User's Guide

The goal of *On the Map* is to help users better understand the issue and context of family homelessness in their neighborhoods and in New York City. It can be used independently, or in conjunction with the 2014 *On The Map: Atlas of Family Homelessness,* which provides individual City Council district maps with shelter locations and Homebase sites.

Why is this information needed?

This information is assembled to help the user accomplish a variety of goals, including:

To identify ways to improve family shelter services through providing a more detailed **picture of the parents and children** living in shelter.

To learn more about why families from different communities apply for and **enter shelter**.

To examine the educational, economic, and community characteristics in a **City Council district** that influence family homelessness.

To use as a tool for **planning and advocacy**.

To **raise questions** and determine what additional data are required to make effective public policy.

What information does *On the Map* provide?

On the Map is divided into four sections.

Section 1 provides charts and tables that describe the extent of family homelessness in New York City: its growth over time, the type of shelter where families stay, the number of families in shelter who entered during a previous year, the rate at which families are returning to shelter, the neighborhoods where families live before they enter shelter, and homelessness among students as a proxy for community-wide housing instability.

Section 2 looks at the reasons why families apply for and enter shelter citywide, and then explores differences by community district.

Section 3 is a series of New York City maps and tables that shows factors such as: children living in poverty, single mothers in poverty with children under five, severe rent burden, and overcrowding. The maps provide an opportunity to compare neighborhoods to one another as well as the city as a whole, and the tables provide context for where each community ranks in comparison to other districts. Wherever possible, maps and tables are shown at the City Council district level, however in cases where that is not possible, data are displayed by community district.

The Appendix provides a glossary defining the important terms used in *On the Map*, as well as overarching tables for City Council and community district data.

What are the limitations of the information provided here?

Some of the challenges of exploring family homelessness in New York City are the many different ways in which data are collected. Information might be collected at the level of the city as a whole, the community district, or City Council district. The other barrier to a better understanding of the issue is the timeliness and availability of the data. Government officials and community leaders often make decisions affecting today's homeless families based on dated information, though more current administrative data could be made publicly available.