The Dynamics of Family Homelessness in New York City

I. Shelter Dynamics

IC PH
Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness

Shelter Dynamics in New York City

Shelter Dynamics in New York City examines the City's shelter system— who is in shelters, why and how families are entering shelter, and the types of facilities in which families are being placed.
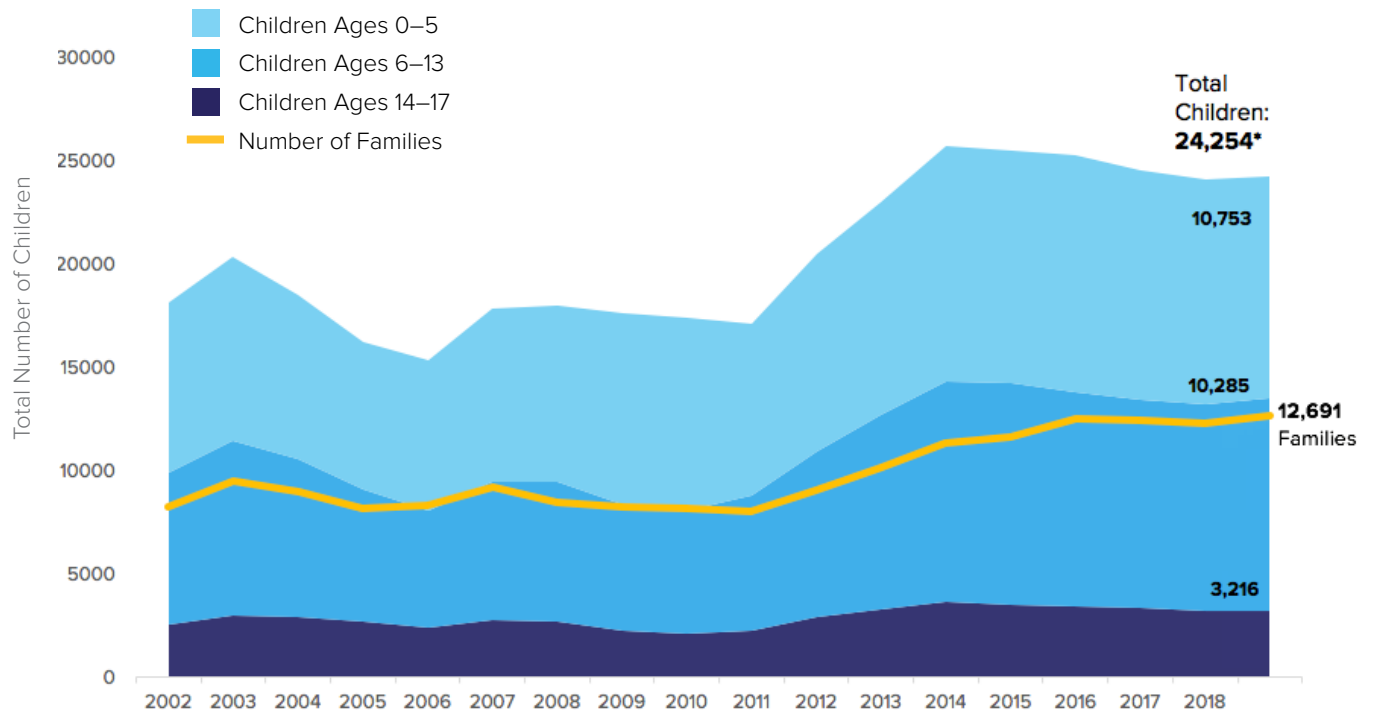
On July 1, 2018, there were over 12,000 families with children sleeping in a City-run shelter. Of the approximately 62,000 total individuals in shelter, 39% were children under the age of 18. Despite the City's various initiatives to prevent, reduce, or end homelessness, the shelter system continues to be stretched beyond its capacity.

Although the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) is responsible for carrying out the City's right to shelter policy, the reasons why families become homeless, or find and sustain permanent housing, are complex. The entrenched poverty many homeless families experience requires that they will continue to rely on public resources for a rent subsidy, healthcare, childcare, food, and other basic necessities even after they leave shelter.

This report includes the most recent data available. More current data have been requested from DHS. This tool will be updated as new data are provided.

How Has the Number of Families in Shelter Changed Over Time?

