

## 2017 Annual Report

We are pleased to present this annual report on organization-wide activities in the 2017 calendar year. During this time, we helped more than a thousand New Yorkers who are either homeless or at risk of becoming so to achieve a greater degree of stability through the provision of housing services, connection to healthcare, access to job training and personal development programs, and other initiatives. Fighting homelessness, and especially tackling its root causes, is a daunting challenge. We are grateful to all those who enable us to continue this fight by supporting our work and helping us to make a difference in the lives of so many of New York's most vulnerable citizens.

### Our Organizational Background and Philosophy

The Partnership for the Homeless was founded in 1982 as a response to an alarming increase in homelessness in New York City. Initially, we facilitated public-private partnerships between the city and various religious and community-based organizations to create a network of emergency shelters where those without homes could go in their time of need. Over the years, however, our focus has changed, as we have come to recognize that homelessness is not an end problem in itself, but rather a symptom of other complex and interacting issues, such as lack of access to education and employment, poor physical and mental health and insufficient care, etc.

It is our contention that these underlying issues must be addressed in order to eradicate – rather than simply mitigate – homelessness. That's why, in contrast to many other homeless services providers, we are 'housing first,' but not 'housing only.' We recognize the central importance of permanent housing as a necessary condition to achieving long-term stability; but we also understand the urgent need to address the root causes that both precipitate and perpetuate homelessness. Research shows that, especially for families with children, homelessness is often a recurrent problem rather than a one-time episode: in fact, of all the families with children living in the NYC shelter system in December, 2015, a stunning 81% were shelter returnees who had previously gotten out of shelter only to be forced back through the revolving door of homelessness.<sup>1</sup> Our mission is to find innovative new solutions that help break this cycle.

To achieve our goal of providing not just temporary housing relief but also long-term stability, we pursue a multi-faceted strategy that includes direct service provision, advocacy work, and research (including piloting creative new initiatives for subsequent scaling up and wider adoption). In everything we do, we strive to be data-driven and responsive to the information we gather, so that we can properly address the complex needs of our clients and help them to escape homelessness permanently.

### Who We Serve

We serve families and individuals from all over New York City who are either homeless or at risk of becoming so. However, while our services are open to anyone who meets these criteria, there are several trends in our clientele that stand out:

- Our clients are overwhelmingly people of color, reflecting the fact that the shelter population in New York City is 89% POC<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.icphusa.org/new\\_york\\_city/map-dynamics-family-homelessness-new-york-city-2017/](http://www.icphusa.org/new_york_city/map-dynamics-family-homelessness-new-york-city-2017/)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/basic-facts-about-homelessness-new-york-city/>

- Our clients are primarily female – in many cases, single mothers. Families with children are now both the largest and fastest-growing subset of the NYC homeless population, and the most common family composition within that group is single mothers with multiple children.
- Many of our clients have significant physical or mental health issues, with roughly 10%-15% being HIV+ and an overwhelming majority struggling with some kind of mental health challenge (depression, anxiety, PTSD, or simply the cognitive impacts of chronic and extreme poverty)

Additionally, it should be noted that most of our clients are from economically underserved parts of eastern Brooklyn – especially Brownsville, New Lots, and East New York, where our Family Resource Center (FRC) has been providing direct services and a sense of community for a decade. In addition to having one of the highest concentrations of people who are homeless in New York City, East New York also ranks extremely high in numerous other negative indicators like food insecurity, infant mortality, violent crime, incidence of disease, lack of completed secondary education, etc.

We provide this description of our clientele because it’s important to understand the range of interacting problems our clients face. They are not simply homeless – they face a whole host of issues (related to race, gender, health, education, income, etc.) that are all interconnected and that underlie the surface problem of housing instability. Our broad understanding of these interactions allows us to address our clients’ problems holistically, and to help them find a path towards long-term stability and success that goes far beyond merely helping them find a place to live.

## Our Work, 2017

During 2017, the Partnership helped nearly 500 clients (mostly families with children, bringing the total number of individuals served to well over 1,000) achieve stability, either by helping them access or maintain permanent, stable housing or through the provision of other essential services. Support was distributed across our various programs as reflected by the chart below.

Service	Unduplicated clients* served
Housing Placement	133
Eviction Prevention	121
Family Stability	79
Workforce Development	127
HIV/AIDS Treatment	71
Education Rights for Children	87
Leadership Development	38
Women’s Support Group	30
<b>Total</b>	<b>490</b>

\*“Client” in this case can mean either a family or an individual. However, the majority of our clients are families. Thus, the total number of individuals we helped in 2017 is roughly 1,000-1,500.

