

AMERICA'S YOUNGEST OUTCASTS

ON THE GROUND: IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR FAMILIES BY HELPING CHILDREN



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 develop strategies for responding to these children in your community. For additional case studies, visit www.HomelessChildrenAmerica.org.

"My babies are happy. I see their spirits again. I see them as children again. Not growing up too soon." –STRong client

STRong: Strengthening Our New Generation uses a voluntary, home-based service model that engages young homeless mothers (ages 18 – 25) in a true partnership to meet the needs of children. The program results from an innovative collaboration among three local agencies, each with unique expertise. Reuben Lindh Family Services serves as the collaboration's lead agency and are experts in child development and educational services. Reuben Lindh's collaborators, St. Stephen's Human Services and Wayside House, Inc, round out the program's service capacity with expertise in housing and chemical dependency, respectively.

STRong has three primary goals:

- 1) Reduce stress in families by improving children's services, parenting skills, and housing stability;
- 2) Increase access and sustainability of permanent housing; and
- 3) Improve child outcomes, including attaining developmental milestones and addressing behavioral, emotional, psychosocial, educational and medical problems.

Consistent with the rapid re-housing approach, families are provided immediate assistance to address their permanent housing needs. At the same time, the immediate needs of children are addressed through developmentally-based interventions, linkages with appropriate services, and education and support for primary caretakers.

The mobile service team meets families wherever they are in the community. This multi-disciplinary service team includes a housing advocate, family worker, and aftercare worker, who serve as the lead in their specialty and have also been cross-trained to provide comprehensive, quality services in all areas. In addition to the STRong services, clients are able to access programs at the three partner agencies and, when appropriate, are referred to services in the broader community.

STRong families have benefitted greatly from the program. The impacts are wide-ranging, from meeting developmental milestones to improved behavior. Parents credit program activities such as parenting education and child development screening with these improvements. Mothers report that their children are more at ease, playful, and happy. In the words of one mother, "[My children are] smiling more; they actually know that they're in an environment where they can be themselves and play."