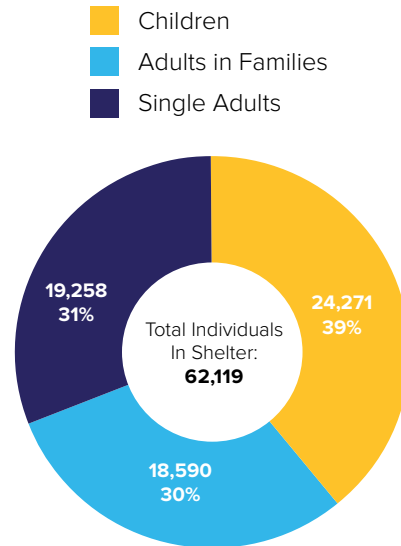**Upward Trend in Number of Families and Children in Shelter**

* December 2018 is the last available month with breakdown of individuals in shelter by age.
Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, Critical Activities Report, FY 2003–FY 2011; New York City Department of Homeless Services, Daily Report, FY 2009–FY 2019; New York City Department of Homeless Services, DHS Data Dashboard Charts, FY 2012–FY 2019.

- The past decade has been marked by a dramatic rise in family homelessness. After a period of relative stability from 2002 to 2011, the number of families with children in shelter has grown by nearly 55% from 2011 to 2018.

- As of July 2018, children five and under were the largest segment of children in shelter, accounting for nearly 11,000 children.

How Many Children Are in Shelter?

Children Are the Largest Single Group of the Homeless: Two in Five Individuals in Shelter Are Children
July 2018

- Despite their lack of visibility, families with children continue to be the largest segment of the homeless population.

- From 2012 through 2018, children under 18 made up about 40% of individuals in shelter. Although single adults are frequently the face of homelessness, they make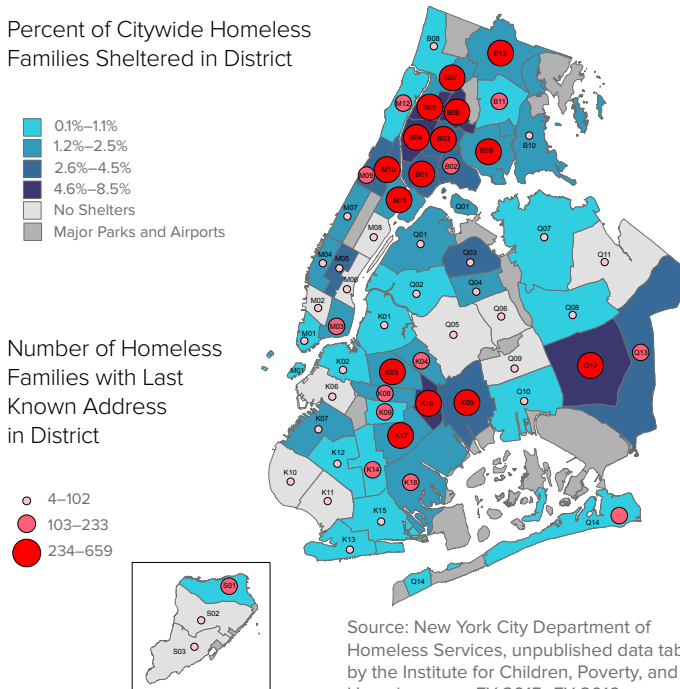 up fewer than one-third of all individuals in shelter. Although single adults are frequently the face of homelessness, they make up fewer than one-third of all individuals in shelter.

Legend:
- Children
- Adults in Families
- Single Adults

Total Individuals In Shelter: **62,119**

- 24,271 — 39%
- 18,590 — 30%
- 19,258 — 31%

Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, *Local Law 37 Report*, July 2018.

Is Shelter Capacity Sufficient in Each Neighborhood?

Most Homeless Families Are Not Sheltered in the Communities They Come From.
A Closer Look at Shelter Capacity, by Community District

Percent of Citywide Homeless Families Sheltered in District

- 0.1%–1.1%
- 1.2%–2.5%
- 2.6%–4.5%
- 4.6%–8.5%
- No Shelters
- Major Parks and Airports

Number of Homeless Families with Last Known Address in District

- 4–102
- 103–233
- 234–659

Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, FY 2015–FY 2016.