## *Housing First*

Overwhelmingly, our clients initially connect with us because they need housing assistance. Losing one’s home is a crisis situation, and whether our clients are already homeless and living in shelter or are in danger of losing their homes through the eviction process, we recognize that they need support as quickly as possible. We strive to help them resolve their housing crises expeditiously and with dignity, so that they can have a stable base of operations from which to address any other issues – health, financial, etc. – they may also be confronting. This is what we mean by “housing first.”

Our housing work falls into two main categories: housing placement (connecting clients to permanent housing) and homelessness prevention (avoiding eviction). In total, these services combined to help 254 clients (mostly families containing multiple individuals) find or remain in more stable housing in 2017.

On the housing placement side, we:

- Help clients prepare realistic housing budgets
- Identify available properties that meet clients' needs
- Conduct walk-throughs of housing units to assess habitability
- Provide help with housing applications and rent and lease negotiations
- Assist clients in accessing housing subsidies and other public benefits
- Host housing workshops where clients can get questions answered and access computers to facilitate their housing searches

Once a client has been placed, we maintain regular contact to ensure that they remain stably housed. This includes providing essential mediation services should there be a conflict between our client and their landlord – particularly with respect to issues like pest infestations, lack of heat or hot water, or other habitability issues that can trigger a return to shelter if unaddressed. The NYC government estimates that 70% of renter-occupied homes in East New York have at least one maintenance defect (e.g. water leaks, inadequate heat, rats, or broken toilets),<sup>3</sup> and so it is critical that our clients have a strong advocate on their side to make sure that housing conditions are maintained.

Mediation is also a key to dealing with other issues – for example, late payments for rent or utilities – that can create tension between clients and landlords and lead to eviction. We know well that it is far easier to become homeless than it is to escape homelessness, so we provide a range of eviction prevention services to keep clients from crossing that threshold. We support clients in all phases of the eviction process – whether they're merely behind on rent, have been served eviction papers, or have already been evicted from their home. In addition to tenant-landlord mediation, these services include two other main components:

- Legal support – through partnerships with several organizations providing legal aid, we offer clinics to prepare families for negotiations with their landlords and for pending Housing Court cases. When necessary, we and our partners provide one-on-one legal assistance and representation in Housing Court.

*Carmela came to us after a history of late rent payments had finally driven her landlord to initiate eviction proceedings. We quickly filed a motion to ensure that she and her three teenage children could stay in their apartment for two months while we located another home, but were stunned when she told us, several days ahead of the deadline, that she had already been evicted. To make matters even worse, since she was now post-eviction, the court could no longer waive the extensive back fees (mostly court and legal costs) she owed in order to return to her apartment. To get her home back, Carmela needed to pay \$12,000!*

*We argued that imposing such a heavy financial burden on a very-low-income family was tantamount to making them homeless, and the court agreed – reducing the amount owed by nearly 75%. We then persuaded NYC's Human Resources Administration to split the remaining fees with us, on the grounds that minor children were involved and also that Carmela suffered from a chronic, life-threatening illness (Carmela is HIV+). Even when HRA's portion of the fees did not arrive by the landlord's appointed deadline, we still persevered, prevailing upon housing court to insist on the restoration of Carmela and her family to her home. At long last, after multiple court motions, getting HRA to break protocol and authorize payment of a portion of our client's fees, and repeatedly negotiating with a seemingly intractable landlord, Carmela and her children are back where they belong. Eviction: overruled.*

- Emergency Financial Assistance – available to clients who present with a one-time emergency need. Clients deemed to have future ability to pay expenses can request financial assistance with rent or utility arrears, security deposits, first or last month's rent, monthly rent, rental application fees, or

<sup>3 3</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/data/2015chp-bk5.pdf>

moving expenses. Last year, with the assistance of several partners, we disbursed more than \$17,000 in emergency financial assistance.

## ***Family Stability: Because Housing Is Not Enough***

Housing stability is the first essential condition for long-term success; but we know that homelessness is frequently a recurring cycle, meaning that one-time provision of housing is not enough to guarantee long-term success. Accordingly, we offer wraparound case management for all our clients, which we call ‘family stability’ (because so many of our clients are families) and which includes counseling and connection to vital services and benefits. Besides housing instability, our clients come to us with a host of other challenges – everything from substance abuse and experience with domestic violence to physical and mental health concerns. We help clients navigate these challenges before they can destabilize fragile equilibriums and trigger another housing crisis. We also assist clients in applying for, receiving, and maintaining a wide range of public benefits and subsidies that can help make their lives a little easier.

