

> Ideally, I do a tour with the family and help them make connections with everyone from the administrative staff to teachers. I encourage parents to talk to teachers directly; but a lot of the families are dealing with a lot issues, they have a lot of appointments, and may be in court. I also touch base for some families daily, especially in the beginning, to give them updates on how their kids are doing. If a family has any problems or concerns with something that happened at school with their kids, I help problem-solve with the family and the school or work with the mom around strategies for how to communicate a problem to the school.

They also work with shelter children on emotional and behavioural problems that can otherwise send an entire class out of control. As one family shelter staff explained, "One child can really make or break an entire classroom setting. A liaison worker can intervene and hopefully preserve it." School liaison workers

will step in and take out a child whose behaviour is disrupting the class and help the child work through the emotional issues that underlie the behaviour. The school liaison worker is professionally equipped to deal with the effects of the trauma the child has experienced, and to assist in reducing the impacts of that trauma on the child's education and the classroom.

One school, where a worker has been placed for a number of years, provides the worker with an office. The school liaison worker can pull a child from a class and work one on one in the office. As the school liaison worker explained:

> We have kids that have witnessed family violence. Emotional issues can be everything. I see a lot of kids who are really scared still. They are scared or very sad, withdrawn. They need a lot of emotional support. In my office, I do a lot of activities around feelings, being able to identify feelings and what do you do with feelings and what do they mean? A lot of the kids I work with almost need permission to be able to share their feelings sometimes, so that is a big focus of the work that I do inside my office. Around feelings.

This work is seen to be highly effective by shelter staff and teachers. Family shelter staff reported:

> The liaison worker does an enormous amount of stuff for people who need the one on one for a couple hours a day. They are able to uncover all those layers so that the academic support can be accessed.

Teachers describe the school liaison worker as a "buffer" in terms of dealing with children's behaviour, and someone quick to recognize what is needed:

> Teacher 1: The school liaison worker is always the buffer for that, and usually intervenes if there is any problem, anticipates it, in fact. For myself, I rarely would see it; the liaison has already recognized it.
> Teacher 2: And the liaison doesn't identify the problems, like if there was abuse, they don't tell us what the problem is. It's better.

The school liaison worker also works with the children in the classroom, and in the playground.

Helping Hands

Aisling's Helping Hands in Schools is a direct service for children living in shelters. It currently provides support to children from one shelter at the nearby TDSB school they attend. Both the shelter and the school participated in this study. Through the program, liaison workers take children out of class for brief periods to work with them on emotional issues that may be blocking learning, they work with the teacher to meet the needs of the shelter children including letting the teacher know if a student is not making friends, and they help to get children to school on time.

The Ambassador's Club

Helping Hands in Schools encouraged a local school to create the Ambassador's program, which encourages training children in welcoming new people to the school and fosters a culture of acceptance in a high turnover atmosphere. A buddy system is set up in which students at the school are paired as mentors with students who arrive in the course of the year. The mentor, or ambassador, takes the new student on a tour of the school, introduces them to teachers and students and helps them make friends at recess and lunch time. Ambassadors may even have t-shirts indicating their role and school. Two schools in the study had the Ambassador's program in place.

Helping Hands in Schools staff meet with parents shortly after their children start in the school to talk about

what they are doing to support their children's education and what else they could be doing. They also do a presentation for mothers several times a year at the shelter called "Helping Your Child Succeed in School" which discusses the impact of being in the shelter, how to help children deal with anxieties around moving schools and dealing with the challenges of living as a family in one room. Helping Hands in Schools staff will deal with the teacher on behalf of the parent if that is needed, acting as a go-between to set up needed appointments. Several years ago, Helping Hands in Schools started a homework club at one of the schools in the study. As one teacher explained:

They would meet with those kids and do extra homework. They would speak to the teachers, what is the homework these kids need to do, and then they would do it actually here in the school.

Shelter staff also recognized the value of this program. One family shelter staff explained how Aisling's Helping Hands in Schools can help change the atmosphere of a classroom:

If you have a group of kids who are reluctant to talk about emotions, or who are angry, or appear to be angry, or if there is problems with them making friends, Aisling [Helping Hands in Schools] is really good about coming in and working with the kids in collaboration with us to address some of those emotional needs.

Shelter Liaison Workers

Shelters also sometimes have liaison workers on their own staff to work with the schools, and their presence is also welcomed by teachers. As one teacher explained:

[The shelter liaison worker] came in the school and she had activities with students where she pulled them from their classrooms and talked with them in terms of how they were coping in the classroom, they played games. She supports them to adjust.

Teachers were clear that liaison workers were key to working with homeless children, and they were sorely missed when the shelter adjusted staffing and the worker was withdrawn. One teacher described the change:

We went through a period without a liaison, and it just felt like everything was disconnected. It was very hard to communicate; whereas when you have got somebody who is in the school and the kids actually know that person, they are used to seeing them there, they are used to seeing them in school, it is a great connection.

This description resonates with the experiences of teachers at schools where there is no liaison. Reductions in liaison programs are also keenly felt at schools:

Teacher 1: It is changed how it works, it is now on as need and on call, whereas before they had specific advocates assigned to specific children. It is not as tight a connection now. They used to be very active in our school; we very rarely see them now.

Teacher 2: They used to be more high profile. We went over, we toured the shelters, this was years ago. We knew them by name.

Teacher 3: And we knew who was in charge of each of our kids. And the kids liked them.

Teacher 2: They would come to assemblies and participate like a guardian.

Teacher 3: Yeah, now we don't know a person like that now.

Bridging for Student Support

As noted earlier, parents arriving in shelters have much on their minds that can take precedence over their child's education in the short-term. In addition to a therapeutic role, liaison workers can link to the child's new school and fill the parental role while the parent is occupied with the after-effects of the crisis that precipitated the family's homelessness.

Creating a bridge between the shelter, parents, school and child on behalf of the child is a widely recognized and well-documented key to school success. The school liaison worker role, especially in the model where

the worker is assigned to the child and works from the child to other adults and institutions is a very effective tool to support the educational of homeless children. It is designed precisely to address the gaps and reduce the impacts created by the crisis of homelessness. As one school liaison worker said:
I view my job as helping the family so the kids and the parents are having the most positive experience they can at the school while living at the shelter and also trying to build some skills that the kids can take with them when they move onto another school.

In Shelters

Building Resiliency

"The concept is to kind of teach them how to be resilient, so when they move out into the community they have enough skills to survive despite what is happening. Our program is really keen on that. So a lot of life skills are taught."

Family shelter staff

At one shelter the staff talked about the concept of resiliency and building resiliency in homeless children. They adjust and create programs to meet needs as they see them. If a child is in the same clothes several days in a row, they will run a class in laundry. They have taught children to cook, as one staff explained:
I remember when I started working here I was blown away at how well these kids could cook and little kids learning to cut with knives appropriately and wearing hair nets and knowing about proper cleanliness procedures for food. We all have the food handlers certificate from Public Health so we teach all those things, a lot of kids have never experienced making their own meals, and we teach them doing their own laundry.
For this family shelter that houses women and children, one notion behind building resiliency is that when the family is back in the community, if mom can't get a task done, a child with skills has the option of simply doing it for themselves.

Training on the Impacts of Stress and Life in a Shelter

VAW shelters have been working to educate the public on the effects of domestic violence. As one VAW shelter staff explained:
We do a presentation in the colleges, we do it at conferences and it's called Planting the Seed. All we can ever do is plant seeds of understanding the information about the experience of violence. In time they will nurture it and they will grow and heal as a family. You can do lots of work with the kids, but if you don't do work as families, we don't move those kids. They come together, they go together.

Management at one shelter felt that she would like to give her shelter staff more training on the effects of stress on the children, and eventually expand this training as well to other services dealing with homeless children:
I need to find a way to train staff in general about the effects of stress in children. Other services that interact with our children sometimes don't understand the reason for the way that they are, the reason they act up, what it results from. I would really like to get training on the effects of violence on children's behaviour and how just living in the shelter effects them and stress and how it manifests.

One parent also felt that children would benefit from learning about the impacts of violence on themselves:
I'm also grateful that right now we are learning something. But if they also could also transfer this education piece to the kids. That will help them too. Things that they think that will help with the kids living like in a homeless place. What would be helpful to the kids.

In the Community

Positive Community Attitude

Given the comments of teachers and shelter workers, and the internalized stigma that homeless children feel about living in a shelter, a positive community attitude can go a long way to improving the school success of shelter children. Teachers at one school talked about how that had been accomplished in their neighbourhood:

Teacher 1: I did notice, that kids would say if something happened or if a child didn't have something, "You know, they are from the shelter, we have to be extra nice." Kids understood the difference, but it wasn't necessarily in the negative fashion. Even for trips, sometimes the odd parent would pay for them, not just for the shelter children. I have had parents say, you know, if you are short, if they can't go because of money, I will pay for the extra child.

Teacher 2: There is always – the community itself is a mixed community. So you've got parents who are reasonably affluent and parents who are hanging on to pay the rent by their fingernails. The difference between the children at the shelter and some of the others wasn't necessarily that substantial.

APPENDICES

1. Project Advisory Committee Members

Armine Yalnizyan, Director of Research, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto
Paula Carrie, Manager, Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre
Liben Gebremikael, Child and Family Therapist, Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre
Dr. Lee Ford-Jones, Pediatrician, Hospital for Sick Children
Christine Davis, Community Planner, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto
Lynda Marshall, Children's Program Supervisor, Family Residence
Leslie Jardine, Manager, Family Residence
Rhonda Roffey, Executive Director, Women's Habitat
Mary El Milosh, retired Vice Principal & Educational Consultant, Toronto District School Board
Tracy Smith-Carrier, Initial Researcher/ Policy Analyst, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (to October 2006)
Ann Decter, Report Author and Final Researcher (from January 2007)

2. Research Instruments

2.1 Focus Group Guides

2.1.1. Focus Group/Interview Guide for Children

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project. We have asked you to be here today so that we can learn more about your experiences at school. Remember that your name will not be used in our report, so no one will know that what you've told us came from you. But we must tell someone if someone is going to hurt you or if you are going to hurt yourself.