Note: Most recent available data on families entering shelter disaggregated by community district are from FY 2015. Most recent data on where families are sheltered are from FY 2016.
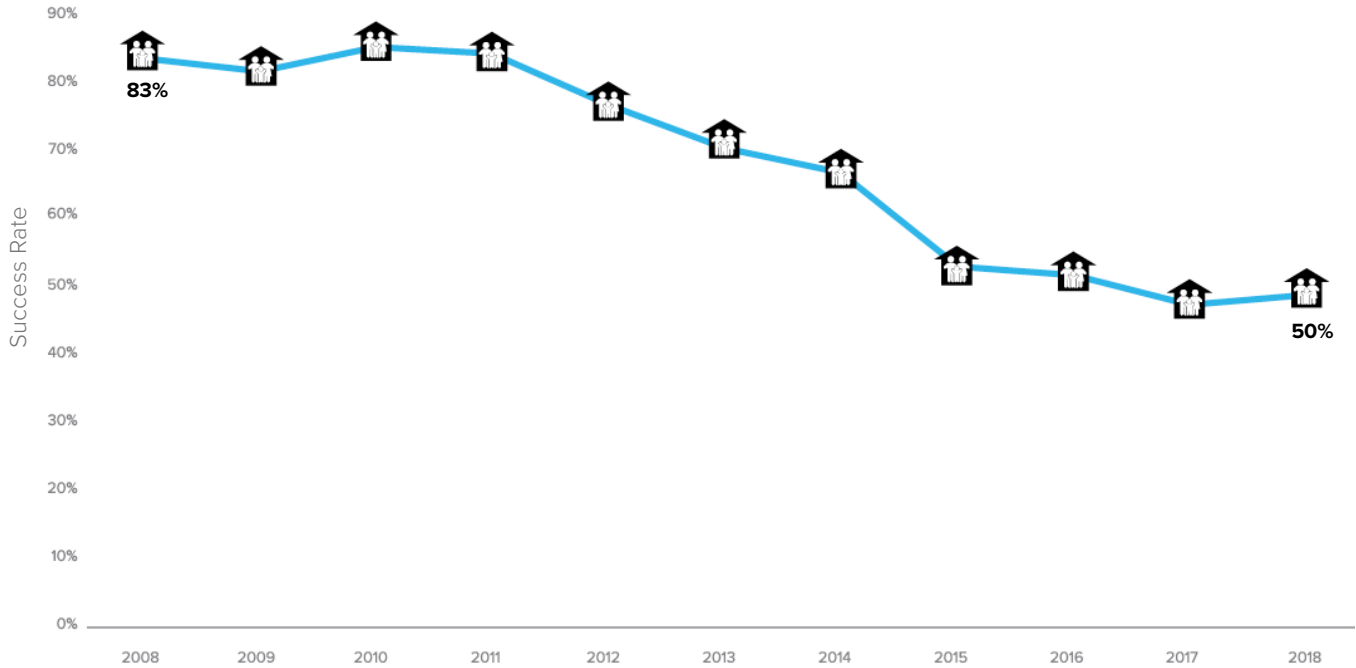
- The community district with the most families entering shelter is **East New York**, Brooklyn (K05), with over 650 families with children entering the system in FY 2015 and 441 shelter units available in the district in FY 2016. Residents of **Bayside**, Queens (Q11) were the least likely to enter shelter, with just 5 homeless families hailing from **Bayside** in FY 2015 and no shelter units in their district.

- With a shelter capacity of 1,200 family units, **Concourse/Highbridge** in the Bronx (B04) had the highest proportion of NYC's homeless families sheltered in the district. Although families entered the shelter system from every community district, there were 12 neighborhoods with no family shelter units.

- While the City's plan is to increase capacity in each neighborhood, there is no available data to either document or review the effectiveness of the City's initiatives.

Has NYC Succeeded in Placing Families in the Shelter Closest to the Youngest Child's School?

City's Success in Placing Families Nearest to Their Original School Has Declined by 30 Percentage Points in Past Decade
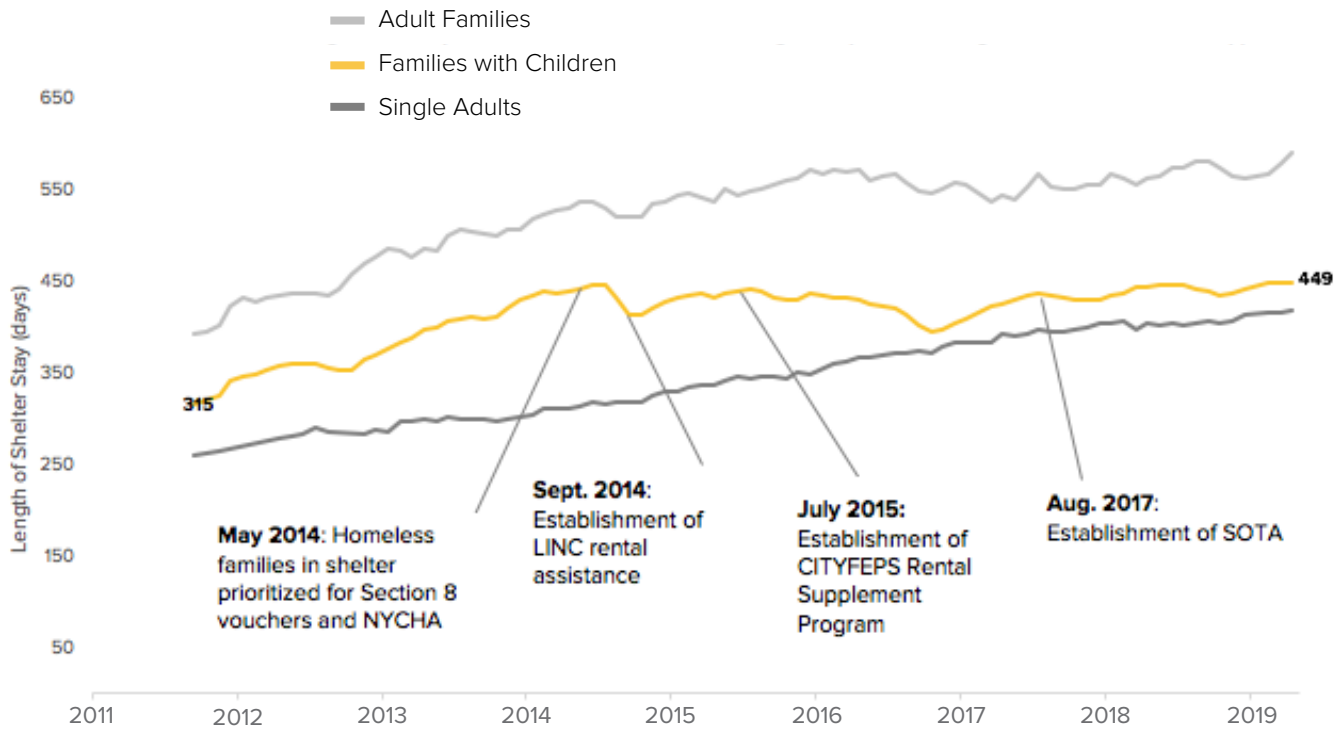FY 2008–FY 2018

