Keeping Families Together and Safe

A Primer on the Child Protection–Housing Connection

Child Welfare League of America

Freddie Mac Foundation

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by Amrit Dhillon

Freddie Mac Foundation • McLean, VA

Child Welfare League of America • Washington, DC

The Child Welfare League of America is the nation's oldest and largest membership-based child welfare organization. We are committed to engaging people everywhere in promoting the well-being of children, youth, and their families, and protecting every child from harm.

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Acknowledgments

Contributing Staff

Caren Kaplan, ACSW, Director of Child and Family Protection, Child Welfare League of America, Washington, DC

Ruth White, LSW, MSSA, Director of Housing and Homelessness, Child Welfare League of America, Washington, DC

Roxana Torrico, MSW, Program Director, Youth Services, Child Welfare League of America, Washington, DC

Advisory Group

Martin Acevedo, University of Illinois Intern, Illinois Department of Children and Families, Chicago, IL

Zeinab Chahine, Deputy Commissioner, Administration for Children's Services, New York, NY

Cornell Chapelle, Chief of Program Operations, Community Partnerships for the Prevention of Homelessness, Washington, DC

John Cheney Egan, Housing Program Specialist, Illinois Department of Children and Families, Chicago, IL

Frances A. Johnson, St. Louis City Division of Family Services, Children Services, St. Louis, MO

Barbara Poppe, Executive Director, Community Shelter Board, Columbus, OH

Tanya Tull, President, Beyond Shelter, Inc., Los Angeles, CA

Introduction

Stable housing and economic stability are so often at the core of child welfare issues that it is time to take notice. It is time to recognize the relationship between child health, development, and academic achievement, and safe, secure housing. It is time to realize that a stable home reduces poverty, promotes children's educational attainment, and increases parental satisfaction, happiness, and well-being, all of which translate into clear benefits for children (Scanlon & Page-Adams, 2000). Most importantly, it is time to eliminate barriers, cross boundaries, and forge partnerships between child protection and housing services so that communities find effective, cohesive solutions to ensure the well-being of children. Children deserve it.

This primer highlights the critical influence that housing has on the protection and safety of children and provides information that practitioners from various disciplines can use to effectively achieve the common goal of ensuring children's health and well-being. It is designed to open a dialogue between the fields of housing and child protection and to provide a foundation for partnerships and resource sharing that will strengthen communities' efforts on behalf of children and families.

The evidence is clear—poverty and homelessness create unsettling conditions for families that place children at risk of a multitude of

unhealthy outcomes. According to the Urban Institute, 1.35 million children experience homelessness each year (Burt, Aron, Douglas, Valente, Lee, & Iwen, 1999). Hundreds of thousands of other children live in substandard or overcrowded conditions that place them at heightened risk of disease, serious injuries, hunger, and educational failure (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2003).

Not surprisingly, many of these children and their parents come to the attention of the child welfare system. Inadequate housing is a major factor contributing to the placement and retention of children in foster care (Jones, 1998). It is clear that attention to a family's housing needs can prevent the need to place children in foster care. When families' needs for housing assistance are identified and housing resources are provided at the front end of the child welfare system, that is, when families are first determined to be at risk, child abuse and neglect may be prevented and the need for foster care avoided.

So what needs to be done to address families' housing needs and protect children?

It is important to acknowledge that no one system can or should be expected to bear sole responsibility for our children's well-being. Communities must join together to ensure that families' needs for services are met. Key community members include public and private child welfare agencies, local housing authorities, youth, family and domestic violence shelters, youth development agencies, local businesses, community coalitions, volunteers, legislators, faith-based organizations, civic groups, foundations, and health care providers. When these community members draw on the support, expertise, resources, and tools of one another, families and children benefit. The options available to families greatly expand. As one researcher has noted, "The absence of an effective partnership between all those involved in formal and informal child protection not only diminishes the potential impacts but also leaves many children, particularly those in resource-poor communities, with few viable options to mandatory child protection" (Daro, 2003).

The connection between child protection and housing begins with an understanding of the basics of each system on its own. This primer presents information on both systems to foster mutual understanding between child welfare and housing professionals and to create a common foundation for collaboration.

Child Protective Services Systems

A Summary

In 2003, 2.9 million reports of child abuse and neglect were made in the United States. Over 906,000 of these reports were substantiated, that is, it was determined that the child had been maltreated. More than 60% of these child victims experienced neglect, almost 20% were physically abused, 10% were sexually abused, and 5% were emotionally maltreated (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). The criminal justice system has primary responsibility for prosecuting these offenses, while child protective services systems have the primary responsibility for addressing and remediating the effects of abuse and neglect on children and families and taking steps to ensure the safety and protection of children. Child safety is and should always be the first goal of child protective services (CPS) professionals.

Definitions

Federal and state laws define the types of child abuse and neglect that must be reported to authorities. These definitions vary from state to state. *Abuse and neglect*, as defined by the Child Abuse Protection and Treatment Act (CAPTA), is "any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation; an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm" (Title I, Sec. III).

Taken separately, *physical abuse* is physical acts by parents or other caregivers that cause, or could have caused, physical injury to the child. *Sexual abuse* is sexual activity by a parent or other caregiver with a child, including but not limited to, any kind of sexual contact through persuasion, physical force, or other coercive means; exploitation through sexual activity that is allowed, encouraged, or coerced; and child prostitution or pornography. *Neglect* is the failure to provide for a child's basic needs, including failure to meet a child's physical needs (such as failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision); medical needs (such as failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment); educational needs (such as failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs); and emotional needs (such as inattention to a child's emotional well-being, failure to provide needed psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs). The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA, 1999) expands on this definition by stating that *neglect* is "the failure of parents or other caregivers, *for reasons not solely due to poverty,* to provide the child with needed age-appropriate care, including food, clothing, shelter, protection from harm, supervision appropriate to the child's development, hygiene, education, and medical care."