A) Child Profile

1. How old are you?
2. Where are you going to school?
3. What grade you are in?
4. How long have you lived in the shelter?
5. Did you live in the same neighbourhood or a different neighbourhood before coming here?

B) Children's Experiences at School

Now I'd like to ask you some questions about school.

1. Did you change schools when you came to the shelter?
2. If you've gone to different schools, how did it feel to leave your old school and come to a new one?
3. How are you doing with your classes?
4. Do you like the subjects?
5. Have you made any new friends at your school?
6. How do you feel about the other kids and your teachers?
7. Do you take part in any activities before or after school?
8. If someone at school asks you where you live, what do you say?
9. Are you getting any help at school?
10. If so, what kind of help?
11. What sort of help (if any) would you like to receive at school?
12. Do you ever go to the local library? How often do you go to the library?

C) Children's Experiences at the Shelter

Now I'd like to ask a couple of questions about your experiences living in the shelter.

1. How do you feel about living in the shelter?
2. What are the things you like about the shelter?
3. What are the things you dislike about the shelter?
4. Who do you talk to if you are sad or in need of some help?
5. Do your parent(s) help you with your homework? Does s/he practice reading with you?
6. Have you made any new friends in the shelter?
7. Where do you and other children play?
8. Do you ever go and play at your friends' houses (friends from school)?
9. Can you describe a typical day at the shelter for me? For example, what did you do yesterday?

E) Coping

1. What are the things you do well?
2. How do these things help you feel good about yourself?
3. How do these things help you at school?

2.1.2 Focus Group Guide for Shelter Staff

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project. We are conducting this study to better understand the experiences of homeless children and their families in Toronto. Specifically, we would like to learn more about children's experiences at school and issues that affect their school success. Please remember that all responses will remain anonymous and all identifying information will be held completely confidential, only the name of the shelter will appear in the report. The focus group / interview will take about an hour and a half and will cover four main areas; shelter demographics; children, school & the shelter; children at the shelter; and issues of homeless families.

A) Shelter Demographics

First I would like to ask you about the shelter and your work with homeless families. For the purposes of this research project, homeless families will be limited to families with children currently living in shelters only, although we acknowledge that there are many other forms of homelessness that families may face. We should spend about 15 minutes on this part of the focus group/ interview:

1. Who are the people you serve?
2. What kind of work do you do with residents and their children?
3. Has the trend of whom you are serving changed over the past few years?
4. Why are families with children accessing your shelter?
5. How many people are in your shelter today?
   a. How many are families with children?
6. Are families with children the majority or the minority in terms of your clientele?
7. Do you ever have to refer families with children to another shelter if your shelter is operating at capacity?
8. If yes, how many people a week?
   a. How many people a month?
   b. How many people a year?

9. Do you ever have to refer families to another shelter if they stayed at your shelter past the specified length of stay?
    a. If yes, how many a week?
    b. How many a month?
    c. How many a year?
10. Do the majority of homeless families accessing your shelter generally fall into the low, middle or high-income ranges?

B) Children, School & the Shelter

Now I would like to ask you some questions about the children with whom you work and school success. For the purposes of this study, school success refers not only to academic performance but also includes a child's sense of well-being and belonging at school, and the quality of their relationships with other children and teachers. We should spend about 15 minutes on this part of the focus group/ interview.

1. In your experience, what challenges do children living in the shelter face in achieving school success?
2. Does the shelter have quiet spaces available for studying?
3. Do the majority of the children at your shelter have needed school supplies?
    a. Who generally provides these, the shelter or the parents?
4. Is it difficult for the children at your shelter to get to school in terms of transportation?
5. Do the majority of children at your shelter consistently go to school? Why or why not?
6. What do students at the shelter do on days that they miss school (not due to illness)?
7. On average, how long does it take to have a child enrolled in school after they have arrived at the shelter?
8. Is there something about the procedures at the shelter or at the school that affects the speed of enrolment?
9. What do you think could increase the speed of this process?
10. Do children have access to structured programming at the shelter? (e.g. play time; access to sports; trips to the library; homework clubs; tutors, etc.)
11. If not, is there access to structured programming for children that is brokered by you through programs that are run elsewhere? Could there be?
12. Do the children at your shelter have access to tutoring, ESL classes, or translator services at the shelter?
    a. Are these services available for the parents?
13. What kinds of support/accommodations do you make for child/ren with special needs?
14. Can you describe your relationship with the teachers and administrators of the schools to which the children of your shelter attend?
15. What changes would allow the shelter and its staff to better assist children to achieve scholastic success?
16. How could the shelter bring about these changes?
17. What challenges does the shelter face in bringing about these changes?
18. Now thinking about other institutions such as schools, community and public services, government and others, what other changes are needed to support the school success of children living in the shelter?
    a. Do you have any ideas how to bring about these changes?

C) Children at the Shelter

1. What have you heard children say about their experiences living at the shelter?
2. How would you describe the relationships among the children living in the shelter?
3. Do children bring their friends to the shelter?

a. If not, why not?
4. Do the children at the shelter play together outside of family units?
   a. Where do they play?
5. What activities have you heard children say they are engaging in at the shelter that they did not engage in at their previous home?
6. What activities have you heard children say they were involved in previously that they are no longer involved in at the shelter?
7. Are food and nutrition an issue for the children of your shelter while they're in school?
   a. If yes, why?

D) Issues of homeless families

1. What barriers do you think children of homeless families face?
2. What types of behaviours do children at your shelter exhibit that may have an impact on their school performance?
   a. Do you see a pattern in these behaviours that may be explained by parts of their social identity?
3. What programs or services are available on-site to meet the emotional needs of children?
4. What programs or services are you able to refer families to off-site to meet the emotional needs of children?
5. What programs or services are available on-site to meet the physical needs of children?
6. What programs or services are you able to refer families to off-site to meet the physical needs of children?
7. What programs or services are available on-site to meet the social needs of children?
8. What programs or services are you able to refer families to off-site to meet the social needs of children?
9. What programs or services are available on-site to meet the academic/ educational needs of children?
10. What programs or services are you able to refer families to off-site to meet the academic/ educational needs of children?
11. What do you think your organization's practices and policies are that are most effective in meeting the needs of your clients?
12. What changes do you think your shelter or other shelters could/should make to better meet the needs of your clients?
13. What changes need to be made by the government to better support your shelter in meeting the needs of your clientele (specifically in relation to meeting children's academic needs)?
14. What changes were made by the government that have affected your ability to meet the academic needs of children at your shelter?

2.1.3 Focus Group/Interview Guide for Parents

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project. We are conducting this study to better understand the experiences of homeless children and their families in Toronto. Specifically, we would like to learn more about children's experiences at school and issues that affect their school success. For the purposes of this study, school success refers not only to academic performance but also includes a child's sense of well-being and belonging at school, and the quality of their relationships with other children and teachers. Please remember that all responses will remain anonymous and all identifying information will be held completely confidential. For the purposes of this research project, homeless families will be limited to families with children currently living in shelters only, although we acknowledge that there are many other forms of homelessness that families may face.

A) Parent Information

1. Please tell me about the members of your family? (children, partner, ages, and gender)
2. Are there any barriers that prevent you from reaching your educational or employment goals?
3. Are there any barriers that affect your ability to support your children's academic success?
4. What is your experience with finding affordable housing in Toronto?
5. How would you describe your support system (outside of the shelter)?

B) Children's Experiences at School

Now I'd like to ask you some questions about your children's experiences at school.

1. Are your children attending school now?
2. Do your children go to school everyday?
3. If not, why?
4. What do they do during the day if they are not at school?
5. Did they change schools when you came to the shelter?
6. If yes, have you had any problems getting your children enrolled in school?
7. How much time has your children missed when they left one school and started another?
8. How many different schools have your children attended since Kindergarten?
9. If your children have attended different schools, what have you heard them say about changing schools and going to a new school?
10. Did you notice any changes in their behaviours?
11. How do you think that changing schools has affected their emotional state?
12. How do you think this has affected their grades?
13. How do you this has affected their attitudes towards school?
14. How do you think your children are getting along with other children and teachers at school?
15. Do your hildren say they have made any new friends at his/her new school?
16. Do your children say they have made any new friends at the shelter?
17. Do friends from school (not living in the shelter) come to visit your child/ren at the shelter?
18. Have they had any problems with their schoolwork since the change?
19. Do you feel welcomed by staff, students and parents at your children's new school?
20. Do you think the school (teachers and administrators) has made an effort to accommodate your current living situation?
21. What kind of value do you place on education and school?
22. Have your children said that they have had any problems at school relating to your family's housing situation?
23. Have your child/ren ever visited a child psychologist, special education consultant or family doctor about their school performance?
24. Do your children have access to needed school supplies?
25. Do they have any problems getting to school?
26. Have you had to make any sacrifices for your children to get to school?

C) Living in the Shelter

Now, I would like to ask you a few questions about your child's experience in the shelter.

1. What do your children say about their experiences living in the shelter?
2. For example, does they appear happy, sad, or frightened?

3. Do your children have any sleeping difficulties? Are they new or long-standing?
4. Are there any health concerns that you or your children experience? If yes, are these new concerns or did your children have these before coming to the shelter?
5. Do they have a quiet, private place to study and do homework at the shelter? Did they have private places to study before coming to the shelter?
6. What type of help do you provide your children in their education?
7. Are there any activities that your children participate in at the shelter that they did not in their previous living situation?
8. Are there any activities that your children participate in your previous living situation that they no longer participate in at the shelter?
9. From your perspective as a client of this shelter, are you concerned with food and nutrition?
10. Please describe a typical day at the shelter for you.
11. Please describe what you did yesterday.
12. Do you feel more or less stress living in the shelter than in your previous living situation?

