

# AMERICA'S YOUNGEST OUTCASTS



## ON THE GROUND: HOUSING FIRST

*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 help you think about how to improve children's situation in your own community. For more case studies, visit [www.HomelessChildrenAmerica.org](http://www.HomelessChildrenAmerica.org).*

Beyond Shelter was created in 1988 to respond to a growing population of homeless families in Los Angeles. Since families were not effectively served through standard practices, the agency sought to develop a more comprehensive approach to service delivery. Its Housing First program was designed as an innovative, cost-effective strategy for ending and preventing family homelessness.

The Housing First model is guided by the concept that transitioning families into permanent housing as quickly as possible, while continuing to provide supportive services, prevents recurrent homelessness. When a client enters the program, (s)he is paired with a case manager who conducts an in-depth needs assessment. The case manager and family then work collaboratively on a "Family Transition Plan" that involves identifying permanent housing and arranging for continued case management services. Families receive support for a minimum of six months and may continue to receive services as long as necessary.

Individualized treatment is an important aspect of the Housing First model. Once housed, families are introduced to their new community and its resources – shopping, transportation, and community agencies. Case managers work collaboratively with families on issues such as education, career development, money management, health, and family dynamics. This home-based case management model allows families to continue accessing needed services as they begin to stabilize and establish some independence. Each quarter, the case management team evaluates progress until the family is no longer at risk. Central to the effectiveness of the program is the concept of empowering clients to identify their own needs, understand their options, and develop strategies for permanent change in their lives.

Since its inception, the Housing First program has helped thousands homeless families transition into permanent rental housing in communities throughout Los Angeles County. The program has also been recognized nationally by organizations such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements for its innovative approach to ending and preventing family homelessness.