Neglect also includes "deprivation of adequate shelter." Inadequate shelter includes the periodic or continuing failure to provide appropriate heat, sanitation, and sleeping arrangements and the failure to protect children from weather and/or environmental hazards in the dwelling and on the property that have potential for causing injury, illness, and/or disease (Minnesota Blue Earth County, 2005). Because the legal definition of neglect includes failure to provide adequate shelter, there is a clear connection between housing and child protection.

Values

The work of CPS professionals is guided by values and principles. Agencies may express these values and principles somewhat differently, but

the concepts remain the same. Ten key values and principles provide the foundation for child protective services.

- The most desirable place for children to grow up is with their own families.
- Most parents strive to be good parents, and the majority of parents who experience difficulty can be helped with appropriate services.
- Every child has a right to adequate care and supervision and to be free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation.
- Every child's family, however his or her family is defined, is unique and has value, worth, and integrity.
- When parents cannot or will not fulfill their protective responsibilities for their child, the community has the right and obligation to intervene directly on the child's behalf.
- Effective services are family driven, culturally responsive and community based. Services and supports for families recognize the strengths of the family unit and its individual members and embrace ways in which family assets can be enhanced.
- Families are involved in the planning of all the services they will receive.
- Services are provided with recognition of each family's unique gifts and challenges.
- The family chooses the people they want to help with their service plan, such as their minister, other family members, and neighbors.
- All services systems work together on behalf of the child's best interests. (Child Welfare League of America, 1999)

Legislation

The laws and policies of federal, state, and local governments direct the way in which child protective services are provided. Although some variation exists among states, the general framework for child protection is fairly uniform. Three federal laws are of particular importance: the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, and the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA).

Since 1974, CAPTA has been part of the federal government's effort to help states and communities improve the prevention, reporting, assessment, investigation, and treatment of child abuse and neglect. CAPTA is the foundation for public policy that directs social services to be provided to parents so that they can ultimately protect and effectively care for their children. CAPTA-funded programs support innovations in state child protective services and community-based child abuse and neglect prevention services, as well as research, training, data collection, and program evaluation. CAPTA provides definitions of the types of child abuse and neglect that are reportable to CPS. It also requires that certain professionals who in the course of their professional responsibilities have regular access to and/or contact with children report any suspected child abuse and neglect. The types of individuals who are mandated to report suspected child maltreatment include health care workers, school personnel, day care providers, social workers, law enforcement officers, and mental health professionals (National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect, 2002). Mandated reporters also include professionals who work in the field of housing and homelessness.

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 set federal standards for the provision of foster care services. Amended by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA), the law now places greater emphasis on the safety of and permanency for children. ASFA promotes timeliness in achieving permanency for children by regulating the length of time that children may remain in foster care before adoption becomes the goal. Its provisions require that children do not linger in

foster care but rather, be reunified with their birthfamilies or move on to adoption (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). The law further provides federal funding for a range of services, including family preservation and support services and time-limited family reunification services.

These federal laws reinforce several key principles: child safety must guide all child welfare services; children should not grow up in foster care; efforts to ensure permanency should begin as soon as a child enters care; and the child welfare system must focus on results and accountability.

Organization of Child Protective Services

CPS is responsible for responding to reports of suspected child abuse and neglect, determining whether maltreatment has occurred, and deciding whether children can remain safely with their families or must be removed and placed outside the home, with kin or unrelated caregivers.

Structure and Programmatic Services

Child protection agencies may be administered by a state or county. They operate alongside other government programs as well as grassroots and community programs to address the welfare of children and the myriad issues often intertwined in child welfare cases. They also work with other systems, such as mental health, domestic violence, and substance abuse treatment, as well as the juvenile courts.

Child protection agencies provide services to children and families that range from responding to a report of suspected abuse and/or neglect to putting into place a comprehensive service plan that addresses the needs of the child and the family (e.g., medical care, housing, parental drug treatment, and/or a placement of the child outside of the home). The primary services that CPS systems provide are screening reports/intake, initial response/assessment and/or investigation, case planning, intervention/service delivery, and evaluation of progress (CWLA, 1999).

Screening Reports/Intake

The first step that CPS takes in its work with children and families is the screening of the initial report of child abuse and neglect. Screening involves an assessment of the nature of the report, an evaluation of the credibility of the report, and an explanation of the agency's responsibility and services to the reporter. The reporter is given the opportunity to explain his/her concerns and why a response from the agency is warranted. CPS decides whether to accept the report and conduct an investigation or assessment (if it does not accept the report, CPS may offer another alternative, such as a referral to voluntary services), and informs the reporter of its decision and its reasons regarding acceptance or nonacceptance of the report. CPS agencies are expected to respond to reports of child abuse and neglect 24 hours a day.

Initial Response/Assessment and/or Investigation

After the CPS agency has accepted the report and assigned the case to a caseworker or social worker, the focus is on the safety of the child and whether the event(s) that transpired constitutes child abuse and/or neglect as defined by state law. The social worker conducts a comprehensive investigation or assessment to determine the child's safety and the risk of future harm to the child.

The assessment process typically includes interviews with the reporting source, the child, the child's sibling(s), parents (custodial and/or noncustodial), and the person suspected of abuse or neglect. The social worker gathers information from individuals who are familiar with the family and who may have information about the alleged child maltreatment, such as neighbors, teachers, and other family members. The social worker also observes the home, neighborhood, environment, and interactions among family members. When law enforcement officers are involved, they gather physical evidence related to the alleged maltreatment. The social worker uses the information to assess child and family safety and risks and then makes the decision whether there is sufficient evidence to substantiate the allegation of child abuse and neglect.