D) Supporting School Success

I'd like to ask you what changes might assist your children in achieving school success – that is, doing well in school, feeling good about themselves at school, and feeling a part of things at school.

1. Thinking about the shelter, are there changes that could be made to better support your children's school success?
2. Now thinking about the school, are there changes that could be made to better support your children's school success?
3. Are there other bigger changes that could be made to better support your children's school success that we haven't yet talked about?
4. Do you have ideas about how to bring about these changes? (E.g. like housing; social assistance; affordable housing, etc.).

E) Broader Issues

1. What do you think are the broader issues in society that have a negative impact on homeless families (families living in shelters)?

F) Coping

1. What helps you cope with your current living situation?
2. Do you think your children have adopted any of these coping strategies?
3. In your opinion, what are some things that could help your children cope better with your current living situation?
4. In your opinion, what are some things that could help your children cope better with the demands at school?
5. Is there anything else about your children's school performance that we haven't already talked about that you would like to add?
6. What are some challenges that you have faced?
7. What are some successes that you have achieved?
8. Do you feel a sense of control over your life?

2.1.4 Interview Guide for School Liaison Workers

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project. We are conducting this study to better understand the experiences of homeless children and their families in Toronto. Specifically, we would like to learn more about children's experiences at school and issues that affect their school success. All responses will remain anonymous and all identifying information will be held completely confidential, only the name of the agency will appear in the report.

A) Shelter Liaison Work

First I would like to ask you about your work:

1. How many shelters do you work with
2. How many schools do you work with
3. How many children do you generally work with at one time?
4. What is the range of their ages?
5. How would you describe the role of a shelter liaison worker?
6. What kind of work do you do with:
   a. Children?
   b. Parents?
   c. Teachers?
   d. Shelter staff?
7. Has the trend of whom you are serving changed over the past few years in any clear way?

B) Children, School & the Shelter

Now I would like to ask you some questions about the children with whom you work and school success. For the purposes of this study, school success refers not only to academic performance but also includes a child's sense of well-being and belonging at school, and the quality of their relationships with other children and teachers. We should spend about 15 minutes on this part of the focus group/ interview.

1. In your experience, what are the challenges children living in shelters face in achieving school success?
2. Do they have quiet spaces available for studying?
3. Do the majority of shelter children consistently go to school? If not, what are the obstacles?
4. At one school we visited the staff identified emotional issues as a barrier to children's learning, and said the Shelter Liaison Worker took care of those. What are the emotional issues that form a barrier to shelter children's learning?
5. What are the techniques and strategies you use to deal with those?
6. Do shelter children have access to tutoring, ESL classes, or translator services they need?
7. What kinds of support/accommodations do you make for child/ren with special needs?
8. Can you describe your relationship with the teachers and administrators of the schools you work with?
9. What changes would allow you to better assist children to achieve scholastic success?
10. How could these changes be brought about?
11. Now thinking about other institutions such as schools, community and public services, government and others, what other changes are needed to support the school success of children living in the shelter?

C) Issues of homeless families

1. What barriers do you think children of homeless families face in general?
2. What types of behaviours do shelter children exhibit that may have an impact on their school performance? Do you see a pattern in these behaviours that may be explained by parts of their social identity?
3. What programs or services can you make available on-site to meet the emotional needs of children?
4. What programs or services are available on-site to meet the physical needs of children?
5. What programs or services are available on-site to meet the social needs of children?
6. What programs or services are available on-site to meet the academic/ educational needs of children?
7. What are the most effective things you are able to do to meet the needs of your clients?
8. What changes do you think would better meet the needs of your clients?
9. What changes need to be made by the government to better support you in meeting children's academic needs?
10. Are there changes that were made by the government that have affected your ability to meet the academic needs of children at your shelter?

D) The School Liaison Program

1. Who is your employer?
2. Do you/your employer have a formal contract with the schools or the shelters you work with?
3. Do you know how your position is funded?
4. What are the goals of the Child Development Institute's School Liaison Program?
5. How many shelter liaison workers are working in the program?
6. How many shelters and schools are they serving?
7. Is there anything you would like to add?

2.1.5 Focus Group Guide for School Administrators and Teachers

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project. We are conducting this study to better understand the experiences of homeless children and their families in Toronto. Specifically, we would like to learn more about children's experiences at school and issues that affect their school success.

For the purposes of this study, school success refers not only to academic performance but also includes a child's sense of well-being and belonging at school, and the quality of their relationships with other children and teachers.

Please remember that all responses will remain anonymous and all identifying information will be held completely confidential.

A) Homeless Students

First I would like to ask some general questions about your school and homeless students, this part of the focus group should take about 10 minutes.

1. How many students attend your school this year?
2. On average, how many students in your school reside in a shelter?
3. Please tell me about your experience working with homeless children.
4. Are there particular issues or challenges that arise related to their housing situation?
5. Does your school have specific programs or practices in place to support homeless children?

B) Impact of Homelessness on School Success

Now I would like to ask you some questions about the impact of homelessness on children's school success, this part of the focus group should take about 15 minutes.

1. Do you think there is a difference between the academic success of homeless children and housed children? If so, what is the difference?
2. In your opinion, are there particular issues or challenges for homeless children that
   a. affect their academic performance?
   b. affect their participation in school activities?
3. Do homeless children experience particular challenges fitting in and making friend at school? Are there particular challenges for homeless children that affect their relationships with other children and teachers?
4. How did you discover that your students were living in a shelter?
5. Are the students (whom you teach) currently living in a shelter open to talking about their experiences in it?
   a. If yes, what have you heard homeless children say about their experience living in a shelter?
6. Are other children aware of the housing status of homeless children? How do you know this?
7. Are you aware of any stigma that homeless children may experience due to their housing situation?
8. How do you, as teachers and administrators, support homeless children's academic success?
9. How does your school support homeless children's academic success?
10. What kinds of support/accommodations do you make for homeless children with special needs?

C) Supports for School Success

I would like to ask you a few questions about changes that could improve the school success of homeless children. This part of the focus group should take about 15 minutes.

1. Does your school have any after-school programs?
   a. If so, do you know whether the majority of homeless children you teach attend these?
2. Are there any barriers, including financial ones, which homeless children may experience in participating in extra-curricular activities at school?
3. Is there funding available for school trips or events which may be financially inaccessible for homeless children?
4. Does your school have a breakfast program?
   (a) If yes, do you know whether the majority of homeless students access this program?
5. In your opinion, do homeless children have access to needed school supplies?
6. Is transportation or T.T.C. fare a barrier for children to get to school?
7. What is the availability of tutoring services for homeless children?
8. What is the availability of ESL or LEAP programming?
9. What is the availability of remedial programs?
10. Is there a social worker in your school?
    a. If yes, how often does s/he meet with children?
    b. To the best of your knowledge, does the social worker meet with children living in shelters?

D) Broader Issues

Now, let's turn our attention to the broader issues that may impact homeless children and their school success. This part of the focus group should take about 10 minutes.

1. What do you think are the broader issues in society that have a negative impact on homeless families?
   a. How do you think these could be changed?
2. Thinking about other institutions such as shelters, community and public services, government and others, what other changes are needed to support the school success of children living in shelters?
   a. Do you have any ideas about how to bring about these changes?
3. Now thinking about the school system as a whole, what system-wide changes would better support the school success of homeless children?
4. Thinking about your school, what more do you need to support children living in shelters? What kinds of professional development would be helpful for you in supporting children residing in shelters?

E) Coping

1. What are the important factors that influence a child's academic success?
   a. How do you think a child living in a shelter is able to acquire these?
2. In your opinion, what coping strategies are important for homeless children to adopt?
3. Is there anything else that you would like to add that we haven't yet talked about?

2.2 Surveys

2.2.1 Kid builders shelter demographic survey

Name of shelter: _____
Date: _____

Part I: People

1. Please describe the population that your shelter serves.

_____
_____
_____
___

2. What are the major languages spoken by the residents at your shelter?

☐ Afrikaans	☐ English	☐ Japanese	☐ Spanish
☐ Arabic	☐ Fanti	☐ Korean	☐ Swahili
☐ Bengali	☐ Farsi	☐ Malay	☐ Tamil
☐Chinese- Cantonese	☐ French	☐ Portuguese	☐ Twi
☐Chinese- Mandarin	☐ German	☐ Polish	☐ Urdu
☐ Croatian	☐ Hebrew	☐ Punjabi	☐ Vietnamese
☐ Czech	☐ Hindi	☐ Russian	☐ Zulu
☐ Dari	☐ Hungarian	☐ Serbian	☐ Other: _____
☐ Dutch	☐ Italian	☐ Somali	_____

3. Roughly, what percentage of your clients are/ have:

___ % Canadian citizens
___ % Refugees
___ % Landed immigrants
___ % Native status
___ % Other: _____
___ % No legal status
___ % Work or student visas
___ % Permanent residents

a. In regards to the newcomers to Canada at your shelter, have the majority come to Canada:
- ☐ Within the last year
- ☐ Within the past 3 years
- ☐ Within the past 5 years
- ☐ Within the past 10 years

4. What proportion of the people you serve are families with children?
_____%

5. What is the full capacity of the shelter?
_____ total # of people permitted to stay

6. How many people are at your shelter today?
_____ # people at shelter today

Part II: Physical Environment

1. a. Does each family with children have their own room or do they share?
☐ Own room ☐ Share rooms

b. If they share, how many people are in a shared room?
_____ people in a shared room

c. How many adults to a shared room?
_____ adults in a shared room

d. How many children to a shared room?
_____ children in a shared room

2. a. How many bathrooms do you have at your facility?
_____ total # of bathrooms

b. How many people share a bathroom (in terms of contributing to lateness at school)?
_____ # people for _____ bathroom(s)

3. How are you accessible for people with physical disabilities?

- ☐ Wheelchair accessible
- ☐ Barrier-free washrooms
- ☐ Designated parking
- ☐ Physical supports (i.e. safety rails in bathrooms)
- ☐ Voice synthesizer/ technical device(s)
- ☐ TTY
- ☐ Other(s): _____
- ☐ Braille
- ☐ Service dogs accommodated
- ☐ Chair lift
- ☐ Sign language for the hearing impaired
- ☐ Elevator(s)

b. How are you accessible for people with other forms of disability?