## **Good Health: A Foundation for Housing Stability**

Health is a major area of concern for many of our clients. Extensive research shows that poor health can both precipitate homelessness and be exacerbated by it;<sup>4</sup> and this is particularly true because so few with unstable housing get the treatment they need. 26% of East New York residents have no healthcare of any kind, and the number is even higher among our clients.<sup>5</sup> We offer referrals to several healthcare providers with whom we have agreements, and we also provide assistance navigating insurance applications.

In addition to more general assistance with accessing healthcare, we also specifically provide a number of services to clients who have or are at risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS. Roughly 10%-15% of our clients are HIV+, reflecting the extremely high incidence of HIV/AIDS amongst those who are homeless. We provide one-on-one counseling, a weekly discussion group centered on HIV/AIDS, and also connection to various treatment options. Through our weekly women’s group, we also provide information about how to reduce risk of infection. AIDS is the #1 cause of death in East New York, though just the tenth-most common cause in all of New York City: our interventions literally save lives by reaching clients who, in many cases, would not otherwise seek treatment.

## **Education Rights Project: Helping Kids Stay on Track During a Housing Crisis**

In part because homelessness is such a destabilizing, disruptive experience, children who experience housing instability have a much higher likelihood of recurring housing instability when they reach adulthood.<sup>6</sup> This correlation is especially important in a city where a shocking 10% of all children attending public schools spent at least one night in a homeless shelter during 2017.<sup>7</sup> To help minimize the disruption caused by housing instability in this generation and the next, our Education Rights Project provides critical educational support to clients with school-age children. We advocate that such families be placed in shelters near to their children’s schools; and, when such placement is not possible, we troubleshoot logistics like transportation and childcare to make things a little easier. We teach parents how to provide encouraging, structured study environments at home that minimize disruption, and we counsel educators on how to reduce bullying and provide for the needs of children experiencing a housing crisis. We also provide connection to after- and summer-school programs, other targeted academic programs (e.g. Head Start, programs for gifted and talented youths, etc.), and programs for students who have special needs. Finally, we are buttressing our education service provision with an advocacy campaign: in 2017, this included several meetings with representatives of New York’s Departments of Homeless Services and Education, as well as presentations at

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/HIn\\_health\\_factsheet\\_Jan10.pdf](https://www.nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/HIn_health_factsheet_Jan10.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/data/2015chp-bk5.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1615728/pdf/amjph00450-0044.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/10/nyregion/one-in-10-new-york-city-public-school-students-are-homeless.html>

City Council meetings to make sure local and state officials are doing all they can to keep children supported during periods of housing instability.

When Kristina, her husband, and their six- and ten-year-old children became homeless and had to move into shelter, they lost nearly everything. Throughout the traumatic process, however, one comforting constant remained: Kristina's children were able to stay in the school they loved, playing with their friends, and maintaining excellent grades in a high-performing elementary school in Jamaica, Queens. Though the ordeal posed many challenges, the school supported Kristina and her children, providing extra uniforms and even changing the reason for her children's absences during the PATH application and shelter placement period from "unexcused" to "family hardship" so that both children could move up to the next grade.

*Kristina initially came to us for housing assistance, and we were able to help her apply for the CityFEPS subsidy and move into a new apartment in Brownsville, Brooklyn. However, she and her family then faced another challenge. Because they now lived in eastern Brooklyn, the city's Office of Pupil Transportation said it could no longer provide busing for Kristina's children to their school in a different borough.*

Fearing the disruption a school transfer would cause in her children's education, Kristina was determined to keep her kids enrolled in the school they loved. Working with our Education Advocate, her resilience and tenacity grew. Even when multiple busing appeals were denied, she continued to press for a solution. Finally, our Education Advocate appealed to a Temporary Housing Specialist in Brooklyn's government. While he could not authorize busing, he was sympathetic to the situation and came up with a compromise solution: unlimited MetroCards during the school year. This enabled Kristina's kids to stay in their school, and they've seized the opportunity: both have made the honor roll in each of the last two marking periods!