If the report is substantiated, the social worker then decides whether the child can remain safely with his or her parents in the home. Nearly one-half of the states use programs that provide an alternative response (also known as differential response) to the investigation of reports of child abuse and neglect. Recognizing that one approach does not meet the needs of every family, these programs use more than one method of responding to reports of suspected abuse or neglect. Services, for example, may be provided to families without a formal determination of abuse or neglect and without labeling someone as a perpetrator and listing them in the state's central child abuse registry. This approach minimizes the stigma of being reported to CPS.

Case Planning

When the decision is made that a child can remain safely at home and the family is in need of services, CPS agencies refer the child and family to community resources and/or provide in-home services to them. When families receive in-home services, a social worker develops a case plan with the family in which service and resource needs, such as housing assistance, are identified. In these cases, the social worker develops a written case plan with the family and other service providers to build on the family's strengths and address the family's service needs and the problems that placed the child at risk of harm. The case plan outlines the specific steps that each of the involved individuals, such as the parents and the social worker, must take to ensure the safety of the child and reduce the risk of future child abuse and neglect.

When the decision is made that the child cannot remain safely in the home, the social worker files a dependency petition with the juvenile court that gives the agency legal custody of the child. The child then may be placed with a relative or with an unrelated foster family. The case planning process, comparable to the one described above, applies to these families whose children have been separated from their parents and placed with a relative or with an unrelated foster family.

Intervention/Service Delivery

After the case plan has been developed for the family (whether the child remains with the family or has been placed in care), the social worker ensures that the identified services are made available to the family. The social worker and any community agencies that are serving the family regularly assess the family's progress and work with them to refine the case plan and services as needed.

Evaluation of Progress

Following the provision of services, the CPS agency evaluates the family's progress, and, in cases in which the child has been removed from the family, decides whether the child can safely return home. This assessment is made periodically throughout the family's involvement with the child welfare agency. The social worker will likely be involved with the court, court appointed special advocate (CASA) or guardian ad litem (GAL), other service providers, family members, and others in making this assessment. Although the CPS social worker is not the final arbiter, he or she will have a significant level of influence on the decisions that are made regarding the outcomes for children and their families.

CPS Staff

Although the staff of CPS agencies may vary considerably from state to state, there are three primary staff positions. *Frontline workers,* most often called *caseworkers* and *social workers*, as described above, have direct contact with children and families. Different caseworkers may assume responsibility for the family at different points in the CPS process—at intake, during the investigation, for service planning, and for service implementation.

Supervisors oversee the work of the frontline staff. Their role is to support, assist, inform, and instruct caseworkers. Supervisors promote the growth and development of caseworkers and ensure that administrative and legal responsibilities as well as performance standards are met (CWLA, 1999). Most importantly, supervisors ensure that positive

outcomes for children and families are achieved through the delivery of competent, responsive, and timely services that are strength-based and culturally competent (CWLA, 1999). Supervisors should be proficient in the core competencies expected of child welfare workers under their supervision, as well as in supervisory competencies necessary to support workers.

The CPS *administrator* provides leadership and models effective work with agency staff, members of the community, and others. The administrator upholds the mission of the organization, satisfies legal mandates, and assures delivery of quality services. The administrator also assures the fiscal responsibility of the agency, acts as a liaison with other child welfare professionals, and ensures that the CPS program is based on current research and practice wisdom (CWLA, 1999).

Housing Services Systems

A Summary

Large numbers of children in the United States live in poverty and/or are homeless. In 2002, 11.6 million children (20% of the total child population) in this country were living in poverty (United States Census Bureau, 2004). At 40% and rising, families with children are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. homeless population (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2002).

Homelessness and inadequate housing present critical issues that impact the well-being of children and families. The focus of this primer is on families whose homelessness or inadequate housing jeopardizes the safety and well-being of their children.

Definitions

As provided in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) states that an individual is *homeless* if he or she "lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." The law goes on to clarify that an individual is considered homeless if the primary nighttime residence is a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter that is designed to provide temporary living accommodations (such as welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill); an in-

stitution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or a public or private place that is not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

The U.S. Department of Education (2004) further makes clear that children and youth are considered homeless if they are living in a variety of conditions, such as sharing the housing of others because of a loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds because they do not have alternative adequate accommodations; living in emergency or transitional shelters; abandoned in hospitals; awaiting foster care placement; living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; or considered to be migratory children.

In addition to the high number of homeless families in the United States, more than 14 million families struggle to afford the housing they have and, as a result, are at risk of homelessness (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD], 2003). These families most often are unassisted renters who have very low incomes (below 50% of area median income), and who pay more than half their income for housing, leaving little in reserve for other basic necessities, or who live in severely substandard housing (HUD, 2003). *Substandard housing* is defined as living arrangements that lack appropriate heat, sanitation, and sleeping conditions and as property that contains environmental hazards such as broken windows or glass, lead-based paint, or animal or human waste/feces (United States Census Bureau & U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2003).

Values

Housing professionals adhere to values and principles that are similar to those that guide child welfare professionals. Nine guiding principles direct the work of housing professionals.

- Housing is a basic human need, and all people have a right to safe, decent, affordable, and permanent housing.

