

AMERICA'S YOUNGEST OUTCASTS



ON THE GROUND: WASHINGTON'S PLANNING EFFORTS

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 think about how to improve children's situations in your community. For more case studies, visit www.HomelessChildrenAmerica.org.

Background

In 1997, the Washington State Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling requiring the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to develop, administer, and monitor a coordinated and comprehensive plan to protect and care for homeless children. The state enacted legislation defining the roles and responsibilities of the Departments and appropriated \$25 million to implement the plan. This was the beginning of a new era of collaboration between DSHS and Washington's Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED). The two Departments worked together to create the State of Washington Homeless Families Plan and regularly update the plan.

The intent of the plan was to deliver services through new programs specifically designed for homeless families, provide shelter for families experiencing homelessness, and increase access to affordable housing and supportive services. Over the course of ten years, the plan described best practices that were used to achieve the following six goals:

1. Shelter homeless families
2. Return homeless families to stable, affordable housing
3. Enhance access to DSHS services needed by homeless families
4. Assist families likely to become homeless to maintain stable housing
5. Improve DSHS staff and contractor understanding of homelessness
6. Maintain or improve services to homeless families who have multiple barriers

Outcomes

The partnerships and directives created as a result of the State of Washington Homeless Families Plan's goals have strengthened Washington's ability to better serve homeless families with children. As a result of the plan, state agencies have better collaborated around service delivery and resource distribution, have expanded avenues of communication, and have increasingly collaborated with providers about successful best practices and research findings. Additionally, the Washington Families Fund, launched in 2005, created a reliable, long-term source of funding for supportive services to homeless children and their families. This first-in-the-nation program has been funded with \$6 million in appropriations from the state legislature, \$2 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and another \$1 million from private match resources from corporations, foundations, and individuals throughout the state. Washington Families Fund supports projects providing case management and a range of services that are tailored to address homeless families' needs.

What's Next

Building on their momentum, Washington is developing a ten-year plan at the state and county level, with the goal of reducing homelessness by 50% by 2015. The state ten-year plan includes plans to quantify the size and characteristics of individuals and families experiencing homelessness, examine the costs of homelessness, propose strategies to prevent and end homelessness in the state, and measure progress toward these goals. The strategies being implemented at this time include strategies for prevention, engagement, diversion, and re-entry; short-term emergency responses; and affordable, permanent housing plus services.