

# AMERICA'S YOUNGEST OUTCASTS

## ON THE GROUND: TRAUMA-INFORMED SERVICES FOR FAMILIES



*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](http://www.HomelessChildrenAmerica.org).*

Homelessness is an extremely traumatic experience. For many families, the stress of homelessness is compounded by past traumatic experiences, including catastrophic illness, abrupt separations, and physical or sexual abuse. Traumatic stress impacts every aspect of a person's life, including response to danger, ability to form sustaining relationships, decision-making, physical and mental health, and ability to maintain housing and employment. A "trauma-lens" provides a way to understand clients' behaviors, responses, attitudes, and emotions as a collection of survival skills developed in response to traumatic experiences. Given the extensive trauma in the lives of people experiencing homelessness, it is essential that services and programs are trauma-informed.

Sheffield Place, located in Kansas City, MO, is a transitional-living program whose mission is to "empower single mothers and their children to break out of the cycle of homelessness and poverty." They work to help families:

- 1) Increase income and education;
- 2) Achieve greater self-determination;
- 3) Obtain and retain permanent housing; and
- 4) Overcome the impact of trauma.

The framework of care for Sheffield Place's supportive services are based on evidence-based, consumer focused, trauma-informed principles. Supportive services include: strengths-based case management; independent living skill development; community linkages to employment and educational services; psychosocial assessments; primary healthcare services; mental health and psychosocial assessments; treatment planning; individual, family, and group therapy; educational groups; parenting education; substance and mental health support groups; transportation; child care for in-house services; and consumer government and decision making including board representation. Sheffield Place is the first homeless shelter in the nation to offer Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) and Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TFCBT), both evidence-based interventions.

"Trauma is very confusing for children. Having a trauma-informed environment supports them by creating a safe place to work on emotional issues and get back on track developmentally," explains Margaret Comford, Clinical Director. She continues, "This kind of environment allows adult/child relationships to blossom." Since implementing the trauma-informed care service model and trauma-specific services, Sheffield Place clients have had numerous positive outcomes, including:

- Fewer clients asked to leave due to non-compliance
- Fewer relapses
- Increased consumer cohesiveness
- Stronger parent-child relationships
- Increases in positive behavior in children.

Sheffield Place is currently working to develop a project to disseminate trauma-informed practices to other community partners.