## ***New Programs, 2017: Building Skills to Get Back on Track***

Lack of living-wage employment is one of the biggest drivers of homelessness; and while many of our clients want to find jobs that can provide the wages and benefits to permanently lift themselves out of homelessness, they often lack the soft and hard skills needed to secure these jobs. We have recently launched two groundbreaking programs that help clients acquire the skills they need to be competitive.

### **Economic Opportunity Program: Workforce Development Beyond Minimum Wage**

It's not just the inconsistent work histories and lack of post-secondary education that make it so difficult for our clients to secure and maintain stable employment and advance beyond minimum-wage jobs. These and other factors also contribute to a deeper issue of entrenched hopelessness and lack of self-efficacy that prevents many from staying engaged in the long-term goal-setting and training programming necessary to escape employment instability and minimum-wage work.

To address both the skills gap and the psychosocial struggles that make long-term career stability so difficult to achieve, we launched the Economic Opportunities Program (EOP) in 2017. Drawing on leading research and social science theory as well as our own experience with clients, EOP aims not only to set participants on a path to secure living wages and career-oriented employment, but also to help clients build the self-efficacy and confidence needed to achieve educational and employment milestones even after the program's 12-month curriculum has been completed.

EOP's core programming includes:

- Workshops on topics ranging from self-regulation and future orientation to social intelligence and interviewing techniques
- Supportive and personalized case management that helps deal with critical ancillary concerns like transportation and childcare logistics
- Connection to a professional career mentor who begins to fill the role model gap experienced by the target population

- Skills training on topics like resume and cover letter writing, job search techniques, etc.
- Connection to a network of partner organizations offering job and internship opportunities
- Ongoing support to ensure job retention after 90 days (the typical program threshold)
- An emphasis on building social capital and dismantling the negative mindsets that frequently impair long-term attachment to the labor force

In 2017, EOP operated as a pilot program aimed at formerly homeless single mothers. During this first year of operation, 70 women participated in three-month internships, followed by four weeks of workshops, job placement assistance and financial education classes. An additional 57 single moms received direct service support in the form of job placement and retention assistance. We are continuing to monitor the development of program participants and to work with them to provide ongoing support in their transition to career-track employment. We are also tracking their experiences to help inform program design as we look to scale up EOP in the years ahead.

### **Leadership Development Initiative: Creating Advocates for Self and Community**

Another way in which we are trying to build self-efficacy and other psychosocial skills in our clients is through our Leadership Development Initiative (LDI). Begun in 2016, LDI works to strengthen the communities where our clients live, even as it teaches invaluable leadership and advocacy skills and inculcates a sense of power and possibility in its participants. The twin goals of the Initiative are to build self-confidence, advocacy, and public speaking skills for participating clients, along with a sense of community engagement and civic responsibility; and to simultaneously influence the policies that shape housing conditions and other important factors in East New York and throughout New York City through a program of collective action.

LDI is centered around a six-week introductory training course that prepares formerly homeless people to understand the issues impacting their lives, research and document the problems they see, and develop advocacy actions to begin addressing these issues. Once participants have completed the introductory training cycle and built up foundational advocacy and presentation skills, they can move on to more advanced, issue-based workshops.

*Wilhelmina DuVose possessed a desire to lead; she just didn't know where to start. She felt too timid, she told us. Too passive. Most of all, she didn't fully understand the various systems of government or how they worked. She had seen first-hand how our Housing Advocates made a difference in her life and the lives of others. Now she wanted to know more about the policies that impacted her, and how she, too, could wield power as an advocate and improve her situation and that of her community.*

*When she found out about our Leadership Development Initiative during a presentation at our weekly Women's Group meeting, Wilhelmina wanted in. She enrolled and began taking classes like Public Speaking and Analyzing Political Structures. She completed the introductory workshop cycle, and then the advanced cycle, too. Along the way, LDI provided her with numerous opportunities to use her growing knowledge and confidence to speak out.*

*One year after first joining the program, Wilhelmina has presented testimony at a press conference, co-hosted a community forum along with other civic leaders, collaborated with the City Council, and even lobbied state legislators in Albany around housing policy issues. She also recently accepted a position on LDI's Steering Committee and begun connecting with advocacy opportunities outside of our program.*

*Thanks to LDI, Wilhelmina has become a powerful voice for progress. She has learned how to tap into the strengths she always had, and to fight effectively for something better – for herself, for her four young children, and for her community.*

LDI currently focuses on three primary policy issues: source of income discrimination (essentially, landlords' reluctance to rent to subsidy-holding tenants), housing affordability, and housing habitability. To impact these issues, and to hone the skills they learn in trainings, LDI members participate in a wide range of public and semi-public events, including rallies, community forums, coalition-building meetings, and even

several trips to lobby state officials in Albany. LDI also works to strengthen ties to the East New York community through open houses and other events. As an indication of the personal growth and skill-building opportunities LDI provides, several clients who have participated in the program have gone on to leadership positions in the Homeless Organizing Union, a citywide alliance we are creating in conjunction with a number of other community-based organizations.