- All people are valuable and capable of being residents and valuable community members.
- Housing and services should be integrated to enhance the social and economic well-being of residents and to build healthy communities.
- Residents, owners, property managers, and service providers should work as a team in integrated housing and services initiatives.
- Programs should be based on assessment of resident's and community's strengths and needs, supported by ongoing monitoring and evaluation.
- Programs should strengthen and expand resident participation to improve the community's capacity to create change.
- Residents' participation in programs should be voluntary, with an emphasis on outreach to the most vulnerable.
- Assessment, intervention, and evaluation should be multilevel, focusing on individual residents, groups, and the community.
- Services should maximize the use of existing resources, avoid duplication, and expand the economic, social, and political resources available to residents. (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2004)

Legislation

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 is the main federal funding source for services to homeless families. McKinney-Vento establishes the Continuum of Care (CoC) Program, which includes a range of programs designed to meet different types of housing needs: the Emergency Food and Shelter Program, Emergency Shelter Grants,

the Shelter Plus Care Program, and the Single Room Occupancy (SRO) program. The law also extends the Veterans Job Training Act and provides Food Stamp Program benefits to homeless individuals.

In response to the act's focus on CoC programs, communities across the country have developed a range of efforts to better coordinate services for families and individuals who are homeless. Communities have established service networks that include representatives from traditional homeless services (such as shelters and other housing programs), mental health and substance abuse service providers, and, in some cases, representatives from the local child welfare agency. These programs administer rental assistance and homeless prevention funding that are also available through McKinney-Vento. Most communities have designated a single agency to administer these funds.

Organization of Housing Services

Structure and Programmatic Services

Seven housing options are generally available for homeless families. Each option offers benefits for children and their families. Two options—emergency shelters and transitional housing—involve only temporary housing. The remaining five options—the Housing Choice Voucher Program, the Family Unification Program, public housing, the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program, and service-enriched housing—offer permanent housing for children and families.

Temporary Housing Options

Emergency shelters are short-term facilities that provide a place for individuals and families to stay, eat, and sleep. The length of stay and type of resident sheltered vary by facility. Shelters are designed to serve a specific group, serving only men, women, or families, although in some communities, the family shelter may only serve female heads of households and their children (and may restrict the age of male children they will admit). Shelter staff often refer individuals and families to affordable

housing, employment, and medical and mental health care. Most family shelters, including domestic violence shelters, are staffed and open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Transitional housing provides longer-term temporary housing. Transitional programs often serve a particular population (e.g., men, women, or families). Often, these programs are available only for individuals and families referred from emergency shelters. Most programs offer onsite services, such as job training, education, and mental health services or make referrals to community services. Transitional housing is not viewed as an appropriate long-term alternative for families who are homeless.

Permanent Housing Options

The Housing Choice Voucher Program, more commonly known as "Section 8," is the largest and most effective federal program for assisting low-income families. The program offers families subsidies to help them obtain decent, safe, and affordable housing in the private market. Families apply through their local public housing authority. Although some public housing authorities have short waiting lists, others have waiting lists of months or even years, and some waiting lists are closed. When individuals and families qualify for this program, they receive a voucher that they may use to rent an apartment from any landlord willing to accept the voucher.

The Family Unification Program (FUP) provides housing vouchers for families who face the immediate prospect of their children being placed into foster care as a result of the family's housing problems or who are not able to reunify with their children in care because of housing problems. The vouchers provide families with subsidies that assist them in renting safe, affordable housing in the private housing market. FUP vouchers are available only in areas where the public housing authority and the local child welfare agency have agreed to work together to implement the program.

Public housing is a program administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development through local public housing authori-

ties (PHAs). Public housing offers rental housing for eligible low-income families and may take a variety of forms, including single family houses and high-rise apartments.

The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program is a federal program that provides privately administered subsidized housing. This program creates incentives for housing developers through access to credits to create equity capital for the construction and rehabilitation of affordable rental housing. Families can receive subsidized rent in tax credit properties because of these arrangements.

Service-enriched housing offers affordable rental housing, with or without a subsidy, and linkage to services. Services may be provided by the company that owns or manages the housing program, a community-based agency, the local child welfare system, or agencies based within the housing program or in the community. At a minimum, the services that are provided include crisis intervention, case management, and monitoring, as well as referrals to other services.

Housing Program Staff

Key housing program staff include outreach workers, shelter workers, supervisors, and administrators.

Outreach workers make contact with homeless individuals and families, serve as a resource for them, and make referrals to other systems. Working at all hours of the day, outreach workers travel throughout the community, seeking out individuals and families who are homeless.

Shelter workers work with individuals and families in shelter settings. Typically, shelter workers conduct intake interviews with new residents, help them settle into the shelter environment, and oversee the day-to-day operations of the shelter, including enforcing shelter rules. In some shelters, staff also include case managers or social workers who provide services or make referrals to services.

In addition, as in the child protective services system, *supervisors* and *administrators* oversee the work of shelter workers, case managers and social workers.

Supervisors promote growth on the job, ensure that administrative and legal responsibilities are met, determine that performance standards are met and, most importantly, seek to achieve positive outcomes for children and families through the delivery of competent, responsive, and timely services (CWLA, 1999). Supervisors should be proficient in the core competencies expected of shelter workers under their supervision, as well as in supervisory competencies necessary to support workers.

Finally, the *administrator* works to provide leadership and a model for working with staff, service providers, clients, and the community. The administrator must uphold the mission of the organization as well as legal mandates. In addition, the administrator must ensure the fiscal responsibility of the agency, act as a liaison and communicator with other housing professionals so the program continues to be based on current research and practice wisdom, and assure the delivery of quality services (CWLA, 1999).

The shared tasks and commonalties between child protection and housing professionals are beneficial to the cohesiveness of the partnership between the staff of both systems. Understanding that the two systems share a similar internal personnel structure helps to eliminate confusion and creates a common ground that will help foster positive working relationships.

CHAPTER 3

The Correlation Between Housing and the Well-Being of Children

A significant correlation exists between homelessness and inadequate housing and child protection. According to the Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996a), close to half (47%) of children with demonstrable harm from abuse or neglect and almost all (95.9%) of endangered children came from families whose income was less than $15,000 a year. Data from this study indicate that physical neglect is most clearly associated with poverty. Homelessness, inadequate housing, and physical hazards in available housing are problems attendant to poverty.