Source: New York City Mayor's Office of Operations, Mayor's Management Report, FY 2008–FY 2018.

- DHS tries to place families in the shelter that is closest to their youngest school-aged child's school address. Shelter locations and limited shelter capacity often prevent DHS from accomplishing this goal.

- In 2008, the City was able to place 83% of families in the facility closest to the original school of the youngest child. By 2018, that number declined to just 50%.

How Long Do Families Stay in Shelter?

Length of Stay Continues to Climb: Average Stay Increasing for All Household Types

Legend:
— Adult Families
— Families with Children
— Single Adults

Y-axis: Length of Shelter Stay (days) — 50, 150, 250, 350, 450, 550, 650

X-axis: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019

Data labels: 315, 449

Annotations:
- **May 2014:** Homeless families in shelter prioritized for Section 8 vouchers and NYCHA
- **Sept. 2014:** Establishment of LINC rental assistance
- **July 2015:** Establishment of CITYFEPS Rental Supplement Program
- **Aug. 2017:** Establishment of SOTA

Note: Living in Communities Rental Assistance Programs (LINC) assisted families in the NYC shelter system with moving into stable housing. CITYFEPS helped eligible families with children at risk of homelessness and those already in shelter to secure permanent housing. Special One-Time Assistance Program (SOTA) covers the first year of rent for working families to move out of shelter.
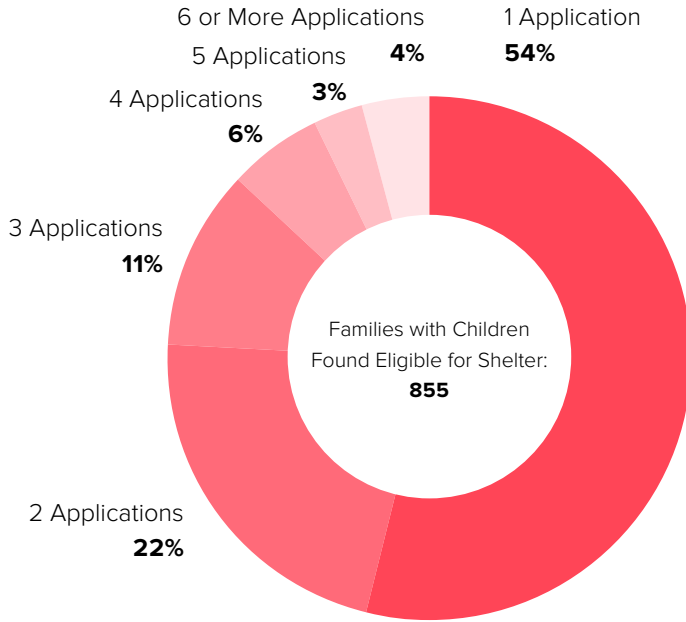
Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, *Local Law 37 Report*, September 2011–April 2019.

- Families with children typically are homeless for longer periods of time than single adults. As of April 2019, the average length of stay for a family with children was 449 days, or over 14 months. Previous declines in this average have tended to coincide with major policy shifts or new initiatives designed to place families into private housing using temporary rental assistance.