_____

4. Do children have access to computers at your shelter?
□ Yes □ No

5. a. What is your major source of funding? _____

b. What is the duration of your major source of funding?
□ Annualized
□ Core – renewable For _____ # year(s)
□ Core – fixed term For _____ # year(s)
□ Project For _____ # year(s)

c. Has your major source of funding increased, decreased or stabilized in the past 3 years (taking into account inflation & cost of living)? By how much?

_____

6. What is the role of your staff in getting children settled (enrolled and in appropriate programming) at school?

□ Walk child to school for enrolment □ Help with enrolment process
□ Attend school meetings (e.g. IPRC) □ Staff not involved in this process
□ School liaison worker attends to this □ Other: _____

b. In what ways, if any, could the enrolment process be improved?

□ More staff time funded for this process □ Funds for school liaison worker
□ Staff at school should be funded to take a more active role in this process
□ No improvements necessary □ Other: _____

Part III: Programs and Services

1. What are the major services and/or programs that your shelter provides?

□ Crisis intervention	□ Counseling	□ Children's program
□ Youth program	□ Information & referrals	□ Volunteer program
□ Advocacy for individuals	□ Case management	□ Outreach program
□ Transition support	□ Housing support	□ Support groups
□ Systemic advocacy (policy)	□ Mental health support	□ Child care program
□ Legal info & support	□ Allowance/ products	□ Settlement services
□ ESL/ language program	□ Language translation	□ Recreational programs
□ Employment service	□ Substance abuse counseling	□ Other: _____

b. Are your services and/or programs offered in languages other than English? If yes, which languages?

□ Afrikaans	□ English	□ Japanese	□ Spanish
□ Arabic	□ Fanti	□ Korean	□ Swahili
□ Bengali	□ Farsi	□ Malay	□ Tamil
□ Chinese-Cantonese	□ French	□ Portuguese	□ Twi
□ Chinese-Mandarin	□ German	□ Polish	□ Urdu
□ Croatian	□ Hebrew	□ Punjabi	□ Vietnamese
□ Czech	□ Hindi	□ Russian	□ Zulu
□ Dari	□ Hungarian	□ Serbian	Other: _____
□ Dutch	□ Italian	□ Somali	_____

c. What range of services/ programs are offered in languages other than English?
- ☐ Full range of services and/ programs
- ☐ Most services and/ programs
- ☐ A few services and/ programs

d. If your shelter cannot provide the above services and/ programs, do you provide a referral/ brokerage service to connect these residents with such services and/ programs if required?
☐ Yes ☐ No

e. What are the most commonly needed services and/ programs by residents of your shelter?
_____ _____ _____ _____

f. If a resident needs a service and/ program that you cannot provide or refer him/ her to, do they get placed on a waiting list?
☐ Yes ☐ No

Part IV: Internal Policies of Shelter

1. How long does the average family with children stay at your shelter? _____

2. Does your shelter have a specified timeline for how long families are permitted to stay?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, why? _____
If yes, what is the length of stay? _____

3. How many people a week do you estimate have to be turned away due to exceeding the specified length of stay _____ or because you are operating at capacity and cannot receive any more people _____?

4. Can children have friends and family visit them while at the shelter?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If no, why? _____

5. Do you ask families with children to leave during the day?
☐ Yes ☐ No
If yes, for how many hours are they asked to leave? _____ hours

2.2.2 Parent Questionnaire

Part I: Parent Information

1. Do you identify as:
☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Transgendered/Transsexual

2. What is your age? ____

3. What is your marital status?
   - □ Married/ Common-law
   - □ Single/ Separated/ Divorced
   - □ Other (please describe): _____

4. Who are the members of your family? (Please fill in the chart below).

Relationship to Participant (partner, child, etc.)	Age(s)	Gender(s)	Is s/he at the shelter with you? Yes or No

5. What is your ethno-racial background? _____

6. What language(s) do you speak most often with your family? _____

   a. Do you speak any other language(s) on a regular basis?
      □ No □ Yes (please specify) _____

   b. What language(s) did you first learn at home and still understand? _____

   c. Have you ever taken an English as a Second Language (ESL) course?
      □ No □ Yes

7. What is the highest level of education that you completed?
   - □ Grade School
   - □ High School
   - □ Apprenticeship/Trade Training
   - □ Attended College
   - □ Completed College
   - □ Attended University
   - □ Completed University
   - □ Attended Post-Graduate Degree program
   - □ Completed Post-Graduate Degree

   a. What is the highest level of education you have achieved in Canada?
   _____

   b. What is the highest level of education you have achieved outside of Canada?
   _____

8. Where were you born? _____

9. If you immigrated to Canada, how long have you lived here?
   - □ Less than 1 year
   - □ 1-4 years
   - □ 5-9 years
   - □ 10 years or more

10. Where was/were your child/ren born?

Child #1: _____
Child #2: _____
Child #3: _____
Child #4: _____
Child #5: _____
Child #6: _____

11. Which best describes your last main source of income (before coming to the shelter)?

- □ Employed:
  - □ Full time □ Part-time □ Seasonal/ Contract □ Self-employed
  - Is this your industry of choice? □ Yes □ No
- □ Ontario Works (OW)/ Learning Earning & Parenting (LEAP)
- □ Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)
- □ Employment Insurance (EI)
- □ Ontario Student Assistance Plan (OSAP)
- □ Workplace Safety & Insurance Board (WSIB)
- □ Child Tax Benefit
- □ Personal Needs Allowance (PNA)/ Food Allowance
- □ Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) /Old Age Security (OAS)
- □ Guaranteed Income Support (GIS)
- □ Savings
- □ Work for cash
- □ No income declared (includes refugee claimants)
- □ Other: _____

12. Which best describes your current main source of income (while at the shelter)?

- □ Employed:
  - □ Full time □ Part-time □ Seasonal/ Contract □ Self-employed
  - Is this your industry of choice? □ Yes □ No
- □ Ontario Works (OW)/ Learning Earning & Parenting (LEAP)
- □ Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)
- □ Employment Insurance (EI)
- □ Ontario Student Assistance Plan (OSAP)
- □ Workplace Safety & Insurance Board (WSIB)
- □ Child Tax Benefit
- □ Personal Needs Allowance (PNA)/ Food Allowance
- □ Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) /Old Age Security (OAS)
- □ Guaranteed Income Support (GIS)
- □ Savings
- □ Work for cash
- □ No income declared (includes refugee claimants)
- □ Other: _____

Part II: Child/ren Information

13. What is the name of your child/children's school[s]?

Child #1: _____
Child #2: _____
Child #3: _____
Child #4: _____
Child #5: _____
Child #6: _____

14. What grade is your child/ren in?

Child #1: _____
Child #2: _____
Child #3: _____
Child #4: _____
Child #5: _____
Child #6: _____

15. How long has your child/ren attended his/her current school?

Child #1	☐ Less than 6 months	☐ 6 months to 1 year	☐ 1 to 2 years	☐ More than 2 years
Child #2	☐ Less than 6 months	☐ 6 months to 1 year	☐ 1 to 2 years	☐ More than 2 years
Child #3	☐ Less than 6 months	☐ 6 months to 1 year	☐ 1 to 2 years	☐ More than 2 years
Child #4	☐ Less than 6 months	☐ 6 months to 1 year	☐ 1 to 2 years	☐ More than 2 years
Child #5	☐ Less than 6 months	☐ 6 months to 1 year	☐ 1 to 2 years	☐ More than 2 years
Child #6	☐ Less than 6 months	☐ 6 months to 1 year	☐ 1 to 2 years	☐ More than 2 years

16. How many schools has your child/children attended since Kindergarten?

Child #1: _____
Child #2: _____
Child #3: _____
Child #4: _____
Child #5: _____
Child #6: _____

17. Has your child/ren attended any daycare or preschool (crèche) programs?

Child #1	Child #2	Child #3	Child #4	Child #5	Child#6
☐ Yes	☐ Yes	☐ Yes	☐ Yes ☐ Yes	☐ Yes	
☐ No	☐ No	☐ No	☐ No	☐ No	☐ No

18. Are there any services or programs at the school that your child/ren are currently accessing? (please check all that apply):

Child #1
☐ Psychologist ☐ Social Worker ☐ Youth Worker
☐ Special Education ☐ Speech Pathologist ☐ Breakfast/ Nutrition Program
☐ English as a Second Language ☐ Remedial support ☐ Other: _____
Child #2
☐ Psychologist ☐ Social Worker ☐ Youth Worker
☐ Special Education ☐ Speech Pathologist ☐ Breakfast/ Nutrition Program
☐ English as a Second Language ☐ Remedial support ☐ Other: _____
Child #3
☐ Psychologist ☐ Social Worker ☐ Youth Worker
☐ Special Education ☐ Speech Pathologist ☐ Breakfast/ Nutrition Program
☐ English as a Second Language ☐ Remedial support ☐ Other: _____
Child #4
☐ Psychologist ☐ Social Worker ☐ Youth Worker
☐ Special Education ☐ Speech Pathologist ☐ Breakfast/ Nutrition Program
☐ English as a Second Language ☐ Remedial support ☐ Other: _____
Child #5
☐ Psychologist ☐ Social Worker ☐ Youth Worker
☐ Special Education ☐ Speech Pathologist ☐ Breakfast/ Nutrition Program
☐ English as a Second Language ☐ Remedial support ☐ Other: _____
Child #6
☐ Psychologist ☐ Social Worker ☐ Youth Worker
☐ Special Education ☐ Speech Pathologist ☐ Breakfast/ Nutrition Program
☐ English as a Second Language ☐ Remedial support ☐ Other: _____