These numbers do not, however, paint the whole picture. The exact number of children who are referred to CPS because of homelessness or substandard housing is not known. Three separate studies, however, have shown that as many as 30% of the children in foster care could be reunited with their parents if safe, affordable housing were available for their families (Dorre & Mihaly, 1996). Courtney, McMurtry, and Zinn (2004) found that significant percentages of families whose children were in out-of-home care reported an eviction (26%), living in a doubled-up situation (42%), or having experienced homelessness (29%).

Not only are homelessness and inadequate housing major contributing factors to the placement and retention of children in foster care

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1997), foster care placement itself is associated with later homelessness. According to the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients, 27% of homeless clients had lived in foster care, a group home, or other institutional setting for part of their childhood (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996b). This percentage is believed to underestimate the number of clients with foster care histories, based on research on this issue. One study, for example, showed that 60% of homeless single mothers grew up in the foster care system (Committee on Temporary Shelter, 2004).

Homelessness and inadequate housing negatively affect children and families in the short and long term. These situations contribute to health, education, and social problems for both children and families. Homeless children suffer four times as many respiratory infections, five times as many stomach and diarrheal infections, six times as many speech and stammering problems, and four times the rate of asthma as nonhomeless children. Homeless children are four times more likely to experience delayed development, and are in special education programs at a rate three times higher than nonhomeless children. Homeless children are also suspended from school twice as often as nonhomeless children and attend an average of two different schools in a single year (Committee on Temporary Shelter, 2004).

Like homelessness, child abuse and neglect can be devastating to a child. A growing body of evidence suggests that abuse and neglect inhibit a child's healthy psychological, emotional, cognitive, and social development and can impair adult functioning (Gaudin, 1999). Children who have been abused and/or neglected are more likely to perform poorly in school, engage in criminal behavior, experience emotional and sexual problems, and abuse alcohol and other substances (Widom, 2000). The negative effects of abuse and neglect can be reversed, but timely identification of the maltreatment and appropriate intervention are necessary to promote positive outcomes for children (Wolfe & Brandt, 1998). When families have safe, decent, and afford-

able housing, there is greater stability in their lives and that stability can provide a foundation for successful outcomes.

Housing and CPS are intertwined systems that can play a significant role in promoting the well-being of children and families. As partners, both systems are essential in keeping children and families together and safe.

CHAPTER 4

Child Protection and Housing

The Critical Need to Work Together

As individual service systems, child protection and housing can each make a powerful case for stronger supports for families and children and changes at the systems level to protect children and strengthen families. Given the close relationship between housing/homelessness and child protection, it is imperative that advocates join forces to better serve children and families.

The lack of collaboration between child protection and housing/homelessness services hinders progress in both systems. Perhaps even more importantly, in the absence of collaboration, each year thousands of children are separated or at risk of separation from their families due to critical housing needs, creating the need for additional services and raising new challenges in both child protection and housing. Collaborative efforts between child protection and housing/homelessness should not focus on short-term, Band-Aid solutions but, instead, should take the form of mutual investments in problem solving to address the underlying issues, increasing opportunities for effective prevention and intervention. For example, a national study of CPS systems and reform efforts showed that collaborations among child welfare agencies and mental health, alcohol and other drug, domestic violence, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs have demonstrated

benefits for children and families as well as service providers (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003).

Collaborations between child protection and housing can and are being undertaken across the country. Challenges to these collaborations however, will always exist. Fragmented funding, insufficient staff training, fear of change, distrust, territoriality, and reluctance to share information across systems can make progress difficult. These obstacles must be explored and addressed so that child protection and housing can work effectively together on behalf of children and families.

This primer supports the development of a mindset and an approach needed for effective collaborations between these two systems. It is time for child protection and housing/homelessness services to step out of their service system "silos" and begin building collaborative relationships.

Laying the Groundwork

Collaboration occurs over time. Several processes—communication, coordination, commitment, and collaboration—must be used to unite organizations for a common good. Each process serves as a stepping stone to the next stage. A clear understanding and implementation of each component is essential.

Communication

In every field of practice, effective communication is essential. It is even more important when different disciplines work collaboratively together. Establishing a common language becomes particularly critical. A common language eases confusion, reduces tension, and ensures a solid foundation on which to base their work together. Professionals in each system must clarify the working definitions they use, refrain from using their own professional jargon and agency abbreviations, and work to create a climate that encourages one another to stop and ask for clarification.

To promote effective communication with CPS professionals, housing professionals should be familiar with their state laws regarding the man-

datory reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect and the procedures for making reports. They should know the legal protections afforded to mandated reporters and the possible penalties for failure to report. Housing professionals also should have the telephone numbers for making reports of child abuse and neglect. To promote effective communication with housing professionals, CPS staff should be able to readily identify families' precarious housing situations and the warning signs of eviction.

Housing and child protection staff also should understand the legal issues regarding confidentiality and the process for sharing information with one another. They should be clear about the need for informed consent to share certain information with one another and the guidelines regarding the information that can be shared, with whom, under what conditions, and for what period of time. When these "ground rules" are understood and in place, communication between child protection and housing professionals is more likely to be clear and straightforward.

Coordination

Coordinated service delivery is essential to viable partnerships. Child protection and housing systems must coordinate schedules, meetings, and related or interdependent appointments. Each system must break away from its own day-to-day schedule and take into account the schedule of its partner system. For example:

> A CPS caseworker is planning a meeting with a family regarding the family's current housing situation. The CPS caseworker calls the family's worker at the partner housing agency and invites the worker to attend the meeting. The discussion of housing options is much more productive because a housing worker is present.
>
> After the two systems engage in initial planning and begin to develop their partnership, they must regularly consult and coordinate with one another regarding their expectations of each system's performance and complementary roles and responsibilities.

