

AMERICA'S YOUNGEST OUTCASTS

ON THE GROUND: COMPREHENSIVE, FAMILY-ORIENTED CARE

Throughout the Report Card, we highlight ways that communities are addressing particular aspects of child and family homelessness. We encourage you to use these case studies to you think about how to improve children's situations in your community. For more case studies, visit www.HomelessChildrenAmerica.org.

The Homeless Families Program (HFP) at the Family Health Center in Worcester, MA provides comprehensive care for homeless families through a family practice, primary care model. They have cared for more than 2,000 homeless families since they opened in 1988. HFP offers a multifaceted medical approach, including primary care, family advocacy and case management, parent education and support, and mental health and substance abuse treatment. The use of the primary care setting as a platform for these services helps HFP families overcome many obstacles associated with access, participation, and stigma. The HFP environment effectively engages families struggling with a range of complex issues by developing a long-term treatment plan that includes all family members.

Five characteristics are critical components of HFP's programs:

1. Comprehensive
2. Flexible
3. Family-centered
4. Strengths based
5. Trauma-informed

HFP recognizes that many homeless families have been victims of violence, experiences which shape how they interact with the HFP in a profound way. As a result, HFP provides care that crosses the traditional boundaries of primary care, mental health, and substance abuse services. The team administering HFP services includes doctors, nurses, medical assistants, psychologists, family advocates, and counselors who work together with family members. The team identifies family needs and provides on-going care based on each family's unique situation. This care can include family-centered advocacy and outreach, comprehensive assessment of all family members, parent groups, mental health services, referrals, and advocacy. HFP services are provided where and when the families need them. The average newly homeless family receives from six to 12 months of intensive services as well as ongoing long-term primary health care. Behavioral health treatment, emotional support, and safe and sustaining social support are at the core of this innovative family-oriented model.