- The length of shelter stay for families has increased by over 40% from September 2011 to April 2019.

How Many Times Do Families Apply for Shelter?

One in Four Families in Shelter Have Applied More Than Twice
April 2019

Families with Children
Found Eligible for Shelter:
855

6 or More Applications **4%**
5 Applications **3%**
4 Applications **6%**
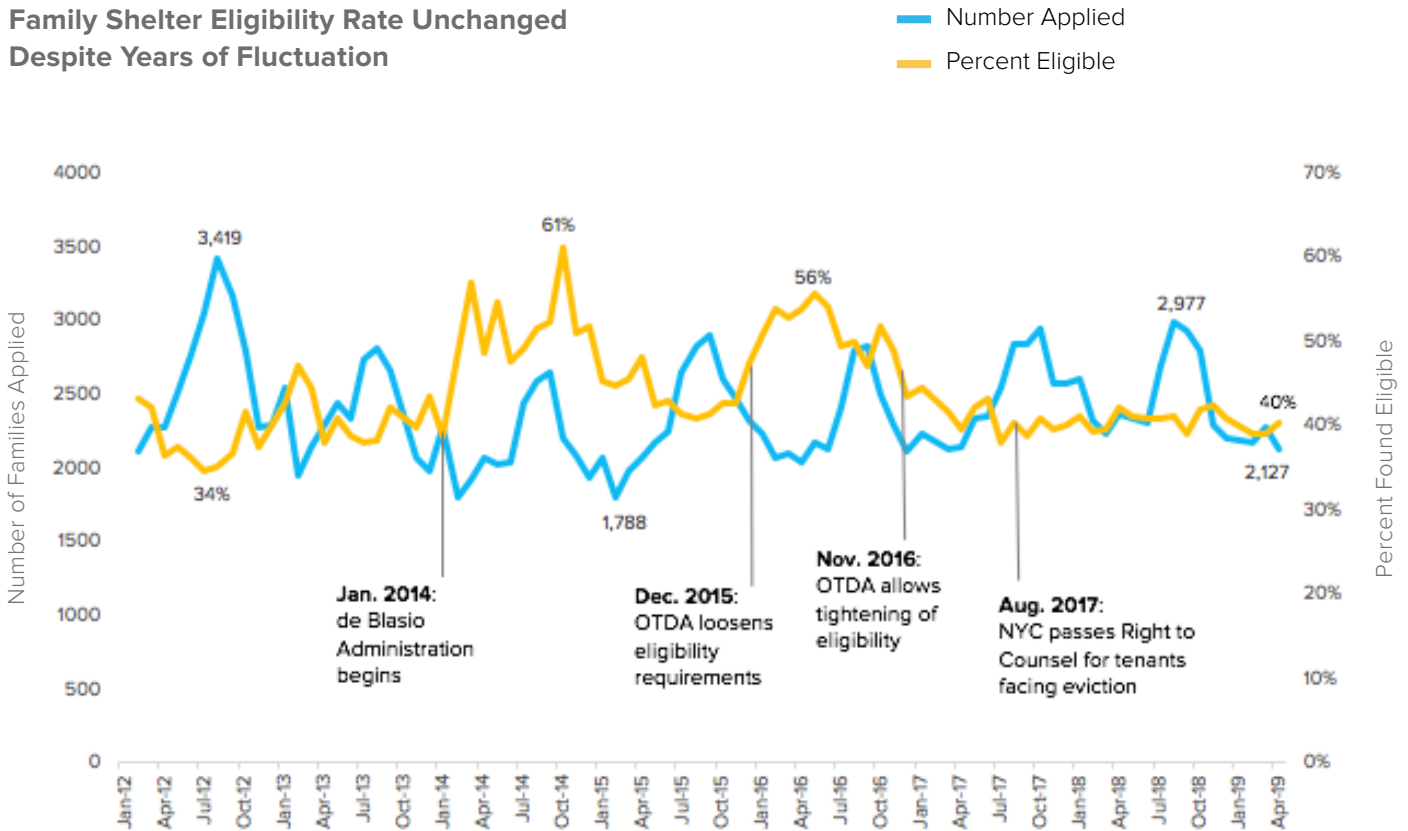3 Applications **11%**
2 Applications **22%**
1 Application **54%**

• Nearly half of all families (46%) that were deemed eligible for entry into the DHS shelter system had to submit more than one application to be admitted.

• These numbers suggest that families that do in fact meet eligibility requirements are being denied from shelter.

Note: This chart shows the number of applications submitted by families in the 90 days prior to being deemed eligible for shelter in April 2019.

Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, Local Law 37 Report, April 2019

How Has Shelter Eligibility Changed?