## [New in 2018: Tackling Mental Health Challenges Through Art Therapy](#)

Whether in the form of severe illnesses such as schizophrenia, more common but still high-impact conditions like depression or generalized anxiety, PTSD brought on by previous experiences with violence or other trauma, or simply the long-term effects of chronic and extreme poverty, mental health challenges are extremely common amongst our clients. Shelters usually diagnose and refer to treatment for the most severe cases, but the vast majority of others are left undiagnosed, leaving many without access to care. More problematically, our clients themselves are typically reluctant to acknowledge mental health struggles or seek treatment because of fear of stigmatization, a sense that other issues are more important, or other causes. As a result, mental health struggles are both some of the most urgent and difficult to solve in the world of homeless service provision.

To provide short-term care to a target population that is reluctant to explicitly seek it out, and to create a bridge to more long-term, clinical treatment, we are in the process of rolling out a new program based around art therapy and cognitive behavioral science. There is a growing body of evidence confirming art therapy's effectiveness in building a wide range of skills and coping mechanisms, including increased self-esteem, greater socialization and a restoration of depleted social capital, a focus on goal-setting, resilience in the face of challenges, and overall self-efficacy.<sup>8</sup> Art therapy also offers a welcoming and non-clinical forum for our clients to receive counseling – in fact, art therapists must complete the same counseling/therapy coursework as LCSWs to become certified. Finally, we believe that a positive experience in the art therapy program can help some clients conquer their fear of stigmatization vis-à-vis mental health, and that our art therapy program can serve as a bridge to more formal care for those clients who really need it.

*“We need something like this at the shelter. Do you know how many women, mothers, need something like this? [Living in the shelter] can be tiring and stressful. I can see how some women feel like they can't make it. I think this [kind of art therapy program] would give them that extra motivation.” – Karina, workshop participant, EOP enrollee*

Beginning later in 2018, we will offer a series of six-week art therapy courses for our clients, consisting of weekly 90-minute sessions staffed by a licensed art therapist and art therapy graduate students from the nearby School of the Visual Arts. The program will be based on exploratory pilot workshops we've already conducted with clients from EOP and our women's group, and will be designed to include several positive behavioral affirmations, backed by leading research, which are trauma-informed and designed to boost self-efficacy. We will be collecting extensive data from the program both to refine it going forward and also, we hope, to eventually demonstrate the viability of our program for wider adoption by other organizations struggling to tackle the urgent challenge of providing mental health care to homeless and at-risk populations.

## [Conclusion](#)

2017 was an exciting and productive year for the Partnership, which saw us deliver a wide range of housing- and stability-related services to 490 clients, including helping more than 250 families secure or maintain housing stability through our placement and eviction prevention services. In addition to continuing to perform this core function of our work, we also witnessed the growth of new pilot programs like our

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<sup>8</sup> Griffith et al, 2015; Vick & Sexton-Radek, 2008; McLaughlin, 1990; Davis, 1997; Moxley et al, 2011

Economic Opportunities Program and Leadership Development Initiative – programs that reflect our focus on addressing the root causes that precipitate and perpetuate homelessness.

We are increasingly convinced that service provision needs to change in a fundamental way if we are to turn back the rising tide of homelessness. In general, homelessness is still viewed and combated as a standalone problem of housing, when in reality it is the symptom of larger diseases – economic inequality, structural barriers based on race, gender, or other criteria, failure of healthcare policy, etc. Even as we recognize the fundamental centrality of housing stability for our clients, we are working to create a holistic services mix that also addresses these underlying issues. It is our belief that homelessness can be not just checked, but reversed – that, with the right supports and policies, we can help at-risk families and individuals stay out of the trap in the first place.

While we still have a long way to go before reaching such a lofty goal, we are convinced we are on the right track. We thank you for reading this report on our 2017 activities, and we hope you will join us as we continue the fight in 2018 and beyond!