19. Do you feel that your child/ren needs any services or programs in school such as (please check all that apply):

Child #1
☐ Psychologist ☐ Social Worker ☐ Youth Worker
☐ Special Education ☐ Speech Pathologist ☐ Breakfast/ Nutrition Program
☐ English as a Second Language ☐ Remedial support ☐ Other: _____
Child #2
☐ Psychologist ☐ Social Worker ☐ Youth Worker
☐ Special Education ☐ Speech Pathologist ☐ Breakfast/ Nutrition Program
☐ English as a Second Language ☐ Remedial support ☐ Other: _____
Child #3
☐ Psychologist ☐ Social Worker ☐ Youth Worker
☐ Special Education ☐ Speech Pathologist ☐ Breakfast/ Nutrition Program
☐ English as a Second Language ☐ Remedial support ☐ Other: _____
Child #4
☐ Psychologist ☐ Social Worker ☐ Youth Worker
☐ Special Education ☐ Speech Pathologist ☐ Breakfast/ Nutrition Program
☐ English as a Second Language ☐ Remedial support ☐ Other: _____

Child #5

□ Psychologist □ Social Worker □ Youth Worker
□ Special Education □ Speech Pathologist □ Breakfast/ Nutrition Program
□ English as a Second Language □ Remedial support □ Other: _____

Child #6

□ Psychologist □ Social Worker □ Youth Worker
□ Special Education □ Speech Pathologist □ Breakfast/ Nutrition Program
□ English as a Second Language □ Remedial support □ Other: _____

a. Is your child/ren on a waiting list for any of these programs and/ services?
□ No □ Yes → How many of your children are on a waiting list? _____

If yes, for what program(s) and/ service(s), and for how long has s/he been on the waiting list?

Program(s)/ Service(s):_____ Length of time on waiting list: _____
Program(s)/ Service(s):_____ Length of time on waiting list: _____
Program(s)/ Service(s):_____ Length of time on waiting list: _____
Program(s)/ Service(s):_____ Length of time on waiting list: _____
Program(s)/ Service(s):_____ Length of time on waiting list: _____
Program(s)/ Service(s):_____ Length of time on waiting list: _____

b. Has a teacher or school administrator approached you about having your child formally identified for a learning disability or other diagnosis affecting his/her ability to learn?
□ No □ Yes → For how many of your children? _____

i. If yes, has your child been formally identified for a learning disability or other diagnosis affecting his/her ability to learn? □ No □ Yes

ii. If yes, how many of your children have been formally identified with a learning disability or other diagnosis affecting their ability to learn? _____

20. Does your child/ren take part in before- or after-school activities at his/her school?

Child #1

□ Yes → If yes, what program(s)?_____
□ No

Child #2

□ Yes → If yes, what program(s)?_____
□ No

Child #3

□ Yes → If yes, what program(s)?_____
□ No

Child #4

□ Yes → If yes, what program(s)?_____
□ No

Child #5

□ Yes → If yes, what program(s)?_____
□ No

Child #6

□ Yes → If yes, what program(s)?_____
□ No

Part III: Living Situation

21. Is this your first time at a shelter?
☐ Yes ☐ No

a. If no, how many times have you been to a shelter? _____

22. Under what circumstances did you come to the shelter? _____
_____

23. Length of stay (so far): _____

24. How long do you anticipate you will stay? _____

25. Are you on a waiting list for subsidized (Rent Geared to Income) housing?
☐ Yes ☐ No

a. If yes, how long have you been on the waiting list?
_____

2.2.3 Ontario School Records (OSR) Review Template

1. School: _____

2. Code of student: _____

3. Grade: _____ Age: _____

4. Languages spoken: _____

5. Country of origin: _____

If not born in Canada, how long has s/he been living in Canada?

☐ 3 months or less	☐ 1 to 3 years	☐ more than 10 years
☐ 3 to 6 months	☐ 3 to 5 years	
☐ 6 to 12 months	☐ 5 to 10 years	

6. How many schools has the child attended since s/he began Kindergarten? _____

If s/he attended more than one school, what school(s) did s/he attend? How long did s/he attend this school(s)?

School: _____ School Board/ Location: _____ Period (month, year): _____
School: _____ School Board/ Location: _____ Period (month, year): _____
School: _____ School Board/ Location: _____ Period (month, year):_____
School: _____ School Board/ Location: _____ Period (month, year): _____

7. Is there a custodial issue to be aware of?
   - ☐ No
   - ☐ Yes If yes, what is the issue? _____

8. Does the OSR indicate that the child is living in a shelter? If so, how?
   - ☐ No
   - ☐ Yes If yes, how? _____

9. Is there an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for the child?
   - ☐ No
   - ☐ Yes

   If yes, what are the special needs of the child identified in the IEP? Explain.

   _____

   _____

   a. If yes, has there been a formal diagnosis?
      - ☐ No
      - ☐ Yes

      If yes, what is diagnosis of the child identified in the IEP? Explain.

      _____

   b. If yes, who diagnosed the child? _____

10. Is there any evidence that the child has visited a social worker, speech pathologist, or any other professional?
    - ☐ No
    - ☐ Yes

If yes, whom did the child visit? _____

If yes, how often did the child visit this individual? _____

11. Has the child participated in an English as a Second Language (ESL, LEAP) program?

    ☐ No ☐ Yes If yes, when:_____

12. Has the child participated in remedial programming?

    ☐ No ☐ Yes If yes, when: _____

13. Lateness

    How many times was the child late this year? How many times were they late last year?
    2006-2007 School Year # Times Late _____
    2005-2006 School Year # Times Late _____

14. Truancy

How many times was the child absent this year? How many times were they absent last year?
2006-2007 School Year # Times Absent_____
2005-2006 School Year # Times Absent_____

15. Behavioural Issues

How many times (if any) was the child suspended this year? How many times (if any) were they suspended last year?
2006-2007 School Year # Times Suspended_____
2005-2006 School Year # Times Suspended_____

16. Has the child ever been expelled from school? If yes, what was the reason?
- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes If yes, reason for expulsion: _____
_____

17. Have there been any other behavioural issues noted in the OSR not subject to suspensions or expulsions?
_____
_____

18. If the student has completed the standardized Education Quality Accountability Office (EQAO) tests, what are the child's scores in comparison to the school they attend and/ the Toronto District School Board? If yes, please complete the following chart.

Grade 3 EQAO Scores (Last two columns to be completed by Researcher)

	Subject Score (A+ to R)	Average School Score	Average TDSB Score
Language: Reading			
Language: Writing			
Language: Oral & Visual Communication			
Mathematics: Number Sense & Numeration			
Mathematics: Measurement			
Mathematics: Geometry & Spatial Sense			
Mathematics: Patterning & Algebra			
Mathematics: Data Management & Probability			

Grade 6 EQAO Scores (Last two columns to be completed by Researcher)

	Subject Score (A+ to R)	Average School Score	Average TDSB Score
Language Reading			
Language Writing			
Language Oral & Visual Communication			
Mathematics Number Sense & Numeration			
Mathematics Measurement			
Mathematics Geometry & Spatial Sense			
Mathematics Patterning & Algebra			
Mathematics Data Management & Probability			

19. What are the grades of the student over the past two years?

	Subject Grades from two years ago (2004-2005) Grade (A+ to R)	Last year's grades (2005-2006) Grade (A+ to R)
Language: Reading		
Language: Writing		
Language: Oral & Visual Communication		
Mathematics: Number Sense & Numeration		
Mathematics: Measurement		
Mathematics: Geometry & Spatial Sense		
Mathematics: Patterning & Algebra		
Mathematics: Data Management & Probability		

20. Are there any comments in the learning skills section of the report card that would be useful to note?

_____

_____

Thank you!

3. Bibliography

Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre (2003). Helping Hands at School Fact Sheet. Scarborough: ADCFC.

Almedom, A. (2005). Resilience, hardiness, sense of coherence, and posttraumatic growth: all paths leading to "light at the end of the tunnel"? Journal of Loss and Trauma, 10, 253-265.

American Psychiatric Association (1990). Homeless Families and Children: A Psychiatric Perspective. Second Interim Report by the Task Force on the Homeless Mentally Ill of the American Psychiatric Association. Retrieved 2005, from www.psych.org

Anooshian, L.J. (2005). Violence and Aggression in the Lives of Homeless Children: A Review. Aggression and Violent Behavior 10, 129-152.

Anooshian L. J. (2003). Social isolation and rejection of homeless children. Journal of Children and Poverty, 9(2), 115-134.

Bassuk, E., Buckner, J., Weinreb, L., Browne, A., Bassuk, S., Dawson, R. & Perloff, J. (1997). Homelessness in female-headed families: childhood and adult risk and protective factors. American Journal of Public Health, 87 (2), 241-248.

Begin, P., Casavant, L. Miller Chenier, N. & Dupuis, J. (1999). Homelessness. Parliamentary Library: Ottawa. Retrieved July 2007 from: http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/prb991-e.htm#COMPOSITIONtxt

Berti, L. Zylbert, S. & Rolnitzky, L. (2001, Sept.). Comparison of health status of children using a school-based health center for comprehensive care. Journal of Pediatric Health Care, 15, 244-250.