Family Shelter Eligibility Rate Unchanged Despite Years of Fluctuation
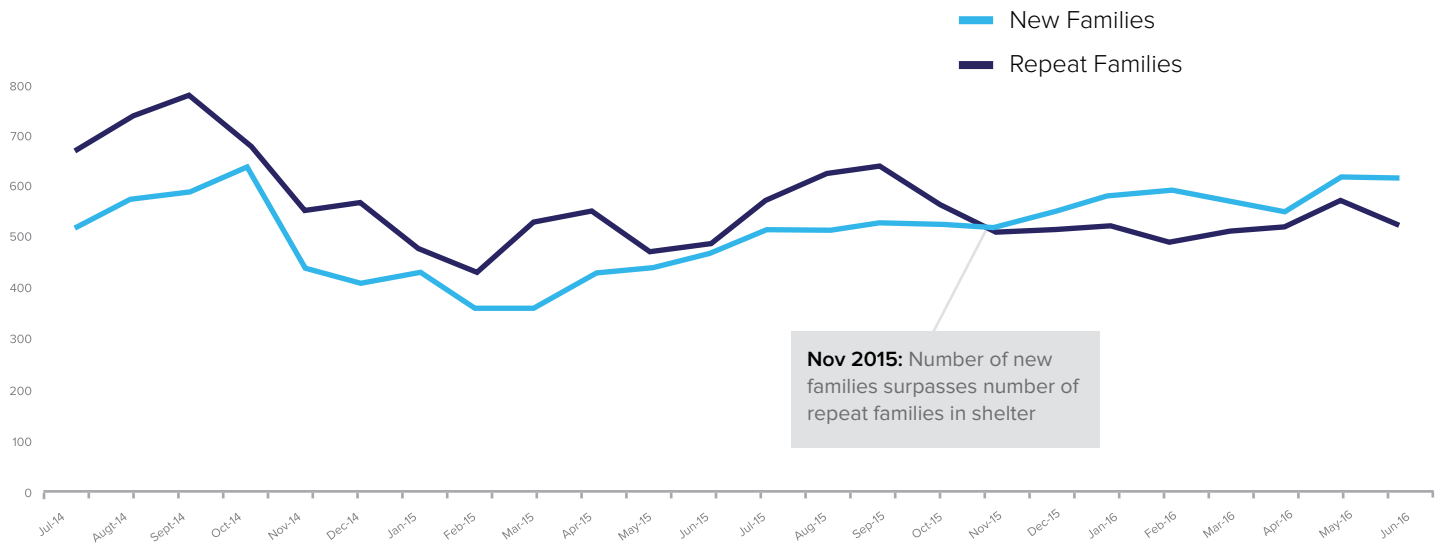

Note: OTDA—New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, Local Law 37 Report, February 2012–April 2019

- Since the de Blasio Administration took office in 2014, the number of shelter applicants has ranged from a high of 2,977 families in August 2018 to a low of 1,788 families in February 2015. The percent of families that were deemed eligible ranged from a high of 61% in October 2014 to a low of 38% in July 2017.

- In the last year, even though the number of families applying continues to fluctuate, the percent of families deemed eligible has stayed relatively stagnant around 40%.

How Many Families in Shelter Have Experienced Homelessness Before?

More Families Entering Shelter for the First Time

Nov 2015: Number of new families surpasses number of repeat families in shelter

Note: Repeat families have previously been found eligible for family shelter at some point in the past.
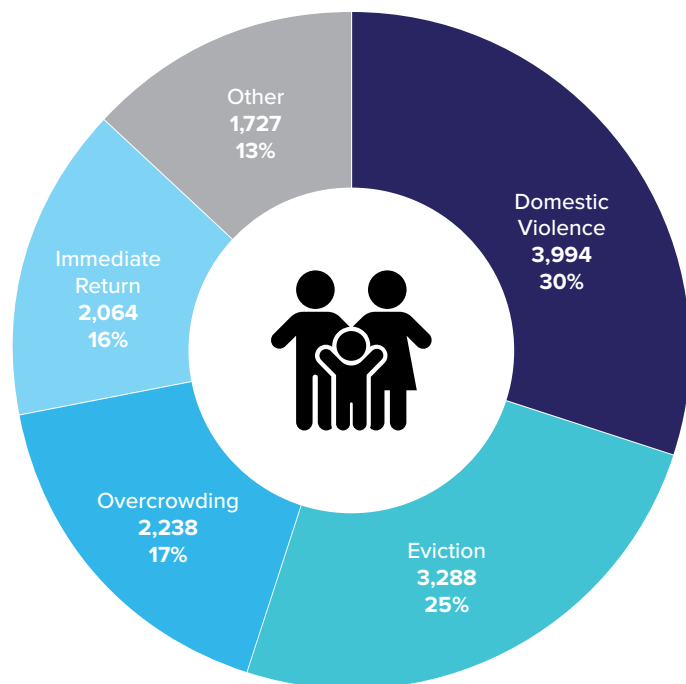
Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, FY 2015–FY 2016.