Commitment

The effort of collaboration means nothing if all agencies and organizations, all systems and communities, do not feel emotionally compelled or 100% obligated to follow through with their collaborative mission and embark on this journey. Commitment involves steadfastness in each step of the process to develop effective working relationships between housing and child protection that promote positive outcomes for children and their families. In connection with commitment, leadership is essential—individuals must make it work, even when there are "bumps in the road." A commitment to a partnership between housing and child protection can yield a safe and healthy future for children and families in the community.

Collaboration

Once the groundwork has been laid and child protection and housing systems begin to work with one another, it is time to make the most of new alliances and relationships. Collaboration becomes stronger as separate organizations are brought "into a new structure with full commitment to a common mission" (Winer, 2000). The partnership becomes more formal and more detailed plans can be finalized. The overarching goal is to develop and sustain a comprehensive system designed to protect the well-being of children and their families. Collaboration will be evident when housing professionals do not hesitate to call and consult with their counterparts in child protection, and CPS caseworkers know they can rely on their housing partners to assist them in exploring housing options and locating safe and stable housing for families.

Putting the Plan into Action

Child protection and housing systems can implement strong collaborations by taking six steps: (1) gathering information and creating a shared vision; (2) determining leadership and developing a work plan; (3) ensuring strong

stakeholder commitment; (4) developing policies and protocols; (5) monitoring and evaluating; and (6) creating a plan for ongoing funding.

Gathering Information and Creating a Shared Vision

Once the child protection and housing agencies have made the decision to collaborate, a framework should be created to guide the collaboration. Each system should clearly communicate how its system is organized, its values and objectives, and how it serves families and children. Although a fuller understanding of each system will evolve over the course of the partnership, this initial sharing of information will provide a foundation for the creation of a shared mission statement.

This shared mission statement should provide a concise explanation of the overall purpose of the collaboration and should be inclusive of all participants. The partners should likewise clarify their mutual values or guiding principles for their work together. Once these have been developed and agreed upon, they should be distributed to all team members and discussed regularly. The mission statement and values are the core of the work together and must be given the highest priority (Jewell Morgan & Martin, 2004). Commitment and full investment in the partnership are essential. Both child protection and housing should consider all of their work in relation to the partnership and be willing to change the way they work to better serve children and families.

Determining Leadership and Developing a Work Plan

Leadership is critical in child protection and housing partnerships. In the initial planning, the current leadership of both the child protection and housing services systems should be present. Commitment at this level is essential to ensure that the partnership is formally recognized and is supported by the administrative leadership and that staff and other resources will be dedicated to the work together (Franklin & Streeter, 1995). Difficulties in making progress together will be minimized when a leadership structure is established that incorporates each

agency's leader and when the roles and responsibilities of each agency are clear to all. A leadership structure for the partnership may be developed by concurrently fully engaging the executive director or top leader of each agency or by establishing a new leadership structure specifically for the collaboration.

As the partnership between child protection and housing proceeds, it may be necessary to revise existing policies and protocols. It is important to reiterate this need so that staff can obtain formal guidance to better manage the changes that may affect the day-to-day schedule they previously followed. Because organizations are more similar than they are different, ultimately, partnerships have the potential to highlight the strengths of both.

Within the partnership, the administrators of child protection and housing must agree upon a general structure for the two agencies' work together and the scope of work to be performed. They may designate others within their agencies to fully develop the implementation of the partnership. Frontline workers and their supervisors should be clear about the partnership and how it will change their daily activities and be given the necessary support to make the partnership work. Both organizations should know how each member of their staffs fit into this structure.

A valuable resource for workers in child protection and housing is a cross-agency "buddy system." Buddies should be selected based on similar tenures and positions within each agency. Each staff member has a lifeline to the staff in the partner agency, with access to information and assistance and opportunities for ongoing dialogue. For example:

> A housing staff member provides the CPS caseworker with a list of landlords who have safe, affordable rental properties. The housing staff member and the caseworker confer regarding clients as the need arises.

Another helpful approach is the use of task-specific leadership teams. Staff members from child protection and housing services create teams to focus on specific steps to further the work of the partnership. The

teams may establish new goals or revise existing ones, identify and find solutions to specific obstacles, and retool existing practices. This process helps ensure that all staff members feel that they are part of the process. At the same time, the partnership is enriched through the involvement of staff with varied skill sets and backgrounds (Jewell Morgan & Martin, 2004).

The partnership can develop other specific ways of working together. For example, the partners may develop formalized processes for referral and case coordination.

> Child protection and housing staff develop protocols to give housing priority to CPS clients. Under the agreement, the housing provider agrees to provide expedited housing admission for families referred by CPS. The protocols include agreements about information-sharing.

Another example might be the development of integrated services and housing.

> Child protection and housing staff work together to provide services within the housing provider programs for CPS clients and to offer a range of preventive services.

Ensuring Strong Stakeholder Commitment

In addition to garnering organizational support from both the child protection and the housing agency, strong stakeholder commitment must be mobilized in the communities that will benefit from the partnership. Formal and informal community leaders as well the families served through the partnership should be made aware of the collaboration. Community members should be provided with information about the partnership and its goals and should be asked what they would like to see accomplished. The community is a critical resource. As partnership goals and future plans are developed, examined, and revised through community involvement, the likelihood increases that important issues will not be overlooked.

"Effective, ongoing communication strategies are key to long-term support. If families, communities, and organizations clearly understand their stake in the change process, their long-term support will be more forthcoming" (Jewell Morgan & Martin, 2004). Child protection and housing agencies can participate in the change process and ensure that effective services are being provided only if all who are concerned about the best interests of children and families work together day by day, month by month, and year by year.