Biggar, H. (2001). Homeless Children and Education: An Evaluation of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act. Children and Youth Services Review, 23(12), 941-969.

Boivin, J. F., Roy, E., Haley, N. & Galbaud du Fort, G. (2005). The health of street youth: a Canadian perspective. Canadian Journal of Public Health, 96(6), 432-437.

Bontoft, K. (1999, November 30). The Scar on Humanity's Face: Homeless Families in Canadian Society. Report written for J. Springer, Ryerson University, Toronto, Canada.

Breen, M. (1993, April). Partners in Practice: The literacy and health project, phase two. August 1990 to October 1992. Ontario Public Health Association.

British Columbia Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services (2001). The Costs of Homelessness in British Columbia: Volume 3 Homelessness - Causes & Effects: Retrieved 2007, from: http://www.housing.gov.bc.ca/housing/homeless/vol3.htm
Buckner, J., Bassuk, E., Weinreb, F. & Brooks, M. (1999). Homelessness and its relation to the mental health and beahior of low-income school age children. Developmental Psychology, 35 (1), 246-257.

Cameron, K., Racine, Y., Offord, D. & Cairney, J. (2004). Youth at risk of homelessness in an affluent Toronto suburb. Canadian Journal of Public Health, 95(5), 352-356.

Campaign 2000 (2005). Decision Time for Canada. Let's make Poverty History. 2005 Report Card on Child Poverty in Canada. Retrieved 2005, from www.campaign2000.ca

Campaign 2000 (2003). To 2000 and Beyond: Report Card on Child Poverty in Toronto. Retrieved 2005, from www.campaign2000.ca

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (2005). Indepth: Budget 2005. Liberal-NDP budget deal. CBC News Online. Retrieved 2005, from www.cbc.ca

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (1998). Homelessness: Canada's Mean Streets. News in Review December 98. Retrieved 2005, from: www.tv.cbc.ca/newsinreview/dec98/homeless/national.htm.

Canadian Mental Health Association (n.d.). Homelessness and the seriously mentally ill. Toronto, ON: CMHA. Retrieved August 2006 from: http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/content/about_mental_illness/homelessness

Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2006, March). Household income, net worth and housing affordability in Canada. Research Highlight, Socio-economic Series, 06-003, 1-16.

Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2003). Family Homelessness: Causes and Solutions. Research Highlights. Socio-economic Series 03-006. Retrieved 2005, from: www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca

Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2002). Discussion Group on Homelessness. Spring 2002 Meeting Summary. Retrieved 2005, from: www.cmhcschl.gc.ca.

Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2001, November). A guide to developing a municipal affordable housing strategy. Research Highlight, Socio-economic Series 89, 1-4.

Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2001). Revision of 1996 and 2001 Core Housing Need Estimates. Retrieved June 2007 from: http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/corp/about/whwedo/spre/spre_005.cfm

Canadian Nursing Students' Association (2005). Position statement: health and homelessness. Retrieved June 20, 2006, from http:///www.cnsa.ca

Childcare Advocacy Association of Canada. (2007). Universality Fact Sheet. Retrieved July 2007 from: http://www.childcareadvocacy.ca/resources/factsheets/english/universality.pdf

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2004). Children and domestic violence. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information. Retrieved 2006 from http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/general/legal/statutes/domviol.htm

City of Toronto, Children's Services. (2007). Children Waiting for Subsidy by Age Group and Ward 1. Toronto: City of Toronto. Retrieved July 2007 from http://www.toronto.ca/children/dmc/wait.pdf.

City of Toronto (2006). Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children. City of Toronto: Toronto.

City of Toronto (2006). Quick facts. Toronto: City of Toronto. Retrieved June 21, 2007 from http://www.toronto.ca/housing.

City of Toronto (2006). Rental Housing in Toronto: Facts and Figures. Toronto: City of Toronto. Retrieved June 2007 from http://www.toronto.ca/housing.

City of Toronto (2005). Status of Housing and Shelter Projects. Toronto: City of Toronto.

City of Toronto (2003). The Toronto Report Card on Housing and Homelessness 2003. Toronto: City of Toronto.

City of Toronto (2003). The Toronto Report Card on Housing and Homelessness 2003. Executive Summary. Toronto: City of Toronto.

City of Toronto (2003). Preserving Child Care in Toronto: The Case for New Ontario Government Funding Revised 2003. Toronto: City of Toronto.

City of Toronto (2001). The Toronto Report Card on Housing and Homelessness 2001. Toronto: City of Toronto.

Coates, J. (2001). Models of Mental Health Intervention and Support for Homeless Children and Their Families: Approaches to Fostering Resiliency and Coping Strategies. Literature Review Funded by the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative. Human Resources Development Canada. Toronto: Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre.

Coleman, M. (1996). Home is where the hope is. Hogg Foundation for Mental Health. University of Texas, 1-15.

Committee on Community Health Services (1996). Health needs of homeless children and families. Pediatrics, 98, 789-791. Retrieved 2005, from www.pediatrics.org

Condly, S. (2006). Resilience in children: A review of literature with implications for education. Urban Education, 14 (3), 211-236.

Cooper, M. (2004). Housing affordability: a children's issue. In Hulchanski, D. & Shapcott, M (Eds.), Finding Room. Policy Options for a Canadian Rental Housing Strategy. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto.

Cowley, S. (1999). Resources revisited: salutogenesis from a lay perspective. Journal of Advanced Nursing, 29(4), 994-1004.

Cumella, S., Grattan, E. & Vostanis, P. (1998). The mental health of children in homeless families and their contact with health, education and social services. Health and Social Care in the Community, 6.

Dauvergne, M. & Johnson, H. (2001). Children witnessing family violence.

Juristat, 21 (6) (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-XPE). Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
DeForge, V. & Zehnder, S., Minick, P. & Carmon, M. (2001). Children's perceptions of homelessness. Pediatric Nursing, 27(4), 377-383.

Disabled Women's Network Ontario [DAWN] (2006). National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) Backgrounder. Retrieved August 2006, from: http://dawn.thot.net/ncbs_backgrounder.html

Disabled Women's Network Ontario [DAWN] (2003). Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) fact sheet. Retrieved June 2006, from http://dawn.thot.net/odsp5.html

Doherty, D. (2002). Health effects of family violence. Ottawa, ON: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, Health Canada

Douglass, A. (1996) Rethinking the Effects of Homelessness on Children: Resiliency and Competency. Child Welfare, 75 (6), 741-51

Duffield, Barbara (2007). Homeless Education: Law, Policy and Practise, National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. Retrieved 2007 from: www.naehcy.org.

Eddowes, E. A. (1993). Education of younger homeless children in urban settings. Education and Urban Society, 25(4), 381-393.

Edleson, J. (1999). Children's witnessing of adult domestic violence. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 14 (8), 839-870.

Ensign, J. (2003). Ethical issues in qualitative health research with homeless youths. Journal of Advanced Nursing, 43(1), 43-50.

Epstein, I. (1996). Educating street children: some cross-cultural perspectives. Comparative Education, 32 (3), 289-302.

Estrada, B. (2003, Jan.). Ectoparasitic infestations in homeless children. Seminars in Pediatric Infectious Diseases, 14, 20-24.

Falvo, N. (2003). Gimme Shelter! Homelessness and Canada's Social Housing Crisis. Toronto: The Centre for Social Justice Foundation for Research and Education.

Fantuzzo, J. & Mohr, W. (1999). Prevalence and effects of child exposure to domestic violence. Future of Children, 9 (3), 21-32.

Fierman, A., Dryer, B., Quinn, L., Shulman, S., Courtlandt, C. & Guzzo, R. (1991). Growth delay in homeless children. Pediatrics, 88(5), 918-926.

Forrest, C. (2004, April). Outcomes research on children, adolescents, and their families. Medical Care, 42(4), iii-19.

Gathenya, W. et al. (2004). A Profile of Children in Homeless Shelters in Scarborough.

Toronto: Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre.
Gibbs, J. (2001). TRIBES. A New Way of Learning and Being Together. Windsor, California: Center Source Systems.

Goering, P., Tolomiczenko, G., Sheldon, T., Boydell K. & Wasylenki, D. (2002). Characteristics of persons who are homeless for the first time. Psychiatric Services, 53 (11), 1472-1474.

Golden, A., Currie, W., Greaves, E. & Latimer, J. (1999, January). Taking responsibility for homelessness: an action plan for Toronto. Report of the Mayor's Homelessness Action Task Force, 1-291. City of Toronto.

Gordon Rouse, K., et al. (1985). Familial Environmental Factors. Fostering Resilience in Children. Bulletin, 875-99.

Government of Canada (n.a.). National Homelessness Initiative. Retrieved 2005, from www.homelessness.gc.ca.

Graham-Bermann, S. (1996). Family worries: The assessment of interpersonal anxiety in children from violent and non-violent families. Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, 25, 280-287.

Graham-Bermann, S. & Seng, J. (2005). Violence exposure and traumatic stress symptoms as additional predictors of health problems in high risk children. Journal of Pediatrics, 146 (3), 349-354.

Hart-Shegos, E. (1999). Homelessness and its Effects on Children. Family Housing Fund.

Hicks-Coolick. A., Burnside-Eaton, P. and Peters, A. (2003). Homeless Children: Needs and Services. Child and Youth Care Forum (32) 4, 197-210.

Holloway, J. (2003). Addressing the needs of homeless students. Educational Leadership, 60(4), 89-90.

Holt, D. (2006, May). Housing affordability. RBC Financial Group. Retrieved 2006, from www.rbc.com/economics

Hotton, T. (2003). Childhood aggression and exposure to violence in the home. Ottawa, ON: Ministry of Industry. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-561-MIE.

Housing Connections (2004). Annual Statistical Report. Retrieved 2005, from www.housingconnections.ca.