- Many families struggle with housing instability after leaving the shelter system and eventually must re-enter. In June 2016, almost half (46%) of families that were entering shelter were "repeat" families, meaning they had previously entered the city shelter system.

- After a long period where the majority of shelter entrances were previously homeless families, the proportion of families returning to shelter is now on the decline, with less than half of all entrants since November 2015 being repeat families. Unfortunately, the decline in repeat families has been offset by an increase in the number of families entering shelter for the first time.

Why Do Families Enter Shelter?

Domestic Violence Is the Most Common Reason Families Enter Shelter
FY 2016

Other
1,727
13%

Immediate Return
2,064
16%

Domestic Violence
3,994
30%

Overcrowding
2,238
17%
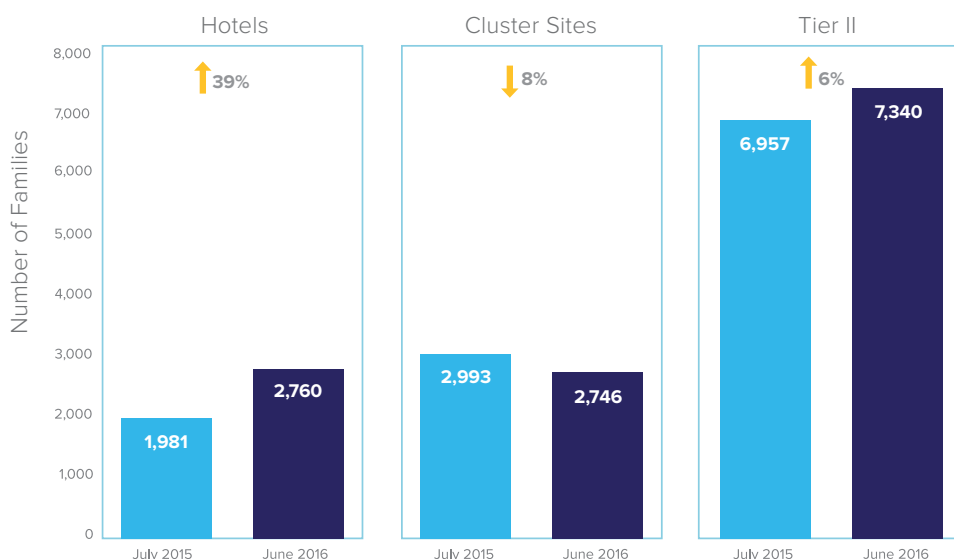
Eviction
3,288
25%

Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, FY 2016.

- Domestic violence was the most common reason families entered shelter, followed by eviction.

- Immediate return to shelter and overcrowding together represented one-third of all reasons for entering shelter. Immediate return means that a family was previously in shelter and returned within 30 days because they could not sustain permanent housing.

- "Other" reasons for entering shelter include Administration for Children's Services (ACS)-related causes, discord, and unlivable conditions.

- This chart only shows the reason a family was determined eligible for shelter; it does not represent all families that applied or even all homeless families. Over half of all shelter applicants are denied and many are living in other temporary situations, such as doubled up with friends or family.

Are All Family Shelters the Same?

Net Increase in Shelter Capacity Due to Sharp Increase in Use of Hotels

- During FY 2016, hotel usage as type of shelter for homeless families increased by almost 40%—the most of any shelter type. At the same time, homeless families in Tier II shelters increased by 6%, while families in cluster sites decreased by 8%.

- By the end of FY 2016, the number of families staying in hotels surpassed the number staying in cluster sites.

Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, FY 2016.
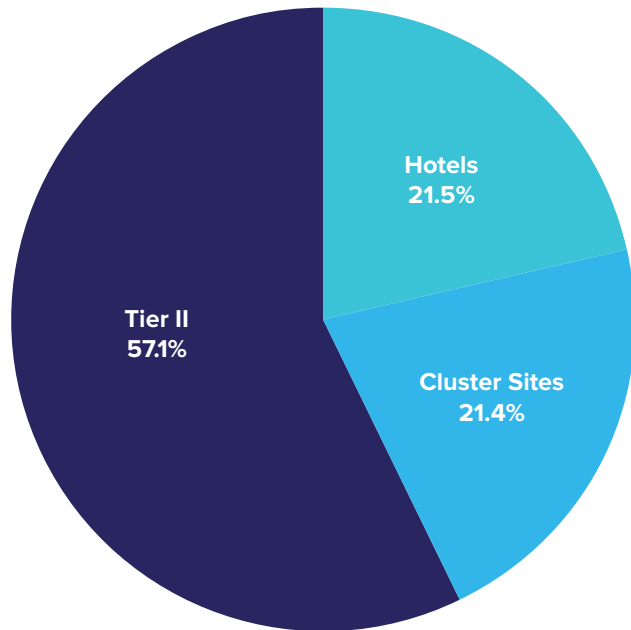
What Are Different Family Shelter Types?