The collaboration between child protection and housing may provide opportunities for each agency to expand its understanding of the possible solutions to some of the ongoing issues both CPS and housing workers face, including revising expected outcomes, developing new resources, and enhancing community connections. Well worth considering is the creation of an advisory board that is composed of community members, family members who are or have been involved in one or both systems, and others who are interested in and committed to the success of the collaboration between child protection and housing. Consideration should also be given to engaging other partners to reinforce and strengthen the collaboration between child protection and housing, including local law enforcement, victim advocates, faith-based service providers, the prosecutor's office, medical personnel, and other community representatives. Their input and participation can enhance the collaboration.

Developing Policies and Protocols

The partnership between child protection and housing needs to be formalized through a written agreement, such as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which states the expectations each agency has for the partnership as well as what role each will play in the collaboration. In addition to the MOU, the partners should develop protocols for their work together, including regular meetings scheduled to maximize the attendance of the participants. Agreement should be reached as to how decisions will be made, including the development of ground rules that

address how discussions will be conducted at meetings; a decision-making process that clarifies how team decisions will be made; and a conflict resolution process that addresses how conflicts regarding values, policies, or practices will be resolved.

Monitoring and Evaluating

A key component in any collaboration is evaluation. Only through an assessment of the results achieved after the partnership between child protection and housing has been formed will the involved agencies be able to determine the impact of their efforts. Equally important are the views of the children and families served, the child protection and housing staff providing the services, and the community as a whole.

To monitor and evaluate the collaboration, the partnership should develop performance measures that reflect the overall goals and expectations of the partnership. Measures used should be easy to understand and interpret, such as the number of FUP or Section 8 vouchers that are provided to families, the number and types of services that families receive such as counseling or parenting classes, and the number of families who are provided with housing resources that result in the prevention of a child's out-of-home placement or the reunification of children with their families. In addition, client surveys provide important information as to whether the partnership is making a difference in families' lives and whether families view the effort as successful. The perceptions of CPS and housing staff and their level of satisfaction with the collaborative efforts that have been developed are also important. Through identifying what is working successfully and what is not, the partnership can modify, if necessary, the way that it is operating as it moves forward.

Monitoring and evaluation should not place blame. There is likely to be ongoing apprehension among child protection and housing staff, and finger-pointing must be avoided when plans do not move forward smoothly. Both child protection and housing agencies should take the

view that they are—together—accountable for the outcomes achieved. Established "buddy system" partnerships should be used and applied to the managerial levels as well, to get true, honest dialogue and to promote free communication with counterparts from the other system about the successes and the challenges of the partnership. This informal checks and balance system may make evaluation results more comprehensive, more accurate, and definitely more meaningful.

At the same time, processes must be in place to hold individuals accountable. All too often, children and families slip through the cracks—whether it is separating a family simply because of a housing issue or not providing services to a child who desperately needs them. These partnerships are aimed at reducing and eliminating such shortcomings. From the outset, the partnership should make clear that collaboration will work only if it is fully implemented. Both child protection and housing staff should be held to the same high standard to support the integrity of the partnership and promote its success.

It is essential to celebrate successes, which may start small and grow over time. Both administrators and staff should identify and share solid examples of success, either through specific stories or through data. Illustrating the beneficial power of the collaborations provides motivation for sustaining the partnership.

Creating a Plan for Ongoing Funding

Child protection and housing partnerships bring many resource benefits. "From a logistics, efficiency and funding perspective, this new partnership provides an ideal opportunity to create new relationships, find new resources, and expand upon old ones" (Winer, 2000). As the partnership between child protection and housing continues, many opportunities for resource development will arise. Stakeholder interest will broaden as the two systems demonstrate their ability to target problems affecting families and children and effectively address them. As the partnership shows that addressing these problems together saves money, a political and fiscal audience, ranging from state and federal bodies to

private foundations and corporate donors, will be captivated, and funders will be eager to invest in a proven success. The partnership also may attract other allies. Imagine the benefit to children and families if a truly comprehensive system were to emerge.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

Over the years, child protection and housing professionals have had three primary options when parents cannot provide for their children's basic needs: provide assistance to families so that children can remain safely with their loved ones; remove children and place them in out-of-home care; or do nothing and potentially place children at further risk of harm (Eamon & Kopels, 2004).

This primer is designed to strengthen skills in connection with the first option—providing assistance to families so children can remain safely with them. By working together, child protection and housing professionals can identify humane, proactive, and cost-effective methods to provide parents with concrete services and support and prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families solely because of homelessness or substandard housing. As professionals, community members, and others interested in the well-being of children and families work to develop and provide these services, they should keep in mind their goal: reducing the number of children who are separated from their families and placed in out-of-home care simply due to housing issues.

CWLA's Standards of Excellence for Services for Abused and Neglected Children (1999) provide best practice guidance in achieving this goal.

They make clear the conditions under which a child should be removed from his or her home: the child is in imminent danger or "the child has suffered serious physical or emotional injury, the parent refuses or is unable to protect the child, and the provision of services will not remedy the conditions in the home that make the child unsafe" (CWLA, 1999, p. 24). It is time to start making sure that essential services are provided prior to removing a child from his or her family.

Where services are available, they must be used in a manner that has the greatest impact for families. Where services are not available and families need them, there needs to be a joining together to generate resources and identify opportunities to develop these services. Creative ways must be found to build on what is available and make it accessible. It is time for child protection and housing agencies to work together to ensure that the housing needs of families who come to the attention of child protection are addressed.