Huang, Chu-Yu & E. M. Menke. (2001). School-aged homeless sheltered children's stressors and coping behaviours. Journal of Paediatric Nursing, 16(2), 102-109.

Hughes, A.R. (2002). The long-term effects of witnessing parental violence: An investigation of early adult male behavior, attitudes and moral reasoning. PhD Dissertation, California School of Professional

Psychology, San Francisco, CA. Dissertation Abstracts International, 63-05B, p. 2586-2709.
Hulchanski, D. (1998, October). Homelessness in Canada: 1998 report to the United Nations. Retrieved April 2006 from http://www.tdrc.net/Report-98-10-DH.htm
Human Resources Development Canada (2006). Homeless persons. Retrieved April 2006 from http:www11.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/pls/edd/v_ report.document

Human Resources Development Canada (1999). What works for whom?: Homeless persons. Government of Canada. Retrieved June 22, 2006, from http://www11.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/pls/edd/WWFW_103010.htm

Hurtig, M. (1999). Pay the Rent or Feed the Kids. The Tragedy and Disgrace of Poverty in Canada. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc.

Hwang, S.W. (2006). Homelessness and harm reduction. Canadian Medical Association Journal, 174 (1), 50-52.

Hwang, S. (2001, January). Homelessness and health. Canadian Medical Association Journal, 164, 2, 229-233.

International Monetary Fund (2001, March). Factsheet – Social dimensions of the IMF's policy dialogue. Retrieved June 19, 2006, from http://www.imf.org/external/x10/changecss/changestyle.aspx

Iowa Department of Education (1998). Educating Homeless Children and Youth: Problems and Solutions. Prepared by the Office for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, Iowa Department of Education, Office of Educational Services for Children, Families, and Communities, Des Moines, Iowa.

Jackson, A. & P. Roberts (2001). Physical Housing Conditions and the Well-Being of Children'. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development. Retrieved 2005, from www.ccsd.ca

Jaffe, P., Baker, L. & Cunningham, A. (Eds.)(2004). Protecting Children from Domestic Violence: Strategies for Community Intervention. New York: The Guilford Press.

Jarvis, K.L. & Novaco, R.W. (2006). Postshelter adjustment of children from violent families. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 21 (8), 1045-1062.

Kalinowski, T. (2006, June 29). Toronto's school board plans drastic cuts. Toronto Star, A19.

Karr, C. & Kline, S. (2004). Homeless children: what every clinician should know. Pediatrics in Review, 25(7), 235-241.

Kelly, E. (2001). Assessment of dietary intake of preschool children living in a homeless shelter. Applied Nursing Research, 14(3), 146-154.

(Kerbow, 1996, as cited in Sandel, Sharfstein & Shaw, 1999)

Kesner, R. (2002). A Haven for the homeless. National Association of Elementary

School Principals, 20(4).
Kidd, S. & Scrimenti, K. (2004). Evaluating child and youth homelessness: the example of New Haven, Connecticut. Evaluation Review, 28(4), 325-341.

Kobasa, S.C. (1979). Stressful life events, personality, and health: an inquiry into hardiness. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37(1):1-11.
Koenen, K.C., Moffitt, T.E., Caspi, A., Taylor, A. & Purcell, S. (2003). Domestic violence is associated with environmental suppression of IQ in young children. Developmental Psychopathology, 15, 297-311.

Lapointe, L. (2004). Analysis of Evictions Under the Tenant Protection Act in the City of Toronto. Toronto City of Toronto Shelter Housing and Support Division.

Layton, J. (2000). Homelessness: The Making and Unmaking of a Crisis. Toronto: Penguin Group.

Levendosky, A.A. & Graham-Bermann, S.A. (2001). Parenting in battered women: the effects of domestic violence on women and their children. Journal of Family Violence, 16 (2), 171-192.

Lightman, E., Mitchell, A. & Herd, D. (2003). Struggling to survive: Ontario Works recipients talk about life on welfare. Social Assistance in the New Economy (S.A.N.E.), Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, 1-30.

Lundy, M. & Grossman, S. (2005). The mental health and service needs of young children exposed to domestic violence: supportive data. Families in Society, 86(1), 17-29.

Mann, M. (2006, June 19). Putting safety back into the social safety net. Law Times News, 1-2. Retrieved 2006 from http://www.lawtimesnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=628&It

Margolin, G. & Gordis, E. (2004). Children's exposure to violence in the family and community. Current Directions in Psychological Science, 13 (4), 152-155.

Marmot, M. & Wilkinson, R. (1999). Social determinants of health. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Masten, A. S., Miliotis, D., Graham-Bermann, S. A., Ramirez, M., & Neeman, J. (1993). Children in homeless families: Risks to mental health and development. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 61, 335-343.

Mawhinney-Rhoads, L. & Stahler, G. (2006, May). Educational Policy and Reform for Homeless Students: An Overview. Education & Urban Society 38 (3) 288-306.

McCain, N. & Mustard, F. (1999). Reversing the real brain drain: Early Years Study final report. Toronto: Ontario Children's Secretariat, Publications Ontario.

McCloskey, L.A., Figuerdo, A.J., & Moss, M.P. (1995). The effects of systematic family violence on children's mental health. Child Development, 66, 1239-1261.

McLean, D., Bowen, S., Drezner, K., Rowe, A., Sherman, P., Schroeder, S., Redlener, K. & Redlener, I. (2004, March). Asthma among homeless children. Arch Pediatric

Adolescent Medicine, 158, 244-249.

Meadows-Oliver, M. (2003). Mothering in public: a meta-synthesis of homeless women with children living in shelters. Journal for Specialists in Pediatric Nursing, 8(4), 130-136.

Menke, E. (1998). Mental health of homeless school-age children. The Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing. Retrieved 2005, from www.looksmartmentalhealth.com

Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (2001). Statistics Sheet: Violence Against Women Partners. Toronto.

Milan, A. & Hamm, B. (2003). Across the generations: grandparents and grandchildren. Canadian Social Trends. Statistics Canada. Catalogue No. 11-008.

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (2005). Retrieved 2005, from www.mah.gov.on.ca.

Moore, E. & Skaburskis, A. (2004, May). Canada's increasing housing affordability burdens. Housing Studies, 19(3), 395-413.

Moore, T., Andres, J. & Pepler, D. (1997). Academic correlates of exposure to family violence. Paper presentation at the Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Conference, Washington D.C.

Mosher, J., Little, M., Morrow, E., Boulding, J. & VanderPlaats, N. (2004, April). Walking on eggshells: abused women's experiences of Ontario's welfare system. Final report of research findings from the Woman and Abuse Welfare Research Project. Retrieved June 5, 2006, from http://dawn.thot.net/walking-on-eggshells.htm

Moss, K. (2004). Kids witnessing family violence. Canadian Social Trends, 73, 12-16.

Mwarigha M.S. Undated. Outline of Proposed Evidence, Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (CERA). Toronto. Retrieved April 2007 from: http://www.equalityrights.org/cera/docs/mwarigha.html

Nabors, L. & M. Weist (2002). School mental health services for homeless children. The Journal of School Health, 72(7), 269.

Nabors, L., Weist, M.D., Shugarman, R. Woeste, M.J. Mullet, E. & Rosner, L. (2004). Behavior Modification 28(4), 565-578.

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (n.a.). Homeless Education: An Introduction to the Issues. Retrieved 2005, from www.naehey.org

National Association of Elementary School Principals (2002). Educating homeless students. Here's How, 20 (4).

National Coalition for the Homeless (2001). Education of Homeless Children and Youth. NCH Fact Sheet #10. Retrieved 2005, from www.nationalhomeless.org/edchild/html

National Coalition for the Homeless (2006). McKinney-Vento Act. NCH Fact Sheet #18. Retrieved 2007, from www.nationalhomeless.org

National Council of Welfare (2004). Welfare incomes 2004. Retrieved 2006 from www.ncncnbes.net

Nilsson, L. (2004). Health promotion as school development. Scandinavian Journal of Nutrition, 48(2), 70-76.

Ng, W., O'Connor, P., Wade, K., Fleiszer, P. & Fordham, J. (2006, February). The health of Toronto's young children. Volume 1 – Setting the Context. Toronto Public Health. Retrieved June 21, 2006, from www.toronto.ca/health

Novick, R. (1998). Fostering resiliency and emotional intelligence. Ontario Early Years (2003). Making a difference: birth to 6 years. Retrieved June 20, 2006, from http://www.ontarioearlyyears.ca/oeyc/en/Library/Publications/0+to+6+years.htm

Park, J.M., Metraux, S. & Culhane, D. (2004). Childhood out-of-home placement and dynamics of public shelter utilization among young homeless adults. Children and Youth Services Review, 27, 533-546.

Penfold, S. (2005, Summer). Family violence and child mental health: mitigating the impact. BC Institute Against Family Violence, 12(1), 22-24.

Peressini, T. & McDonald, L. (2000). Urban homelessness in Canada. In Bunting, T. & Filion, P. (Eds.). Canadian Cities in Transition, 2nd Edition, Oxford University Press.

Pollack, G. (2001). Who are Canada's Homeless? The Reader's Digest Association (Canada) Ltd. Retrieved 2005, from www.hartfordhwp.com/archives/44/244.html.

Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office (2001). Personal Needs Allowance. Advocating for an Increase. Press Release. June 14 2001. Retrieved 2005, from www.ppao.gov.on.ca.

Public Health Agency of Canada (2003). What determines health? Retrieved 2006, from: http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/phdd/determinants/index.html#determinants

Public Health Agency of Canada (2006). How does literacy affect the health of Canadians? Retrieved 2006, from: http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/phdd/literacy/literacy2.html

Rafferty, Y. & Shinn, M. (1991). The impact of homelessness on children. American Pscyhologist, 46(11), 1170-1179.

