



Why is Bridge of Hope focused on serving homeless women and children?

Homelessness – is a condition in which individuals or families have no regular, adequate residence in which they can live safely and legally 24 hours a day and meet their basic needs with privacy and dignity. Homelessness ends when the individual or family is living in permanent affordable housing and has adequate support systems in place with which to remain stable.

(Adapted by Bridge of Hope from definitions by National Alliance to End Homelessness, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Coalition on Homelessness in Pennsylvania)

Bridge of Hope focuses on serving single women who have children and are facing homelessness. The factors outlined below are what have inspired our intentional work with these homeless families.

1. Homelessness in the U.S. impacts a large number of “hidden families.”

Traditional images of homeless people often focus largely on the “street homeless”—those living on the streets, sleeping under bridges or on park benches, begging for food, or playing music for donations. But this picture only reflects some of those who are homeless.

According to the 2012 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, 239,403 people in families were homeless on a single night in 2012. In 2011, the National Center on Family Homelessness reported that homeless families comprise roughly 1/3 of the total homeless population, and approximately 1.6 million children will experience homelessness over the course of a year. Since they are unlikely to be found living on the streets, families who are homeless often remain uncounted and unseen. They may be staying with friends or family, in a domestic violence shelter or other transitional living program, or staying in a hotel. They may also temporarily reside in a dwelling that is overcrowded or unsafe, or they may face imminent eviction with nowhere to go. These are some of the circumstances that families served by Bridge of Hope frequently experience.

2. Bridge of Hope’s program is designed specifically to meet the needs of single mothers and children – the largest group of families who are homeless.

According to the Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, 80+% of all families experiencing homelessness are headed by women. These single mothers are typically in their late 20s and have two children.

3. Women and children who experience homelessness have some vulnerabilities that are less likely to be experienced by their male counterparts.

According to The Institute for Women, the median weekly income for women working full-time in 2012 was 80.9% of what men were earning. As a result, housing costs exhaust a greater percentage of earned income for female-headed families. And for many of these families, the cost of child care actually exceeds the cost of rent.

Another significant vulnerability is that of domestic violence and abuse. Research from across the country suggests that as much as 13% to 50% of women experiencing homelessness cite domestic violence as a primary cause. Ninety-two percent of all homeless mothers report experiencing severe physical or sexual assault at some point in their lives—illustrating a strong correlation between violence and family homelessness.

SOURCES: *A Long Journey Home* (L. Prescott and others, 2008); *Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress* (2012); *The Characteristics and Needs of Families Experiencing Homelessness* (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011); *Breaking the Piggy Bank: Parents and the High Price of Child Care* (National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2006); *Fact Sheet on Homeless Families with Children* (National Coalition for the Homeless, August 2007); *The Gender Wage Gap* (The Institute for Women, 2012).