Hotels and Commercial Hotels*	DHS utilizes two types of private hotel capacity to shelter homeless families. The first are hotels that have been converted into shelters offering private rooms with kitchenettes. These facilities often operate without a City contract, are poorly-maintained, and lack many of the services required by New York State Tier II regulations. The second are rooms rented in for-profit commercial hotels by non-profit operators under contract with the City.
Cluster Sites	Cluster Sites are shelter units in privately-owned residential buildings that house both rent-paying tenants as well as DHS clients. Cluster site apartments are both the most poorly-maintained and are the least frequently-monitored of all three types of family shelters, in addition to offering the least adequate social services to families, most often with no on-site social services available.
Tier II	Tier II shelters are certified by New York State and are typically the best maintained of all types of family shelters with the most on-site social services available to occupants. Tier II shelters are either run by nonprofit organizations in privately-owned buildings and operate under contracts with the City, or are directly-run by the City itself.

* Data received from DHS on shelter utilization does not distinguish between the two types of hotels noted in the "What Are Different Family Shelter Types?" definition box

What Proportion of Families Are Placed in Each Shelter Type?

How Homeless Families Are Being Sheltered
June 2016

Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, unpublished data tabulated by the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, FY 2016.

- As of June 2016, most families (57%) are still placed in Tier II shelters. This proportion has risen by six percentage points since 2010.

- The growing reliance on hotels and recent efforts to minimize the usage of cluster sites is a reversal from earlier this decade. Between 2010 and 2015, the percent of New York City's homeless families placed in hotels was cut in half, from 32% to 16%.

- As of September 2014, the City began utilizing commercial hotel rooms to shelter homeless adults and families. Please see the previous page for an explanation of the different types of hotels used by the City. Hotel use data is presented herein is as provided by the DHS; it does not distinguish between the two types of hotels in use as shelters.
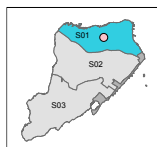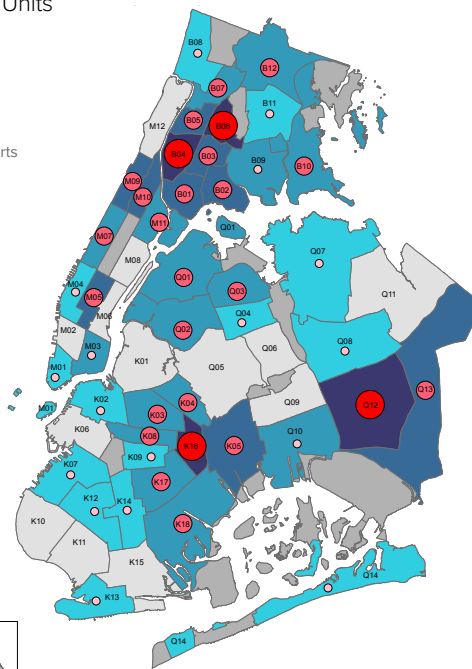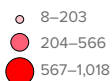
Where Are Different Shelter Types?

The Distribution of Homeless Families and Shelters, by Community District
May 2017

Percent of Citywide Units

- 0.1%–1.2%
- 1.3%–2.7%
- 2.8%–4.4%
- 4.5%–8.0%
- No Shelters
- Major Parks and Airports

Number of Units

- 8–203
- 204–566
- 567–1,018

Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, *Shelter Repair Scorecard,* May 2017.

- The **Concourse/Highbridge** (B04) neighborhood of the Bronx had the highest number of overall family shelter units, as well as the highest number of cluster site units. One in five of the city's family cluster site units was located here.

- **Brownsville** (K16) had the most Tier II units of any Community District. Brownsville was home to 641 Tier II units, or 10% of the city's total. The District with the highest number of hotel shelter units was **Jamaica/St. Albans** (Q12), with 480 hotel units.

- **Midtown Manhattan** (M05) had the most shelter units of any Manhattan Community District in FY 2016. Midtown Manhattan had 421 family shelter units in total. Staten Island had a total of 46 family shelter units, all of which were Tier II units located in **St. George** (S01).

- While the prevalence of cluster sites is declining, there are five community districts in the Bronx where they remain the most common type of shelter. These neighborhoods are **Concourse/Highbridge** (B04), **University Heights** (B05), **Bedford Park** (B07), **Soundview** (B09), and **Pelham Parkway** (B11).

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