Certainly situations exist in which parents are unable to care for their children no matter how many services are provided, but these are the exception rather than the rule. Partnerships between child protection and housing can help make clear that most families can safely care for their children with the right resources and information. These partnerships also can support the work of countless agencies struggling to serve vulnerable families on their own. Through outreach to other service providers, partnerships between child protection and housing can make even more of a difference. The partnerships that this primer describes will optimize the provision of essential supports and services to families so that children can remain safe, families can provide their children with adequate care and protection, and communities can be enriched through promoting the well-being of their citizens. By joining forces, we can keep families together…and safe.

Glossary

Adequate Shelter: Living arrangements that include appropriate heat, sanitation, and sleeping conditions and the absence of environmental hazards in the home or on the property.

Assessment: The process used with a family to determine if a child has been abused or neglected and if intervention is needed to ensure child safety and to reduce the risk of future abuse or neglect. This process includes, but is not limited to, what has traditionally been called a child abuse or neglect investigation. Assessment occurs throughout the life of the agency's involvement with the family.

Confidentiality: The protection of information from release to organizations or individuals not entitled to such information by law.

Displaced Family: A family in which each member, or whose sole member, is a person who has lost access to his or her home as a result of governmental action or whose dwelling has been extensively damaged or destroyed as a result of a disaster declared or otherwise formally recognized pursuant to federal disaster relief laws.

Endangerment Standard: A standard that includes all children who meet the Harm Standard, that is, children who already experienced harm from abuse or neglect, but includes other children as well. The Endangerment Standard allows children who have not yet been harmed by maltreatment to be counted in the estimates of the number of abused and neglected children if they are considered to be endangered by maltreatment or if their maltreatment was substantiated or indicated in a CPS investigation. This standard is slightly more lenient than the Harm Standard concerning the identity of allowable perpetrators in that it can include maltreatment by adult caregivers other than parents in certain situations and includes sexual abuse perpetrated by teenage caregivers.

Environment Hazards: Property conditions that include, but are not limited to, broken windows or glass, gas leaks, open and accessible containers of dangerous drugs or household poisons, exposed electric wiring, scalding water, unprotected space heaters, lead-based paint, discarded refrigerators with doors attached, open wells without covers, animal and human waste/feces, rodents, and insects.

Eviction: The displacement of a tenant from a leased unit as a result of the termination of tenancy by the landlord or other individual with control of the property, including a termination prior to the end of a lease term.

Extremely Low Income Household: A family whose annual income does not exceed 30% of the median income for the area, as determined by HUD, with adjustments based on household size. In addition, HUD may establish income ceilings higher or lower than 30% of the median income for the area if HUD finds that such variations are necessary because of unusually high or low family incomes [See 24 CFR §5.603].

Fair Housing Act: A broad federal statute that prohibits discrimination based upon race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, or familial status in most housing and housing-related transactions.

Family: Defined broadly, a variety of formations, including single-parent and blended units. Members of a family may include birth- or adoptive parents, grandparents, siblings, foster parents, legal guardians, or any other person in a parental role.

Homeless Prevention Funds: Funds available through the Emergency Shelter Grant Program to qualified families at risk of eviction for nonpayment of rent.

Investigation: A process used by child protective services and/or law enforcement to determine the validity of a report of child abuse or neglect and/or to determine if a crime has been committed.

Low-Income Household: A household with an annual income that does not exceed 80% of the area median income, as determined by HUD, with adjustments depending on household size.

Minimum Rent: The lowest tenant payment permitted for tenants receiving Section 8 housing assistance. The minimum rent is $50 and is used when 30% of the family's or individual's adjusted monthly income, 10% of the family's or individual's gross monthly income, and the welfare rent are all below $25. The minimum rent covers the tenant's contribution for rent and utilities.

Petition: A legal document filed with the court to initiate court action. In child protective services, the petition is filed with juvenile or family court and sets forth the alleged grounds for the court to take jurisdiction of the case and place legal custody of the child with the child protection agency.

Private market rental housing: Low-cost rental housing without government subsidy and not linked to services provision.

Safety: A condition assessed when a report of child abuse or neglect has been received. The safety of a child is determined on the basis of an analysis of information related to the child's current circumstances and the risk of future harm. A child is determined to be safe when the child is found not to be in imminent danger of harm and no interventions are necessary to ensure the child's safety in the current living conditions.

Shelter-Plus Care Programs: A federal program that provides rental assistance for individuals with disabilities who are homeless and also provide social services. Assistance may be used for a variety of housing options, including group homes and individual units.

Single Room Occupancy (SRO): Housing units for occupancy by one person and which may include food preparation, sanitary facilities, or both.

Substantiated: A finding after a child protection assessment or investigation that there is credible evidence that a child has been abused or neglected.

Unsubstantiated: A finding after a child protection assessment or investigation that insufficient credible evidence exists to show that a child has been abused or neglected.

Very Low-Income Household: A household with an annual income that does not exceed 50% of the area median income, as determined by HUD, with adjustments for family size.

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Stable housing and economic stability are often at the core of child welfare issues. When families' needs for housing assistance are identified and housing resources are provided at the time families are first determined to be at risk, child abuse and neglect may be prevented and the need for foster care avoided.

Keeping Families Together and Safe: A Primer on the Child Protection–Housing Connection makes the case for cross-systems collaboration between child protective services workers and housing services workers to better meet the needs of children and families who come to the attention of either system. It highlights the critical influence that housing has on the protection and safety of children and provides (1) background information on each service system; (2) insight into the intersection between housing and child protection and the need for improved coordination between these two systems, and (3) an action plan for the development and implementation of collaborative partnerships and service integration.

Freddie Mac Foundation
8250 Jones Branch Drive • McLean, VA 22102
703/918-8888 • Fax 703/918-8895
www.freddiemacfoundation.org

CWLA
CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF AMERICA
Headquarters
440 First Street, NW, Third Floor • Washington, DC 20001-2085
202/638-2952 • Fax 202/638-4004 • www.cwla.org