Some families on social assistance have only $1,000 per month to cover: rent, food, transportation & other expenses.

1 in 5 of all rental households in Canada spend >50% of their income on rent.

235,000 Canadians experience homelessness each year.

BETWEEN April 1, 2009 & March 31, 2010, 64,500 women sought refuge at a VAW* shelter.

IN March 2014, 841,191 people in Canada visited food banks, an increase of 25% from 2008.


Executive Summary

Beyond Housing First: A Holistic Response to Family Homelessness in Canada, part of Raising the Roof’s national Child and Family Homelessness Initiative, speaks to Housing First as a means of early intervention for families experiencing homelessness. However, while Housing First has been identified as a successful and effective approach in assisting those currently experiencing homelessness, this report aims to hold a parallel discussion of what it would mean to genuinely prevent homelessness from occurring, and how we can ensure that the systems and structures are put in place so that workers are better able to assist Housing First participants.

Homelessness is not a social concern that occurs in a vacuum, but one that intersects with multiple social concerns. This includes poverty and Canada’s declining social safety net. It is the contention of this report that by addressing the root causes of homelessness – such as affordable housing, income, food security, discrimination, and violence – we can prevent the cycle of poverty and homelessness experienced by families and eventually eliminate the need for Housing First.

In addition, the complex systems and services provided to families experiencing poverty or homelessness must be better coordinated. This includes income assistance programs, education, child welfare, and social housing, among others. It must also be noted that a lack of overall services has resulted in decreased success among Housing First ‘graduates’ and other program participants. To assist those at-risk and provide them with opportunities to escape the cycle, these services must be supported and implemented in a way that matches the unique needs of families experiencing homelessness.

To demonstrate, the report features qualitative research from interviews with both Housing First participants and workers from across the country. This in-depth analysis identifies the most common barriers and challenges faced by these two groups, and provides insight for long-term solutions.

“…by addressing the root causes of homelessness… we can prevent the cycle of poverty and homelessness experienced by families…”