Ramey, C.T. and Ramey, L. (1998). Early intervention and early experience. The American Psychologist, 53(2), 109-120.

Raphael, D. (2002). Poverty, income Inequality, and Health in Canada. Toronto: Centre for Social Justice.

Raphael, D. (Ed.) (2004). The Social Determinants of Health: Canadian Perspectives. Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press.

Reed-Victor, E. & J. H. Stronge. (2002). Homeless students and resilience: staff perspectives on individual and environmental factors. Journal of Children and Poverty, 8(2), 159-183.

Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (2004, Oct.). Policy statement: homelessness. Retrieved June 5, 2006, from http://www2.rnao.org/policy/policy.asp

Rivett, M., Howarth, E. & Harold, G. (2006). "Watching from the stairs": Towards an evidence-based practice in work with child witnesses of domestic violence. Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 11 (1), 103-125.

Roschelle, A. R. & P. Kaufman. (2004). Fitting in and fighting back: stigma management strategies among homeless kids. Symbolic Interaction, 27(1), 23-46.

Rosenheck, R. et al. (1990). Special Populations of Homeless Americans. Retrieved 2005, from www.aspe.os.dhhs.gov.

Rossman, B. B. (1998). Descartes's error and posttraumatic stress disorder: Cognition and emotion in children who are exposed to parental violence. In G. W. Holden, R. Geffner, & E. N. Jouriles (Eds.), Children exposed to marital violence (pp. 223-256). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Rubin, Ericson, San Agustin, Cleary, Allen and Cohen (1996) in Coates, J. (2001). Models of Mental Health Intervention and Support for Homeless

Rutter, M. (1999). Resilience concepts and findings: implications for family therapy. Journal of Family Therapy 21 (2), 119–144.

Sandel, M., Sharfstein, J. and Shaw, R. (1999). There's No Place Like Home: How America's Housing Crisis Threatens Our Children. San Francisco: Housing America.

Sev'er, Aysan. (2002). A feminist analysis of flight of abused women, plight of Canadian shelters: another road to homelessness. Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless, 11(4), 307-324.

Shapcott, M. (2006, May 30). Speaking notes – Bill C-13. Memorandum to the Standing Committee on Finance House of Commons. The Wellesley Institute: Toronto.

Shapcott, M. (2005, June). Streets into homes scheme has left too many people on our streets. Centre for Urban and Community Studies, University of Toronto, 1-6.

Sharma, A. (2001). Healing the wounds of domestic abuse. Violence Against Women, 7 (12), 1405-1428.

Shartal, S., Cowan, L., Khandor, E. & German, B. (2006). Failing the homeless: barriers in the Ontario Disability Support Program for homeless people with disabilities. Street Health.

Sherkin, S. (2004). Community-based Research on Immigrant Women: Contributions and Challenges. CERIS Working Paper No. 32. Toronto: Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Im-

migration and Settlement – Toronto.

Sherkin, S. (2006). Kid Builders Research Project – Phase 2: Supporting the school success of homeless children in Scarborough. Toronto: Community Social Planning Council of Toronto.

Shinn, M., and B. C. Weitzman. 1996. Homeless families are different. In Homelessness in America, ed. by J. Baumohl, pp. 109–22. Phoenix, Ariz.: Oryx Press.

Smith, J. (2003). Education and public health: natural partners in learning for life. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Step it Up. (2006). Step 5 – Create and maintain housing, non-profit childcare, training – NOW. Step it Up Campaign to End Violence Against Women. Retrieved July 2007 from: http://www.stepitupontario.ca/10-steps/step-5-create-and-maintain-housing-non-profit-childcare-training--now..html.

Sox, R. (2004). Integrative review of recent child witness to violence research. Clinical Excellence for Nurse Practitioners, 8 (2), 68-78.

St. Christopher House & Toronto City Summit Alliance (2006, May). Time for a fair deal. Report of the Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults.

Statistics Canada (2005). Shelters for abused women. The Daily (15 June). Retrieved 2005, from www.statcan.ca.

Stewart, M., Reid, G., Buckles, L., Edgar, W., Mangham, C., Tilley, N. & Jackson, S. (1999). A Study of Resiliency in Communities. Office of Alcohol, Drugs and Dependency Issues, Health Canada. Retrieved August 14, 2006, from: http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ahc-asc/pubs/drugs-drogues/resiliency-enquete/index_e.html

Strumpfer, J.W. (1995). The Strengths Perspective: Fortigenesis in Adult Life. Social Indicators Research (77) 1, 11-36.

Task Force on MISWAA (Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults). (2006). Time for a Fair Deal: Report of the Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults. Toronto: St. Christopher House and Toronto City Summit Alliance.

Taylor-Butts, A. (2005). Canada's shelters for abused women, 2003/04. Juristat, 25 (3). Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 85-002-XIE.

TD Bank Financial Group (2005, January 18). In search of well-being: are Canadians slipping down the economic ladder? TD Economics Topic Paper. Retrieved June 2006, from http://www.td.com/economics

Tesch, Renata. (1990). Qualitative Research; Analysis Types and Software Tools. Routledge

The Toronto Board of Trade (2006, January). Strong city, strong nation: update: the growing gap. 1-26.

The Toronto Board of Trade (2000, June 9). Building solutions to homelessness: a business perspective on homelessness and Toronto's housing crisis. Retrieved June 20, 2006, from http://www.ginsler.com/documents/policy00-6-9.html

Tischler, V., Khalid, K., Rustall, S., Gregory, P. & Vostanis, P. (2004). A family support service for homeless children and parents: user's perspectives and characteristics. Health and Social Care in the Community, 12(4), 327-335.

Tischler, V., Vostanis, P., Bellerby, T. & Cumella, S. (2002). Evaluation of a mental health outreach service for homeless families. Archives of Disease in Childhood, 86, 158-163.

Torquati, C. and Gamble, W. (2001). Social resources and Pyschological Adaptation of Homeless School Aged Children. Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless, (10) 4, 305-321.

Toronto Civic Panel (2005). Inclusive Cities Canada: Toronto. Community Voices, Perspectives and Priorities. Report prepared by the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, a partner of Inclusive Cities Canada: A Cross-Canada Civic Initiative.

Toronto Community Foundation (2005). Toronto's Vital Signs 2005: The City's Annual Check-Up. Toronto: Toronto Community Foundation.

Toronto Community Foundation (2004). Toronto's Vital Signs 2004: The City's Annual Check-Up. Toronto: Toronto Community Foundation.

Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (1998). Homelessness in Canada: 1998 Report to the United Nations. Retrieved April 24, 2006 from http: www.tdrc.net/Report-98-10-DH.htm.

Toronto District School Board (2002). OSR Manual. Toronto.

Toronto Public Health (2006, Feb.). The health of Toronto's young children. Volume 1- Setting the context. City of Toronto. Retrieved June 20, 2006, from http://www.toronto.ca/health

United Nations (2006, May 19). Consideration of reports submitted by states parties under Articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Thirty-sixth session. Future E/C.12/CAN/CO/5.

United States Department of Justice (2000). Safe from the start: Taking action on children exposed to violence. Washington, DC: Office of Justice Programs. Retrieved 2006 from: www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/182789.pdf

Varcoe, C. (2005, Summer). The women's health effects study. BC Institute Against Family Violence, 12(1), 18-21.

Vostanis, P. (2002). Mental health of homeless children and their families. Advances in Psychiatric Treatment, 8, 463-469.

Vostanis, P. & Cumella, S. (Eds.) (1999). Homeless Children: Problems and Needs. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Vostanis, P., Tischler, V., Cumella, S. & Bellerby, T. (2001). Mental health problems and social supports among homelesss mothers and children victims of domestic and community violence. International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 47(4), 30-40.

Vostanis, P. et al. (1998). Mental health problems of homeless children and families: longitudinal study. British Medical Journal, 316, 899-902.

Wasylenki, D. (1998, October). Psychosocial interventions: homelessness and mental illness. Canadian Psychiatric Association, 30, 5, 1-2. Retrieved June 21, 2006, from http://www.cpa-apc.org/publications/archives/bulletin/1998/oct/practice%20updates.html

Weinreb, Goldberg, Bassuk & Perloff. (2005, April). Providing Care For Immigrant, Homeless, and Migrant Children. Pediatrics 115 (4), 1095-1100.

Whitman, B.Y., Accardo, P., Boyert, M. & Kendagor, R. (1990) Homelessness and cognitive performance in children: a possible link. Social Work, 35 (6), 516-519.

Wolfe, J. (1998, Jan.). Canadian housing policy in the nineties. Housing Studies, 13(1), 121-133.

World Bank Institute (2006). Social safety nets in OECD countries. Social Safety Nets Primer Notes. World Bank, Human Development Network. Social Protection, Social Safety Nets, No. 25. Retrieved June 20, 2006, from http://www.worldbank.org/safetynets

World Bank Institute (2001). World Development Report (WDR) 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty. Retrieved June 2006 from; http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/0,,contentMDK:20194762~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:336992,00.html

Yalnizyan, A. (2007). The Rich and the Rest of Us: The Changing Face of Canada's Growing Gap. Toronto: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Yalnizyan, A. (2007). Ontario's Growing Gap: Time for Leadership. Toronto: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Yalnizyan, A. (2000). Canada's Great Divide: the Politics of the Growing Gap Between Rich and Poor in the 1990s. Toronto: Centre for Social Justice.

Yamaguchi, B., Strawser, S. & Higgins, K. (1997). Children who are homeless: Implications for Educators. Interventions in School and Clinic, 33(2), 90-97.

Yousey, Y. & Carr, M. (2005). A health care program for homeless children using health people 2010 objectives. Nursing Clinics of North America.

COMMUNITY SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL OF TORONTO

Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre