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# **UMI**

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**THE TIES THAT BIND:  
THE ROLES OF FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND SCHOOL  
IN THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES  
OF HOMELESS CHILDREN**

by

Josephine E. Imbimbo

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Program in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1996

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Psychology.

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**Abstract****THE TIES THAT BIND: THE ROLES OF FAMILY,  
COMMUNITY, AND SCHOOL IN THE  
EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESS CHILDREN**

by

**Josephine E. Imbimbo**

Adviser: Dr. Leanne G. Rivlin

This study examined the educational experiences and academic achievement of elementary school-age homeless children living with their mothers in temporary housing facilities in New York City. The relationships among school achievement, attitude toward school, residential and school mobility, the families' social support network, and the institutional support available to and used by the families were investigated.

A total of 31 children and their mothers were interviewed, as well as 15 teachers. The interviews used a semi-structured, open-ended format. The social support network of the mothers was assessed using the Norbeck Social Support Questionnaire. Educational data for the children (reading and mathematics achievement, attendance, and promotion) were obtained from the children's school records through the New York City Public Schools.

The study found that children who obtained average to above average scores on achievement tests taken the year they were in the temporary housing facility had a history of fewer residential and school changes, had more contact with their fathers, and had mothers with a more extensive social network than those who scored below average to poorly. Examining the school environment from the perspectives of the children, their

mothers, and teachers, this study found that, for the most part, the school environment did not support the academic, social, or emotional development of the children. The participants described inappropriate educational practices, extensive school violence, including the maltreatment of students by school staff, and the exclusion of families in the educational process. Most of the children had “disconnected” themselves from the learning process, which they expressed through acting out in or withdrawing from school. Those children who managed to stay connected and committed to the learning process, despite their negative experiences, tended to have had positive learning experiences in the past and a positive image of themselves as learners, which was typically reinforced by their mothers from early on in their educational history.

This study concluded that to increase the chances of educational success for homeless children and all children living in poverty, policy changes need to be directed toward stabilizing families economically as well as improving the school environment.

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I consider myself very fortunate to have had a dissertation committee that provided me with excellent guidance as well as personal support. I am particularly indebted to Leanne Rivlin, who in shepherding me through this process has played a central role in my academic development and personal growth. It has been immensely rewarding to work with Lee, a tremendous scholar, who never loses sight of the individual. As a mentor, she has provided me with not only the academic guidance, but with the confidence and conviction necessary in obtaining a doctoral degree. During the all years we worked

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## **CHAPTER ONE THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

**Children spend most of their early years either at home or in school. In these two settings they begin to develop their personal identities, a sense of their place in the world and begin to learn the social and academic skills necessary to prepare them for their future societal roles. Both the home and the school environments have a tremendous impact on children's social, intellectual and psychological development.**

**The loss of home is a traumatic and demoralizing experience for a person of any age, but the effects of homelessness are likely to be the most severe for children. Homelessness can disrupt every aspect of a child's growth and development. Insufficient sleep, poor nutrition, unsanitary living conditions, and the absence of medical care contribute to the development of illness and disease. Constant mobility and family disruption can affect a child's ability to form secure social relationships. The development of identity and self-esteem is impeded in an environment where a child lacks control, privacy, stability and security. The disruption of schooling prevents a homeless child from developing the academic skills needed to succeed in adult life, as well as the social connections with classmates who become friends.**

**Homelessness is not a single event, but encompasses a series of events and circumstances, which vary across individuals (i.e., the duration of homelessness and residential stability, the quality of available shelter, support from family and friends, the availability of institutional assistance, and the circumstances that lead to the loss of home). Not only do the circumstances around homelessness vary but so do individuals' resources**

and strategies for dealing with this trauma. Tragically, when children become homeless they are not only uprooted from their homes but are also displaced from their schools. Their ability to deal with these life changes are connected to the decisions and responses of the adults in their lives upon whom they depend for survival, as well as their own personal resources. Therefore, to examine the impact of homelessness on children, the present study examines how these different factors individually and collectively contribute to people's experience of and ability to cope with homelessness, with a particular emphasis on how they affect children's school experiences.

#### Background on Homeless Families in the United States

There is no way of knowing the exact number of homeless people in the United States or even in New York City. Estimates are affected by what type of agency does the counting, what method is used, who is included as homeless, and the time period that is covered (Wolch & Dear, 1993). Taking into account the duration of homelessness as well as the proportion of people who are homeless more than once, Wolch and Dear estimated that there were between 840,000 and 1.1 million cases of homelessness in 1991. Added to this number are millions of other residents who are precariously housed or "protohomeless," those whose pay a proportionally large percentage of their income for housing leaving their others basic needs unmet (Stone, 1990), as well as families who subsidize their housing costs by doubling-up with friends and relatives (Rossi, 1989). These people are at great risk of becoming homeless in the near future.

Families with children are the largest and most rapidly increasing segment of the homeless population representing 30 to 40% of the total number of homeless people

nationwide and more than 50% of the homeless population in large urban areas (National Coalition for the Homeless, 1987a; Waxman & Reyes, 1987). According to the U.S. Department of Education (1992) there were over 322,856 homeless students in 1991 and 20% of them were not attending school. However, these figures did not include estimates for New York State. They also do not include the millions of "runaway" youth who are living away from their families (Powers & Jaklitsch, 1992).

A number of factors have been identified as barriers to homeless children's access to school. Residency requirements, guardianship laws, the inability of schools to obtain prior school and immunization records, an interruption in special instructional services and inadequate or unavailable transportation, all prevent many homeless children from attending school regularly, if at all (Helm, 1992; National Coalition for the Homeless, 1987b; National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 1990; Rafferty & Rollins, 1989)

#### Homelessness in New York City

Throughout 1994, the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) counted 61,798 people using their facilities at least once during the year (Brand, personal communication, October 18, 1995). Almost one-third of the City's homeless population were children within families. This does not include individuals or families who sought shelter in private shelters that were not under contract with DHS. In October, 1995, there were a total of 5418 homeless students registered on the DHS database, showing an increase from 1994. Not included in these data are preschoolers, including those with disabilities, as well as

children who have not been identified as homeless, and children who are not enrolled in school.

Between 1983 and 1987 there was a tremendous public outcry against the City's policies to provide emergency assistance to homeless families. Advocates found these policies to be, at best, inadequate, and in many cases highly detrimental to individuals' physical and mental health. Emergency shelters and hotels were publicly condemned for their inhumane conditions that intensified the trauma of homelessness and prolonged the experience rather than helping families to overcome it (Kozol, 1988; Simpson & Kilduff, 1984). As a result, transitional housing facilities (referred to as Tier II facilities in New York City) were specifically designed to provide families with a safe, supportive environment and access to social services (Bach & Steinhagen, 1987). Managed by both the public and private, not-for-profit, sector, there is a great deal of variation among the environmental conditions of Tier II facilities and the support that they provide to homeless families (Rivlin, n.d.). Tier II facilities vary in terms of the scale of the building, the amount of space shared among families, and the type and amount of social services that are provided.

New York City has developed a complex shelter system and comprehensive educational policies to help address the needs of homeless families. Families typically enter the "shelter system" by requesting shelter at their local Emergency Assistance Unit (EAU). From there they may be referred to a congregate, emergency (Tier I) shelter, a welfare hotel, a Tier II facility, or, as in most cases, some combination of placements. In a study conducted by the New York City Public Schools (1991), 75% of the students who

were homeless during the 1990/1991 school year lived in Tier II facilities, while 10% were housed in hotels, and 15% were housed in the Tier I facilities. Since Tier II facilities provide a range of family services, they present an opportunity to examine how institutional support can influence a family's ability to cope with homelessness. Therefore, these settings provide the context for the present study.

### Educational Policy and Impacts on Schooling

In New York City homeless children's access to education is sanctioned at the City and State levels, as well as by the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (Public Law 100-77). The McKinney Act was amended in 1988, 1990, and 1994 to further protect students' educational rights as well as to provide funds for supplemental services to offsets the deficits caused by homelessness (Rafferty, 1995). In March of 1987 the New York City Public Schools enacted regulations (Chancellor's Regulation A-780), which were then amended in 1990, to promote education for homeless children. In accordance with these regulations, the New York City school system tracks residency changes and school attendance of homeless children as they enter the shelter system by collaborating with the DHS. The Board of Education provides educational services, including assistance in school registration, attendance outreach and monitoring, counseling/case management, and parental involvement programs, to homeless students through the Attendance Improvement Dropout Prevention (A.I.D.P.) program (New York City Public Schools, 1991). There is some evidence that New York City's efforts are somewhat effective. Rafferty and Rollins (1989) found that 91% of the 427 New York City school-aged children included in their study were currently enrolled in school.

Obtaining access to school is just part of the struggle homeless students face.

Those who do attend school must attempt to learn under difficult conditions. Substandard and dangerous conditions in hotels and shelters prevent them from getting adequate rest or quiet to complete their school assignments. Hunger, poor nutrition, and frequent illness hamper children's ability to concentrate in school and lead to high rates of absences from school (Children's Defense Fund, 1988; Citizen's Committee for Children of New York, 1984, 1988; Kozol, 1988; Rafferty & Shinn, 1991; Waxman & Reyes, 1987; Wright, 1990). The curriculum may vary in different schools so that students may fall behind their classmates or repeat what they have already learned. The stigma of homelessness can carry a great deal of stress for students who are teased or avoided by their classmates and treated with insensitivity by school personnel (Crosson Tower, 1992; Johnson, 1992). Homeless children are often separated from their fathers, teenage siblings, and other relatives and friends who were sources of support in their lives (Children's Defense Fund, 1988; Hall & Maza, 1990; Waxman & Reyes, 1987).

There has been considerable research dedicated to documenting how homelessness adversely impacts upon children's intellectual growth and psychological development (Rafferty & Shinn, 1993). The findings of these studies consistently indicate that large numbers of homeless children exhibit developmental delays, particularly in the area of speech, but also in social skills and gross motor and fine motor abilities (Bassuk & Gallagher, 1990; Molnar, 1988). They also identified a high incidence of behavioral problems among homeless children including withdrawal, aggression, restlessness, sleep disorders, short attention span, shyness (Bassuk & Rubin, 1987; Molnar, 1988),

inappropriate social interactions with adults and strangers, being overly protective of siblings, and hoarding food (Molnar, 1988). On psychological measures homeless children were found to have high incidence of depression and anxiety (Bassuk & Rubin, 1987; see Rafferty & Shinn, 1993).

These studies seem to confirm that large numbers of homeless children are exhibiting a range of serious problems. What is less clear, however, is if these developmental deficits and behavior disorders are acute stress-related responses to homelessness, or if they are related to chronic conditions that existed prior to that experience. Developmental regression, withdrawal, depression and aggression are all among the behaviors that characterize children who are undergoing stress and grief (Gewirtzman & Fodor, 1987; Jewett, 1982; Johns & Johns, 1983). By assessing children in the midst of a devastating trauma, it is difficult to determine whether these behaviors are a "normal" stress reaction or indicative of a more pervasive problem. Studies comparing homeless children to housed children having similar economic backgrounds have shown that poor children, in general, exhibit similar problems, although the extent of the problems may vary in each population (Rafferty & Shinn, 1991; Molnar, Rath, Klein, Lowe, & Hartmann, 1991).

Studies of the educational impacts of homeless students have found that homelessness places children at risk of school failure. Rafferty and Rollins (1989) found that homeless children attending New York City's public schools had higher rates of absenteeism, lower achievement test scores, and higher grade retention rates than the average citywide rates. Rafferty & Shinn (1991) cited several other studies which

indicated that homeless children have high grade retention rates. Children living in poverty have historically scored lower on achievement tests, and are retained more in grade, and are more frequently identified as having learning disabilities or psychological problems (Committee for Economic Development, 1987; Gartner & Lipsky, 1993; Schorr, 1988). Homelessness then adds to the risk factors of children living in poverty.

The findings that large numbers of homeless children exhibited high levels of psychological and behavioral disturbances or do not do well on standardized achievement tests are not surprising in light of the conditions and experiences these children have endured. What is more surprising are the numbers of children, who may be in the minority who, nevertheless, seem to be coping with the trauma of homelessness. What is it about these children's lives that allow them to resist the overwhelming stress of homelessness? The current research on homelessness offers little insight into this question. However, the body of research on stress, coping, and resiliency provides a conceptual framework for understanding children's responses to homelessness.

#### Childhood Stress and Educational Achievement

Stress has been described as "any event in which environmental demands, internal demands, or both tax or exceed the adaptive resources of an individual, social system, or tissue system" (Monat & Lazarus, 1977, p. 3). Stressful experiences are necessary in order to develop effective coping skills to deal with the inevitable problems encountered throughout life. In fact, all life changes represent some source of stress, but it is the unexpected and adverse events that present greatest sources of stress (Cohler, 1987; Johnson & Sarason, 1979).

Sources of stress encompass a vast array of events and situations. Researchers usually differentiate between major life stressors and stressful events encountered on a daily basis (hassles). Both types of stress have an effect on the functioning of the individual (Wertlieb, Weigel, Springer & Feldstein, 1987). Some researchers have argued that the duration of stress is more damaging than its source (Cohler, 1987; Fisher, Kokes, Cole, Perkins, & Wynne, 1987; Murphy, 1974). Multiple, chronic stressors that are difficult to control have been considered the most detrimental to child development (Earls, 1986; Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny, & Pardo, 1992; Schorr, 1988).

Major life stress and chronic stress have impacts upon children as well as adults. In fact, children may experience stress more powerfully than adults since children have little control over the source of stress in their environment or ways of reducing stress, they do not readily understand that they are reacting to stress, and under stressful conditions the adults in their lives may withdraw rather than give the child extra attention (Jalongo, 1985). There is evidence that children's perception of and response to stress changes with age and is different for boys and girls (Rutter, 1987; Wertlieb, Weigel & Feldstein, 1987). Wertlieb et al., found that older children were more likely than younger children to seek information in attempts to cope. They also found that girls tended to seek support from others and boys did not. Instead, boys' coping responses were more likely to focus on the self. Rutter indicated that boys tend to act out more than girls in response to stress which leads to a chain of negative interactions and more stress.

Sources of stress in childhood include poor physical health (admission to a hospital, disabilities, chronic illness); family trauma (death of a family member, divorce,

family instability, admission to foster care or other residential institutions); economic stress (unemployment, poverty); and environmental stress (relocation, crowding, noise, substandard housing conditions, and community violence). There has been a tremendous interest in how stress affects children's adjustment and academic achievement. There has been considerable research on the separate sources of stress that are related to homelessness, including mobility (Kealy, 1982; Lindblad & Johnson, 1988; Perrodin & Snipes, 1966; van Putten, 1974; Whalen & Fried, 1973), family breakup (Guidubaldi & Cleminshaw, 1983; Roy & Fuqua, 1983; Wallerstein, 1987) crowding (Evans, 1978; Loo, 1978; Parke, 1978; Saegert, 1978, 1981), poverty (Committee for Economic Development, 1987; Schorr, 1988) and the school environment itself (Grannis, Fahs, & Bethea, 1988).

**Mobility:** In a society as mobile as ours, it is not surprising that social scientists have tried to determine whether relocation is detrimental to children's development. Maris (1975), Fried (1963), and Walker (1991) have described relocation as an experience of profound loss, and people's responses to relocation as grieving or mourning. Children, as well as adults, experience grief associated with relocation (Bowlby, 1980; Jewett 1982; Jalongo, 1985). While relocation can be a traumatic event for children, one that requires a period of adjustment, researchers have assumed that children adapt quickly and there are no long-term consequences (Cornille, Bayer & Smyth, 1983; Jalongo, 1985). The ability of children to adjust positively to a move is influenced by age and gender (Donahue & Gullotta, 1983; Smardo, 1987), the circumstances surrounding the move, and parental

attitudes (particularly the mother's) toward the move (Jalongo, 1985; Levine, 1966; Marchant & Medway, 1987; Pederson & Sullivan, 1964; Smardo, 1987).

**There is no simple relationship between relocation and school achievement.**

Relocation has been measured differently from one study to another. Some included long distance moves only (Perrodin & Snipes, 1966), or highly mobile groups such as military or corporate families (Blair, Marchant & Medway, 1987; Whalen & Fried, 1973). Other studies focused on school changes rather than residential changes (Greene & Daughtry, 1961). As a result, there are conflicting findings. Some studies have shown that mobility positively affects school achievement (Greene & Daughtry, 1961; Perrodin & Snipes, 1966), negatively affects school achievement (Kealy, 1982), and has no effect on school achievement (Blair, Marchant & Medway, 1987; Schaller, 1976).

Mediating variables including race, socioeconomic status, and the child's intellectual ability or level of school achievement prior to the move, played an important role in how mobility affected achievement. Students who were high-achievers prior to the move or who scored above average on intelligence measures, students whose parents were professionals and were moving due to a career change, and those who tended to move long-distances obtained higher school achievement scores than their non-mobile counterparts (Greene & Daughtry, 1961; Perrodin & Snipes, 1966; Whalen & Fried, 1973). In contrast, students who scored low on intelligence measures or were performing below average in school prior to the move, students coming from low-income families, who moved more frequently within the same city, tended to do show a decline in school

achievement following a move (Levine, 1966; Lindblad & Johnson, 1988; van Putten, 1974; Whalen & Fried, 1973).

Demonstrating the complex relationship between achievement and mobility van Putten (1974) found that overall, Black students were much more negatively affected by moving than White students who were residing in a financially similar neighborhood. However, Black students whose parents were professionals showed achievement gains with increased mobility.

Lindblad & Johnson (1988) found that among children who had moved within the same city, from a different city, or did not move, only those who had moved within the same city showed a significant decline in achievement. They also found that higher income students and White students were less affected by moving than low-income students or Black students. Black males from low-income households were most negatively affected by moving.

The findings from these mobility studies have been consistent with the conception of how stress affects children. They suggest that mobility in itself does not negatively affect achievement, but mobility combined with other stressful conditions does. Therefore, the context of the move may be more important than the move itself.

Based upon the mobility literature, we can predict that increased mobility will negatively affect the academic achievement of homeless students since these students come from low-income families and are experiencing a great deal of stress. In addition, it is likely that constant moving does not allow for the process of adaptation to occur that is essential for coping and adjustment. Instead of moving into a home, homeless students

typically move into a series of temporary settings, that could prolong the stress that is associated with relocation and possibly drain their ability to cope effectively with relocation and the demands in each successive setting.

Crowding and Noise. Researchers interested in how physical settings affect people's behaviors have found that crowded and noisy environments adversely influence the cognitive and emotional functioning of children (Evans, 1978; Loo, 1978; Parke, 1978; Saegert, 1978, 1981). Nursery school children reacted to increases in the number of children in their classroom with behavior changes--decreased motor activity, withdrawal, anger and distress (Evans, 1978; Loo, 1978). Evans and Loo each noted more passive play and withdrawal as attempts to reduce environmental stimuli, and anger and distress as reactions to aversive stimuli that children could not control.

Children living in high-density homes are exposed to more uncontrollable social interactions, activity, and noise. High levels of noise and crowding at home had a deleterious impact on children's school achievement and social behavior (Parke, 1978; Saegert, 1978). The ability to control stimulation has emerged as an important factor in assessing the impact of noise and crowding. The availability of a room where child could obtain privacy (Parke, 1978) or easy access to the outdoors (Saegert, 1981) lessened the negative impact of crowding on cognitive development and social behavior.

Many of the aberrant behaviors cited in observations of homeless preschool children (Bassuk & Rubin, 1987; Citizen's Committee for Children of New York, 1984; Molnar, 1988) were similar to the behavior of children in the crowded nursery school classrooms (Evans, 1978; Loo, 1978). Facilities for homeless families range from

emergency facilities that accommodate hundreds of people in one room to those in which each family is given an individual room or apartment. Of these facilities, even the better designed transitional housing does not provide adequate privacy for children to study or to escape family activity (Rivlin, n.d.). These factors all have consequences for educational success.

**Family Trauma.** Research on the relationship between changes in family structure and childhood stress has focused on three types of events--those that remove a parent from the family setting (death or divorce) (Guidubaldi & Cleminshaw, 1983; Roy & Fuqua, 1983; Wallerstein, 1987; Wertlieb et al., 1987), those that remove the child from the family setting (foster care or institutionalization) (Rutter, 1987), and those where an illness limits the parent's ability to provide a supportive environment for the child (Anthony, 1987a, 1987b; Fisher et al., 1987; Seifer & Sameroff, 1987).

The loss of a parent is a very traumatic experience for a child (Bowlby, 1980; Jewett, 1982). In addition to the initial experience of grief and mourning, single parenthood creates stress for children due to the loss of the financial resources and the additional caregiving which a second parent may provide (Mulroy, 1994; Polakow, 1993). Some psychologists have argued that unresolved grief associated with parental loss in childhood can create psychological problems in adult life (Bowlby, 1980; Jewett, 1982). Others have indicated that long-range effects after a loss are likely to occur only if there were problems prior to the separation or loss of the parent (Rutter, 1987). The ability of children to adapt to parental loss may be a function of "contextual factors", such as gender and age (Roy & Fuqua, 1983; Wallerstein, 1987), the temperament of the child and

past experiences of stressful life events (Garnezy, 1986; Rutter, 1987; Wertlieb et al., 1987).

Social and economic support are important mediating variables that influence effective functioning following a divorce or separation (Guidubaldi & Cleminshaw, 1983; McAdoo, 1982). Guidubaldi and Cleminshaw found that children of divorced parents performed better in school when there was an availability of relatives (including non-custodial parent's in-laws), and friends, as well as paid childcare support. Academic achievement was also positively related to the mothers' educational and occupational level. Children who become homeless often are separated from the supportive adults in their lives, as well as their friends.

Socioeconomic Status and Race: Poverty is both a complex and potent source of stress. First, it creates conditions for families and children that induce stress--poor health, crowded or deteriorated housing, and unsafe neighborhoods. Secondly, a lack of financial resources limits one's control over stressful events and seriously restricts the available options one can employ to manage stressful situations (i.e. moving to a different neighborhood) (Belle, 1983; Shumaker & Stokels, 1982). Third, unlike stress related to major life changes, poverty is often a chronic source of stress. Poverty puts children at a tremendous risk for school failure (Levin, 1985; Schorr, 1988). Race and economic status are factors that strongly predict dropping out of school, poor performance on achievement tests, and being diagnosed as learning disabled (Committee for Economic Development, 1987; Levin, 1985).

Although there is a close relationship between race and poverty in the United States, race can be perceived as a separate source of stress (Gougis, 1986; McAdoo, 1982; Ogbu, 1986). McAdoo reported that Black middle-class families experienced moderate to high levels of continued stress. While some stressors were described as recent life changes, the most potent and constant stressors they reported were racism, discrimination, and economic isolation. Ogbu (1986) has argued that the underachievement of "castelike minorities" is clearly related to the internalization of institutional discrimination. That is, Black students are disillusioned regarding the real value of schooling, since to succeed in school they must identify with the White system. At the same time, the unequal distribution of economic opportunity limits the rewards for doing so.

School as a Source of Stress: School itself may be a source of stress for children. In a longitudinal study of stress in an intermediate school in New York City (Grannis et al., 1988), the most frequent source of stress reported by students was general school disruption, followed by academic troubles, and direct assault. Students who experienced a great deal of school stress had lower levels of academic achievement, self-esteem and morale, felt less in control and reported more physical complaints. In addition to students, teachers in virtually every classroom reported a pervasive climate of school stress. Experiences of stress were compounded by events in both the teachers and students lives outside the school. In contrast, Rutter (1987) described how positive school experiences were able to mediate the effects of a stressful home environment. Horowitz, Springer and Kose (1988) also found that homeless students had more positive attitudes toward school

than students enrolled in a dropout prevention program or housed children who were in regular classrooms, suggesting that their school environment provided them with a positive, supportive setting. Rivlin (1990) has argued that the act of going to schools adds a sense of normalcy to homeless students otherwise chaotic life.

Taken together this body of research demonstrates that stressful events cannot be studied in isolation. Instead one must consider the impact of multiple stressors as well as the presence of mediating factors in understanding people's responses to trauma (Garmezy, 1987).

### Coping and Adaptation

In order to understand the effects of stress it is necessary to examine the process by which people attempt to neutralize and live through the experiences causing them discomfort or grief. This process, coping, "refers to efforts to master conditions of harm, threat, or challenge when a routine or automatic response is not readily available (Monat & Lazarus, 1977, p. 8)." People typically cope with stress either by attempting to change the condition causing them stress or by attempting to reduce the emotional experience of the stress.

Coping is learned throughout the developmental process (Murphy, 1974). Children will have different ways of dealing with stressful events depending upon their age. Although young children have little ability to control the sources of stress in their lives, beginning in infancy they attempt to control their environment through bodily movements or crying (Murphy, 1974). By the time children reach third grade they have developed an understanding of those events which cause them anxiety or unhappiness and

are aware of their behaviors as ways of coping with these unpleasant events (Wertlieb et al., 1987).

Successful coping and personal adaptation are possible only if an individual possesses the skills or abilities to deal with the demands of a particular situation, if the person is motivated to meet those demands, and is able to maintain "psychological equilibrium" (Mechanic, 1974). Coping is enhanced by successfully overcoming tasks or events that are stress-inducing. In contrast, repetitive failures form a base of anticipation for future failure, ineffective performance, and inadequacy (Garmezy, 1986; Murphy, 1987). Contextual factors in the physical or social environment also promote the successful development of coping strategies.

Demands and stresses ... must be within the range of the child's ability to master them. They are more likely to lead to growth, rather than defeat, if the child is surrounded by familiar routines and a predictable, understandable physical and social environment. (Schorr, 1988, pp. 148 - 149)

Coping resources refer to the presence of conditions that allow a person to activate a particular coping response. These may be personal resources (health, morale, problem-solving skills, personality dispositions) (Lazarus, Averill, & Opton, 1974), social networks (Belle, 1983, Cook & Weigel, 1983, McAdoo, 1982) and economic or institutional resources (Cook & Weigel, 1983; Folkman, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1979; Hutchison, Searight, & Stretch., 1986). Obtaining support in responding to one stressor helps to alleviate the impacts of the others (Earls, 1986; Guidubaldi & Cleminshaw, 1983; Rutter, 1987; Schorr, 1988). Coping options are a product of social structure (Mechanic, 1974). For example, one's ability to overcome a stressful experience through problem

solving is partially dependent upon whether our educational institutions are preparing people to solve problems. Motivation is dependent upon society's incentive system. Coping resources are not evenly distributed throughout society. The availability and quality of a variety of services is considerably better for those with financial resources (Folkman et al., 1979). Therefore, individual coping responses must be studied in relation to the social context and people's range of options.

#### Vulnerability vs. Resiliency

The term "vulnerability" has been used extensively in the field of psychology to refer to children who have a greater probability of developing psychological illness (Anthony, 1987a). Resiliency or invulnerability refers to a capacity for individuals who are exposed to deleterious circumstances to withstand and succeed despite them. Interest in the area of resiliency evolved from longitudinal studies of vulnerable children who, contrary to the predictions of the researchers (Anthony, 1987b), adapted and thrived in adulthood. Drawing from the review on stress and coping discussed in the previous section, vulnerable children are those exposed to life stress; resilient children are those who after being exposed to life stress have been able to cope successfully with it. The focus of the resiliency literature is on the long-term impact of childhood stress on development into adulthood (Anthony 1987a; Anthony 1987b; Cohler, 1987; Earls, Beardslee, & Garrison, 1987; Fisher et al., 1987; Garnezy, 1987; Murphy, 1974; Rutter, 1987). This literature stresses the importance of examining how children successfully overcome the impacts of different stressors, and outlines the conditions under which this is possible.

In looking at individual differences in people's reactions to stress, resiliency can be placed at the positive end of the pole with factors that protect the individual from stress, and vulnerability can be placed at the negative end of the pole with factors that increase a person's risk (Rutter, 1987). Although personality dispositions (temperament, sense of control, self-image, self-efficacy) may contribute to the development of resiliency, conditions external to the individual (family structure, economic resources) also make a substantial contribution (Garmezy, 1987; Rutter, 1987). As such, it would be inaccurate and misleading to present resiliency as a general trait of some individuals. All individuals are more or less vulnerable or resilient depending upon the type of stress they are facing, how adjustment and competence are measured, and the period at which the person and the situation is assessed (Anthony, 1987a; Fischer et al., 1987). Often when different measures of competency are used a child may be rated as competent in one area such as school achievement, but not another, such as social behavior. Also, people develop differently so that an assessment at one point in a person's life may not give an accurate picture of that person's competencies over time (Cohler, 1987; Earls et al., 1987; Fahn, 1987).

#### Statement of the Problem

Homelessness and the circumstances that are associated with it -- forced relocation, mobility, unpredictability, and the possible breakup of the family, are among the most stressful life events individuals can experience. The lives of families who become homeless also are often filled with chronic, long-term stressors, such as poverty, crowded and deteriorated housing, unsafe neighborhoods, and racial and economic discrimination.

While chronic, uncontrollable stress is often associated with poor educational outcomes for children, all homeless children do not fail in school and some continue to thrive or make educational advances during the time they are homeless.

To understand how homeless children cope with severe life stress it is necessary to examine both the sources of stress in their lives and their sources of support. The family, the school, and the shelter system are the three institutional contexts that define the lives of homeless children. Each of these contexts provide potential sources of stress as well as potential sources of support. The present study examines how these aspects of the lives of homeless children interact and impact upon their ability to succeed in school. School success is defined as children's ability to perform at grade level on standardized achievement tests in mathematics and reading. Also included in this definition is the children's ability to stay connected or show a positive orientation to school. This study will specifically address the following two questions:

1. Do homeless students who continue to succeed in school differ from those who do not in terms of: (a) the children's individual characteristics and personal history including gender, social skills, history of academic achievement, and strategies for coping with problems; (b) family characteristics, including their social networks and support, educational and occupational level of parents, residential stability, the presence of problems or discord (i.e. divorce or substance abuse); (c) institutional support, including the family's access to and use of social services, as well as the environmental conditions of the Tier II facility; and (d) school

characteristics, including parents' and student's attitudes toward school, and the role of school in the lives of the families.

2. Are there differences between teachers' and parents' perceptions of homeless students' educational needs and the role of the school in fulfilling them?

## **CHAPTER TWO RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

To explore the complex relationships among homeless children's family life, institutional life, and school life, this study employs a qualitative research design and methodology. This chapter will describe the data collection procedures, the instruments and measures that were used, and the process used to analyze the data.

### **Methods**

Interviews from multiple sources -- children, their mothers, teachers -- provide most of the data for this research along with information from the children's school records. Informal observations of the Tier II facilities and schools described in this study also helped me to form impressions of these settings which I have included in my analyses of them.

### **Selecting the Sites**

The most difficult aspect of this research was obtaining access to the Tier II facilities. In the hope of drawing my entire sample from a single facility I initially contacted three of the larger facilities (those which served more than 100 families). Although, the administrative staff in these facilities encouraged me to apply for permission, after involving me in a review procedure that usually lasted about six months, they ultimately denied me permission to conduct my research. Their reasons for refusal had little to do with the nature of my research. For example, one facility actually granted me permission, but the day before I was to begin my interviews informed me that it was against their policy to allow any outside research to be conducted in their facilities. The

directors of the two other facilities simply commented that research was too disruptive for them or troublesome for their residents. Given the number of research studies on homelessness conducted during this period, I can fully understand and appreciate any reluctance to cooperate with yet another research study. I suspect, however, from the way they handled my requests, that they also felt threatened that the research would not benefit them in any way and might hurt them. Otherwise, why bother implementing a lengthy review process and give an impression that researchers are welcome, when they are not?

As a result I began approaching the smaller facilities. The directors of these facilities were much more open and willing to have their facilities act as the setting for my study. The difficulty, however, was locating a sufficient number of school-aged children in them. The majority of the families consisted of young mothers of infants or preschool-age children. Ultimately, a total of five Tier II facilities were selected. The strength of having several sites rather than one was that it allowed me to examine different design and programmatic features and how these affected the children. Due to the problems in gaining access to the facilities, the data collection process covered a year. The first set of families were interviewed in the Spring of 1991, and the second set in the Spring of 1992.

#### Characteristics of the Tier II Facilities

The families who were included in this study lived in five different Tier II housing facilities. Four of these were located in the Bronx and one was located in Manhattan. The sites varied by physical design, administrative procedures, and by the types of services they offered to families.

Residence A was located in a working class, residential neighborhood in the South Bronx, which was easily accessible by subway and bus. The neighborhood contained intact housing stock and small businesses. Within walking distance from the facility, was a busy commercial area, a large hospital, a community college, an elementary school and several places of worship. Residence A was a small facility, housing less than 25 families. Each family was provided with a single room furnished with beds and furniture to store clothes and other belongings. The families shared bathrooms, which were located in the hallways, as well as a kitchen and a dining/social room, located in the basement. The facility offered families an evening meal that was prepared by residents, who were paid a stipend for their work. All other meals were the responsibility of the families, who had the option of preparing them in the communal kitchen. The facility was governed by a set of rules that included a nightly curfew, hours and locations for visiting (only in the shared social space), rotating chores, and required visits to assigned social worker. Five families living in this residence were interviewed.

Residence B was located in an isolated, hilly area of the South Bronx. It was about a five minute walk to the nearest bus and there was no subway nearby. Residence B was relatively small, housing between 25 and 50 families. Each family was provided with one apartment containing up to three furnished bedrooms, a bathroom, an eat-in kitchen, and a living room. This facility implemented a strict rule and disciplinary system. In addition to being expected to follow the standard rules around curfew, visiting, etc., the families earned points if they cleaned their apartments, got their children to school on time, and participated in educational workshops. Mothers earning the most points were publicly

acknowledged. Those who did not follow the rules received demerits and could lose privileges, such as a weekend pass. Mothers and children were provided with social, recreational, and educational activities, including outings, access to tutors, and a library for children. One family living in this residence participated in this study.

Residence C was located in a run-down neighborhood in the South Bronx, where its newly renovated appearance stood in contrast to the deteriorated, abandoned buildings with which it shared the block. The facility was within walking distance to bus and subway transportation, businesses and public service organizations. Residence C also was relatively small with between 25 and 50 units. In this facility up to four families shared a suite of rooms. Each family was assigned its own sleeping quarters. The kitchen and dining/living room were shared by all families; and each two families shared a bathroom. The rule system of Residence C included curfews, set times and locations for visiting, required visits to social workers, and maintaining clean living quarters. This facility provided families with on-site daycare, trips and outings, and informational workshops for mothers. Four of the families in this study lived in this facility.

Residence D also was located in the South Bronx in a residential area, where the condition of the housing stock ranged from burnt out to newly renovated buildings. In order to reach the nearest commercial area and subway station, residents used local bus service or had to walk ten to fifteen minutes down (or up) a somewhat steep hill. This facility housed between 25 to 50 families in individual apartments. The units had up to three bedrooms, a bathroom, an eat-in kitchen, and a living room. There were rules around curfew, times for visiting, housekeeping, and social work services. Residence D

provided on-site daycare, and recreation in the form of outings and home videos viewed in the shared social room. Two of the families included in this study lived there.

Residence E was located in midtown Manhattan in the vicinity of the Port Authority. The facility was larger than the others, housing between 50 to 75 families with young children only (under 11 years old). Each unit consisted of one room with a bathroom. On the main floor, there was a public space which had a microwave oven and dining tables for families to use. Also, three times a week the facility provided dinner, which was prepared off-premises, but served by residents who received a stipend for their work. In addition to the social space, the facility housed a daycare center and had an interior playground for the children. On-site medical care was also provided. Twelve of the families included in this study lived in this facility.

### The Families

A total of 24, women-headed, families were included in the present study. The selected Tier II facilities all prohibited men from residing there, therefore, mothers were the only parent included in this study. All the women were currently unemployed and receiving public assistance. Half the women were Black and half were Latina. A total of 31 children -- 16 boys and 15 girls, between the ages of seven to ten, and grades two to four were included in this study. At the time of the interviews, the families had resided in the facilities, on average, for about five months, and had been in the shelter system for more than six months.

### Procedure for Families

The administrative staff of the Tier II facilities facilitated the recruitment of families. They identified families having children in grades two through four, gave the mothers my letter of introduction, and informed them that I would contact them. In some cases, the staff helped me to schedule interviews and set aside office space for me to work.

When each mother was contacted, the study was described to her and if she were interested, was asked to sign a consent form. Of the 26 mothers who were approached, 2 refused to participate, reportedly due to time constraints. I then scheduled times to interview the mothers and their children. The mothers were usually interviewed during the day when their children were in school. The children were interviewed in the evenings. Each interview took about an hour. I typically had to make two or more trips to the facility to complete one family interview. As a result, entire interviews with parents and children were not completed in every case. Some families were either evicted from the facility or moved into an apartment during the interval between appointments. In total, 2 of the 24 interviews with mothers are incomplete. Because I usually interviewed the parents before the children, more of the children's interview data are missing. Of the 31 school-aged children for whom I have educational data, 6 children (from four families) were not interviewed.

Interviews with mothers and children took place within the transitional housing facility either in the families' individual rooms or apartments, a public space (i.e. a shared "social room") or in the facility's administrative offices. On numerous occasions the women commented that my interview was the first time anyone was allowed to "visit"

them in their rooms. All the women spoke English well enough to be interviewed in English. One child, however, did not speak English, but her mother translated the interview questions to her and the child's responses to me. The mothers' responses to the interview questions were written directly on the interview form. The children's interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.

As a token of appreciation, parents received a sum of \$15.00 for their participation in the study and the children each received a book, which they selected from an assortment of them. Although the introductory letter and consent form both stated that the parents would receive the money after the interview, not all the parents were aware of this. A number of them expressed their surprise and commented that they would have been happy to participate without any compensation. In fact, one parent was troubled that she was "taking my money." I had to convince her that as the money came from a dissertation fellowship and that she was entitled and welcome to it as a participant in the research. However, a few mothers did express to me that money was an incentive for them to participate.

#### Procedure for Teacher Interviews

As part of the requirements for conducting research in the New York City Public Schools, my dissertation proposal and instruments were reviewed and approved by the Proposal Review Committee of the Board of Education. Once this permission was granted, I was able to contact individual schools.

In selecting a strategy for interviewing teachers, my main concern was protecting the anonymity of the homeless children. I suspected, and later found out, that teachers do

not necessarily know which students are homeless. Therefore, beginning with the two schools serving the largest number of homeless children in my study, I requested to interview a sample of teachers of second to fourth grade classrooms. I expected to obtain a sample that would consist of teachers having varying experience teaching homeless students, as well as a number of the teachers of the students included in my study. Due to circumstances beyond my control (i.e., an illness of a principal and a particularly problematic school board) I, unfortunately, was not able to obtain permission to interview in these two schools. The two schools where I ultimately received permission to interview had few of the homeless students in my study, and had a small homeless student population overall. Between these two schools I interviewed a total of 15 teachers, 3 of whom were teachers of the children in the study.

The school principal and administrative staff contacted the teachers and scheduled the interviews. They all were conducted during school hours usually during the teachers "prep period" or lunch. Two teachers were interviewed in their classrooms during regular class time. The interviews lasted between 20 to 30 minutes. In one case a teacher had to leave before she completed the interview, due to a crisis in her classroom.

#### Educational Records of Students

Educational data for all the participating students were obtained from the New York City Board of Education's computerized student databases. The mothers had to sign a release in order for me to obtain this information. Information on each child's educational history -- school transfers, attendance, grade promotion, test scores, and

referrals to special instructional programs (i.e., special education, English as-a-Second Language or bilingual education) were obtained from the student databases.

### Interview Instruments

Interview data were collected from the mothers, their children and a sample of teachers. The interview guides are described below and a copy of each one can be found in the Appendix.

#### Parent Interview

The Parent Interview used a structured, open-ended format and covered four topic areas: (1) residential history; (2) children's educational history; (3) mothers' attitudes toward their children's schools; (4) mothers' education and employment history; (5) the family's social support networks; and (6) use of social services. An adapted version of the Norbeck Social Support Questionnaire (NSSQ; Norbeck, Lindsay, & Carrieri, 1981) was used to assess the mothers' social support network. Institutional support was assessed through an adapted version of the Use of Services Questionnaire that previously was used in the New York Family Services Project, conducted by Bank Street College (Molnar et al., 1991).

#### Child Interview

The children's interview used an open-ended, semi-structured format and contained questions on their attitudes toward school, their daily routines and activities in and out of school, and their friendships in and out of school. The children also were asked to discuss their fears or worries and the ways they dealt with them, as well as sources of happiness and achievement in their lives. The children were not directly asked about their

experiences of being homeless. Instead, issues pertaining to homelessness were discussed within the context in which they were introduced by the child (e.g., having to leave their old school, having no friends). This approach provided the opportunity for the children to indicate how homelessness had an impact on the different aspects of their lives, without imposing upon them preconceived assumptions about their experiences as homeless children.

### Teacher Survey

The content of the teachers' interviews focus on their awareness of homeless students, their personal experiences with teaching homeless students, their perceptions of homeless students' problems as well as strengths, parental contact, and their knowledge of supportive school and community services for students.

### Indicators of Educational Progress

To measure children's educational progress I examined their standardized achievement scores in reading and mathematics for the school year that they were homeless. When available, prior achievement test scores and scores from other assessment measures were also examined. Other measures of educational progress included grade retention or promotion and referral to special education.

In undertaking this study I was aware of the limitations of assessing student progress based on standardized achievement test scores (Haney, 1993). However, I made this decision based on several reasons. First, it enables me to relate my research with past research on the school achievement of homeless students in New York City (New York City Public Schools, 1991; Rafferty & Rollins, 1989). Second, other measures of school

progress (i.e., grades, teachers' reports, parents' reports) are more difficult to obtain and are not reliable. Third, since I am comparing students having similar racial/ethnic and economic backgrounds with each other, test bias is not as much as an issue as if I were comparing them with more privileged students.

Students' test scores only tell part of the story of what they are getting out of their school experience. However achievement test scores that are better than average are quite revealing, more so than below average scores. That is, when a student scores below average it might indicate a lack of skills but could also be caused by a variety of other reasons -- being a poor test-taker, hunger, insufficient sleep, lack of motivation. When a child does well, however, it indicates that not only does he or she have the required skill level for his or her grade, as defined by the New York City Public schools, but that student also has been able to screen out, to some degree, the contextual conditions that can interfere with test taking. For a homeless child, one would expect that this is no simple task.

#### School Testing Data

In order to obtain baseline data on the students' educational level upon entering school I attempted to examine their initial screening test scores. All children who are new entrants to the school system are given a cognitive screening battery. The purpose of the screening is to identify children who are potentially "at-risk" of having some type of learning disability or are potentially "gifted." These children are then referred for follow-up testing to determine if special instruction is necessary.

Since 1986 the Board of Education has used the Structure of Intellect Screening for Learning and Thinking Abilities (SOI Screen) (Herman, Taleporos, Jackson, & Clive, 1989). It is considered to be less culturally and economically biased and less affected by children's prior learning experiences than other developmental tests. During the 1987-88 pilot testing (Herman et. al, 1989) the SOI was found to be correlated with standardized achievement reading test scores through third grade.

Metropolitan Achievement Test. In grades two through eight New York City students take the Metropolitan Achievement Test - Mathematics (MAT-Math) to assess mathematical achievement. The MAT is a standardized test that is customized to reflect New York City's mathematics curriculum (Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment, 1989a). In addition to the English version it is administered in five other languages: Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, French, and Haitian-Creole. Reading achievement is assessed by the MAT-Reading test in the second grade. In some schools the MAT-Reading test also is given to first-graders.

Degrees of Reading Power. New York City students in grades 3 through 10 take the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) achievement test (Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment, 1989b). In 1992, the DRP replaced the MAT-Reading test for second-graders as well. The DRP is a test of reading comprehension. DRP mid-instructional unit scores indicate the difficulty value of text children of a particular grade can read with 75% comprehension. For example, beginning reading books have a difficulty level of around 35 and the average New York newspaper has a DRP level of 67.

The Language Assessment Battery (LAB) is administered to students of non-English-speaking backgrounds to assess English language proficiency. It assesses oral and written language skills. Students who score below the 40th percentile on the LAB are entitled to receive bilingual and English as a second language (ESL) services. The Spanish version of the LAB is used for Spanish-speaking students to determine their literacy in Spanish. Home language literacy has been found to be a good predictor of English language achievement (Torres, 1989).

#### Data Analysis

For the parent and teacher interviews, the range of responses to individual questions were content analyzed. Responses from the Parent Interviews were then grouped around the themes of residential history, children's educational history, mothers' attitudes toward their children's schools, mothers' education and employment history, the family's social support networks, and the families' use of social services. Teachers' responses were grouped around the categories of awareness of homeless students, experiences with homeless students, perceptions of homeless students' problems as well as strengths, parental contact, and their knowledge of supportive school and community services for students.

The analyses of the children's interviews were more complicated. While all the children were asked the same set of questions, their manner of responding varied widely. Some questions elicited a lengthy discussion, others generated a monosyllabic reply, even after several attempts to obtain a more comprehensive answer were made. Therefore, in organizing the analyses of the interviews, I focused on the topics that each child chose to

discuss, rather than the specific interview questions. During this process one interview was eliminated. This child was a Spanish-dominant, bilingual speaker. Her mother helped to translate during the interview and to some extent interrupted the flow and integrity of the child's responses.

Each interview was loosely organized according to 13 major themes: Morning Routine; Schoolwork; Homework; Teachers; Principals; Rules and Discipline; School Environment; Relationships with Schoolmates; Friendships; After School Activities; Relationships with Family; Past Schools; and Old Neighborhood. Next, an examination of these themes across the children's interviews generated larger analytic categories. For example, information from all of the school themes were used to formulate a larger category of children's relationship to school.

The next step of the data analyses consisted of comparing and relating data derived from different sources. Achievement test score data were related to variables such as school and residential mobility, institutional support, and social support, as well as child and mother demographic data. Children's relationship to school also was related to children's school progress. Parent and teacher data were compared around corresponding themes (e.g., parental contact).

The final stage of the data analysis process involved reviewing and integrating all the sources of data for each family to determine their entire range of life stress and protective resources. A sample of cases was then selected to illustrate patterns of risk and support. A more detailed description of data analysis procedures is provided as the findings are presented.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

## **DEMOGRAPHIC AND EDUCATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILIES**

**This chapter presents an overview of the 24 families included in this study. First, family background characteristics including family composition, residential stability, and families' experiences of becoming homeless will be discussed. Second, summaries of the children's school data will be presented (See Figure 1 for an overview of family members, Tier II facilities and schools)<sup>1</sup>. Finally, family background and school data information will be compared and examined.**

#### **Family Background**

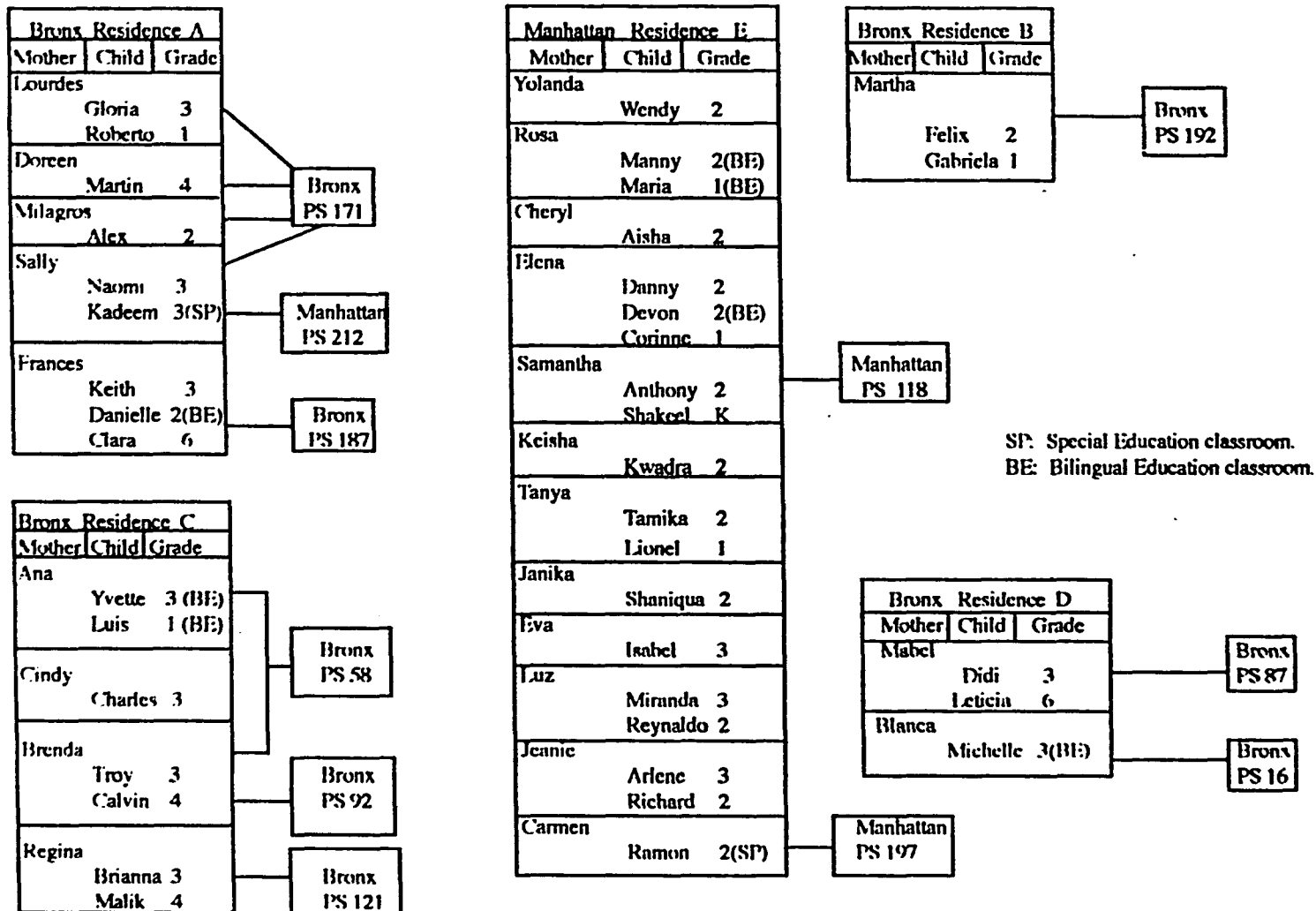
**The number of children in each family ranged from 1 to 5, with an average of 2.9 children per family. In all but three cases all the children in a family were living in the Tier II facility with their mothers. One mother had a teenage daughter who lived with the daughter's father due to the age-limit restrictions (i.e., under 16) of the facility. Two mothers had teenage sons who were incarcerated, one of whom also had a 10 year-old son who was living with her mother. With the exception of the children who were incarcerated, the parents indicated that they saw their other children at least once a week.**

#### **Mothers' Education and Employment Background**

**Overall, the women had limited educational and employment histories. Fifteen had neither a high school nor equivalency diploma (GED); two of these women never attended high school.**

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<sup>1</sup>The names of all individuals, schools, and Tier II Residences have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants of this study.



**Figure 1.** An overview of families in each Tier II facility listing the mothers, their children by grade, and the schools they attend. Children who are not in elementary school are not included.

Of the nine women who had a high school diploma, five had attended some college, but had not yet earned a college degree. About a quarter of the women had some type of vocational training, most commonly in clerical or health-related fields (e.g., nurse's aide, X-ray technician). All but three of the women had been employed in the past, generally in low-paying jobs that offered little security or advancement (e.g. food preparation, clerical, home attendant). The longest amount of time the women had worked at any one job ranged from 2 months to more than 10 years, with 2 ½ years being the average.

### Residential History

Most research on homeless families uses entry into the shelter system as the starting point of homelessness (Bassuk & Gallagher, 1990; Bassuk & Rubin, 1986; Boxill & Beaty, 1990; Molnar, 1988; Molnar, et al, 1991; Shinn, Knickman, & Weitzman, 1991). There is considerable research, however, that shows that for most families, entering the shelter system marks the end, rather than the beginning, of a very mobile and unstable life (Hall & Maza, 1990; Mulroy, 1995; Polakow, 1993; Shinn, et al., 1991; Wolch & Dear, 1993). Most families do not suddenly become homeless. Over a period of time, after first depleting their financial, personal, social or institutional resources to keep themselves housed, they then enter the shelter system. For this reason, any analysis of how homelessness affects children's lives must take into account the families' residential histories before entering the shelter system.

In the present study, each parent was asked to list the places they had lived beginning when the child(ren) who were included in the study was born. This period was chosen for its impact on the children's subsequent schooling. In some cases, particularly

when parents had difficulty recalling all the places they had lived, children's educational records were used as a supplemental source of information on family mobility. For the most part, the parents' reports provided more detailed and informative information than the educational records.

Residential mobility among the families was generally high. On the average, the families had lived in 5 different places before entering the shelter system, with the number of prior residences ranging from 1 to 10. Molnar et al. (1991) found the average number of moves for 84 homeless families living in New York City to be 3.6, while housed families having similar socio-economic characteristics moved only 2.2 times on average. Keeping in mind that the children in this study were between the ages of seven and ten, some had moved an average of once a year throughout their lifetime. With the exception of three families who were placed directly into a Tier II facility, the families had previously resided in at least one other temporary housing facility -- emergency shelter or hotel. Entering the shelter system generally added 2 additional moves to families' mobility, making the average number of places a family lived to be 7 with the range between 3 and 13.

Although the families moved often, most (14) stayed within New York City, usually in the same neighborhood or borough. Two families moved around within the Tri-State area. Before entering the shelter system all of the parents had lived in New York City for some part of their lives. This is consistent with research on homeless families in New York City (Dumpson, 1987; Molnar et al., 1991). A third, however, had moved out-

of-state -- to Louisiana, Florida, Alabama, Ohio, or Puerto Rico -- and became homeless soon after returning to New York.

### Becoming "Homeless"

In previous research examining families' residential histories (Imbimbo & Pfeffer, 1987; Rivlin, n.d.), we found that the way people house and shelter themselves over their lives is a complicated process that is often difficult to order or categorize. Similarly we found that homelessness was a highly subjective experience, which went beyond the presence or absence of a physical space as shelter. Homelessness is also related to one's sense of being in the world and a connection to a place that has been defined as home. Definitions of homelessness do not usually take into account this phenomenological aspect (Stronge, 1992). In setting out to define homelessness for the present study, I recognize that my definition also does not take into account what it means to be homeless from the perspectives of the participants.

For the present study, I have defined homelessness as the period when a family leaves their permanent, primary place of residence and enters into a temporary, less stable living arrangement, in which they are no longer the primary resident. The primary place of residence may be their own apartment or their parents' apartment (if they had never lived anywhere else). Temporary living arrangements include entry into the shelter system, as well as periods of doubling-up (living with more than one family, whether they are relatives, friends or strangers from whom families rent a room in an apartment). Although the family may be technically housed with others, in many cases shared living arrangements eventually lead to entry into the shelter system and resemble, in some ways,

characteristics of the shelter system (i.e. lack of permanency, privacy, and control, as well as crowding) (Molnar et al., 1991; Shinn, et al., 1991; Wolch & Dear, 1993).

The families in this study, on average, spent about two and a half years, since their children were born, in a state of homelessness. However, there was tremendous variation among the families ranging from four months to over seven and a half years. Eleven of the families had been homeless for less than one year, and seven had been homeless for more than three years.

Generally, the time a family spent in the shelter system accounted for a small portion of their entire period of homelessness, with most of the time spent doubled-up with others. Time spent doubled-up ranged from two months to over seven years, with the average amount of time being slightly more than two and a half years. Six families who had initially lived with the mothers' parents, entered the shelter system directly without doubling-up with anyone else. This makes sense since the strain of living in a shared housing arrangement is often what leads families to enter the shelter system in the first place. Also, many families tend to double-up with parents, and if these families started out in their parents' apartment they might not have any other options. Shinn et al. (1991) found a similar pattern of relocation in their study. Of the 24 families, 6 had been in the shelter system before.

Families often listed multiple causes that contributed to their losing their housing and entering the shelter system. Some focussed on a recent incident, while others included factors spanning over a longer period.

I had my own apartment for two years. I almost was raped there so I gave it up. I was living with a friend who rented out one of her rooms. It was too overcrowded there and there was too much going on all the time. The kids started to fall behind in school. Then she got a dispossess so we entered the shelter system. [Marta, who first moved after the death of her husband]

Table 1 lists the events which triggered one or more moves, eventually leading to the shelter system. Since women listed more than one reason, the responses exceed 24. These findings are comparable with other studies which describe events leading to homelessness (Shinn et al, 1991; Maza & Hall, 1990; Mulroy, 1995; Polakow, 1993; van Ry, 1992).

<b>TABLE 1 CRITICAL EVENTS LEADING TO HOMELESSNESS</b>	
Reason Given	Number of Responses
Crowding -- leading to poor physical conditions and interpersonal conflict.	14
Separation from Spouse/Partner -- due to death, abandonment, domestic violence, infidelity, criminal activity	10
Eviction by private landlord or city agency	7
All other effort to obtain housing failed	6
Personal Safety threatened due to building conditions and/or community violence	5
Moved to NYC from out-of-town and could not find housing	3
Deterioration in mental or physical health	1

Many of the women began to move toward homelessness when they were separated from their spouses or partners. Physical or emotional abuse as well as the partners' involvement in crime or drugs were among their reasons for leaving. Only two women, however, entered a shelter specifically for battered women prior to entering the shelter system. Other women recounted how they began moving around after the death of or abandonment by their spouse.

Families became homeless when they were evicted from their apartments, because they could no longer afford the rent, or afford to live elsewhere. Many women described their frustrating and fruitless attempts to find housing on their own before entering the shelter system, and how their failure at securing a place resulted in homelessness. Many women explained how living doubled-up with friends or relatives often led to interpersonal conflicts which eventually became intolerable.

**I moved back to New York [from Puerto Rico] to get away from my husband. I moved into a friend's apartment. I had problems with the friends I was living with. They were giving my kids a hard time. [Ana, mother of two, victim of domestic violence]**

**I wanted my own apartment. I would get it faster if I went into the system. I couldn't get along with my mother. My son was treated like he was one of my brothers and not my son. It was my mother's house so I had to follow her rules. [Cindy, mother of one, who never lived on her own]**

**Miami was too hard. I couldn't find a job and welfare wasn't enough. I came to New York to find a job like babysitting. My sister was here. I lived with my sister. She has four kids. I had problems with my sister. We were fighting all the time. I couldn't do anything about it. My sister thought her kids could never do wrong. She locked me out of the house a few times. I couldn't live like that anymore. [Lourdes, mother of two, moved after becoming separated from her husband]**

Dangerous building and community conditions were also associated with homelessness for these families. Some women felt threatened by the violence and crime in and around their building.

The rent was so high and I was scared to go out of the building. It was a bad neighborhood. There were shoot-outs every day. [Elena, mother of three, who previously homeless]

I was robbed at gunpoint. It was getting really dangerous for me and the kids. There were shoot-outs all the time. [Carmen, mother of two, when she first entered the system]

Others felt that the housing conditions of the building were so bad that it put their families at risk.

[We left] because of the slum landlord. The ceiling caved in, there were rats. The people upstairs could look right into our house. The landlord went to jail and we moved out. [Janika, mother of three]

The landlord didn't want to fix anything. It was nice and neat at first, then everything started falling apart. It was unsafe. The windows were falling out, they broke twice and during a time when it was cold. There was leaks in the ceiling. [Carmen, the second time she entered the shelter system]

In several cases, the mothers' inability to negotiate the complex administrative procedures of city agencies, such as Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), led to the families' eviction and homelessness.

The IM [Income Maintenance] Center closed our case. I owed back rent and welfare wouldn't pay it. The landlord wouldn't give up the document I needed to re-open the case. I was sent to find out if he was the real landlord. I found out he wasn't, but he was collecting the rent money. Welfare refused to give him money, so he padlocked the apartment. The police said we had to go to housing court. HPD said I would be considered a squatter if I stayed there, so I had to leave. [Keisha, mother of three]

I squatted in an apartment for about one and a half years in the Bronx. It was across the street from my mother's apartment. I kept going to HPD. I applied for

Section 8. They wouldn't give it to me because they wanted information on my kid's father, which I didn't have. HPD said I had to go to a shelter. Then I was living with my mother. She got another, smaller apartment and there was not enough room. [Eva, mother of five]

The families in this study generally had long periods of residential mobility and instability which often covered the children's school careers. In addition, many of the families were experiencing the related stresses of community or family violence, crowded or deteriorated housing conditions, and other problems associated with poverty, all of which were likely to have an impact upon their children's schooling.

#### Children's Educational Background

Of the 24 families, a total of 31 children -- 16 boys and 15 girls, fell within the target ages (seven to ten) and grades (second to fourth) to be included in this study. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the children's characteristics. Using school records compiled by the New York City Public Schools, educational data were obtained for each of these 31 children.

Gender	N	Ages	N	Grades	N	Home Language	N
Boys	16	7 yrs	5	Second	17	English	25
Girls	15	8 yrs	14	Third	11	Spanish	1
		9 yrs	8	Fourth	3	Both	5
		10 yrs	4				

Almost all of the children in this study were English-speakers, with the exception of one child who spoke Spanish exclusively and one who spoke both languages but was

Spanish-dominant. Most of the parents reported English as the language spoken at home, while some included both English and Spanish. In five cases there were discrepancies between the parents' reports of their home language as English and the children's school records, which listed it as Spanish. The processes by which a school labels a child a Spanish speaker, and the implications of this decision are discussed below.

At the time they were interviewed, the children were attending 11 different schools. Fourteen attended the same school located in mid-Manhattan; and two others attended two different schools in lower-Manhattan. The remaining 15 children were divided among eight schools in the Bronx, which were located in five different school districts. Only one child lived in a different borough (Bronx) from where his school was located (Manhattan).

### School Achievement

The testing histories obtained from the students' cumulative school record files were examined. Overall, the children showed the same pattern of poor achievement that has been previously documented among New York City homeless students (New York City Public Schools, 1991; Rafferty & Rollins, 1989). Of the 23 students who have testing data, only 5 (22%) scored at or above grade level (i.e., the 50th percentile) on the DRP reading test, and only 6 (26%) scored at or above grade level on the MAT mathematics test. There were seven children who had no test scores in reading or mathematics for that year, because (a) they were absent on the days the tests were administered; or (b) they were exempt from testing as Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. According to citywide DRP scores in 1991, 47% of second-graders, 35% of

third-graders, and 49% of fourth-graders scored at or above grade level (i.e., the 50th percentile); and in 1992, 50%, 32%, and 42% scored at or above grade level, respectively. Citywide MAT math scores in 1991 for second, third, and fourth-graders were 62%, 59%, and 64%, and in 1992, were 63%, 57%, and 61%, respectively.

In order to compare the children's academic standing with family background characteristics, the children were placed in three groups according to their test scores: "Above Average", "Below Average", and "Poor". Students in the Above Average group scored above the 50th percentile on citywide tests in either reading or mathematics during the year they were homeless. Students who had two years of test scores also showed evidence of gains in reading or math during this period. Those in the Below Average group scored in the 41st to 22nd percentile range in either reading or math. Students in the Poor group all scored below the 20th percentile on both the reading and math tests.

Above Average: This group was composed of seven students, six of whom were girls. Four of the students were third-graders having two years of test data. The other three were second-graders having one year of test data. All the second-graders scored above the 50th percentile in both reading and math. Looking at the third-graders achievement over time, all four demonstrated gains in reading and mathematics, although in two cases their percentile rank remained below grade level or decreased from the previous year.

Generally, it is easier to identify gains than to interpret decreases in test scores. The reason for this is that sometimes (as in the cases above) a child's national percentile

score may decrease while their mid-instructional unit score increases. The national percentile score compares the child's performance to the national norm sample; the mid-instructional unit score looks at mastery independent of the norm sample. Therefore, in the case of the two students mentioned above, while they seemed to increase subject knowledge, the third grade students in the national norm sample, had mastered even more in third grade. (New York City Public Schools, 1991b).

Below Average. The nine students in this group were divided between seven boys and two girls. There were five second-graders, one third-grader, and three fourth-graders. Comparing math and reading scores, most of these students (6) showed uneven proficiencies, with a difference of at least 10 percentile points between subjects. One such student, who was in a special education class, scored at the 34th percentile in math and only the 3rd percentile in reading.

There was more than one year of test data available for the third and fourth graders, making it possible to look at progress over time. Three of these students scored highest on their achievement tests while in the second grade, while one student's scores increased between second and fourth grade (no third grade scores were available). However, all the students' scores remained below grade level.

Poor. This group is composed of eight students -- five girls and three boys. Five of these students were second-graders and three were third-graders. Of the third-graders only one had a record of prior test performance, which denoted academic problems beginning in grade one. Although one other third-grader had no prior achievement scores,

her English proficiency test scores in grade one did not indicate any language problems at that time.

**Limited English Proficient Students.** Four students were exempt from testing due to their LEP status. Of these four students, only two, according to their mothers, spoke Spanish as their home language. Both had lived in Puerto Rico for some period of time. One of these students, a third-grader, scored high on the Spanish version of the Language Assessment Battery. Since language skills usually transfer from one language to another (Cummins, 1993; Torres, 1989), it is a promising sign to have a third-grader with strong language skills in her home language. The student's records indicate that she was given the English instead of the Spanish version of the MAT math test, making her poor test scores uninterpretable. The other student, a second-grader, was initially tested on the LAB when she entered kindergarten in New York City. Her test scores on both the Spanish and English versions of the LAB were very low. In kindergarten these are basically speaking and listening tests. Children scoring low on both the Spanish and English versions of this test are considered "alingual" or "comparably limited", meaning that they have not developed basic language skills in any language. These students are considered to be at great academic risk. When this student moved back to New York from Puerto Rico she continued to obtain low LAB scores in English, but was not retested in Spanish. Therefore, it is difficult to get determine if there has been any improvement in her language development.

The remaining two LEP-exempt students appear to have been erroneously classified. Both had Hispanic surnames, but did not speak Spanish, nor did their parents.

In fact, one student scored well above the cut-off point for English proficiency (70th percentile), demonstrating adequate English skills for his grade, and should never have been exempt from testing. The second student was "comparably limited" having a history of language skill deficiencies in both languages. He was given a Spanish reading achievement test at the end of the school year and scored poorly on it.

These students' test histories tell us as much as, if not more, about their schools as they do about the children. It is puzzling that in one school a Spanish-speaking student, who was enrolled in a bilingual program, was given the Math achievement test in English, while in another school, two English-speaking students were not tested because they were considered not proficient in English.

Absent Students. Three students were absent from school the days the tests (and make-up tests) were administered. Two of these children were 2nd-graders and had no prior test history. The third child who was absent on testing days was a third-grader who had tested below average in reading and math in second grade.

#### Achievement Characteristics of Children's Schools

Since the children attended a total of 11 different schools, it is extremely difficult to determine whether school achievement could be attributed to attending any particular school. Of the 11 schools the children attended, seven had achievement rates that were lower than the citywide averages. Three schools had comparable or higher rates than the city. One school had higher rates for the third grade, but lower rates for the fourth. Six of the seven children in the Above Average achievement group attended a school with achievement rates higher than the citywide averages; and five students attended the same

school (which I will refer to as PS 118 in Manhattan). Six of the nine children in the Below Average group attended a lower than average school. However, six of the children in the Poor group attended schools that had achievement averages that were comparable or higher than those citywide.

Another interesting characteristic of PS 118 in Manhattan, was that of the 11 schools, it served the most homeless students. In October 1991, 17% of the student population were students living in temporary housing. However, as will be discussed in the next Chapters Four and Five, the temporary housing facility which was the source of the schools' students had exceptional educational services. Therefore, one cannot necessarily attribute the relative success of the students to the school alone.

In the following chapters I discuss school effectiveness from the perspectives of the families in this study. A broader definition of effectiveness, one that involves the meaning and role of school for homeless children, is examined.

### School Stability

Based on school records and parents' interviews, school changes throughout the course of the children's educational history were examined. The children had been in their current school for an average of 1.8 years, with the amount of time ranging from 2 months to 5 years. Overall, the children changed schools frequently, averaging a total of four schools. Some children, however, had never attended any school other than their current school, while others attended up to six different schools. Age was not a factor in school change. The oldest children (i.e., 10 year-olds) changed schools, on average, 2.3 times, followed by 7 year-olds, who averaged 2.6 changes, 9 year-olds, who averaged 3.6

changes, and 8 year-olds, who averaged 3.9. One reason was that the older children were more often allowed to travel alone to go to school than the younger children, which made it easier to keep them in their original schools, as long as they were not too far. New York City Public Schools (1992) citywide data on elementary school stability also show more instability among younger children than those in the higher grades.

Entry into the shelter system is considered to increase school mobility (Rafferty & Rollins, 1989). In the present study, the children changed schools, on average, once when they entered the shelter system, although some did not change at all and others changed up to three times. The greatest numbers of school changes generally occurred beginning when the families' first became homeless, prior to their entry into the shelter system. For many of the families, entering the shelter system was preceded by a number of moves, which would typically lead to a change in the children's school as well.

Overall, the highest achieving children had a more stable school history than the lower achieving students. They spent the longest amount of time in their current school and changed schools less frequently (see Table 3).

### Attendance

According to the 1992 New York City School Profiles, elementary school students generally had high attendance rates, about 90.5% in 1991 and 1992. The average attendance rates during the 1990 - 1991 and 1991 - 1992 school years was 91% for 2nd and 3rd graders and was 92% for 4th-graders. The students in this study had lower attendance rates than the citywide average (an average of 80%). Among the 31 students only seven attended school 91% of the time or more.

**TABLE 3  
EDUCATIONAL INDICATORS BY ACHIEVEMENT GROUP**

Achievement Group	Average Years in School	Average Schools Attended	Average School Changes	Average Yearly Attendance	No. of Over-age Students	No. of Students Retained	Students Having Preschool
Above Average (n = 7)	2.6	2.0	.86	84%	2	0	6
Below Average (n = 9)	2.1	3.3	1.1	81%	2	0	7
Poor (n = 8)	1.25	4.75	1.6	79%	4	1 1 (SE)	3
<b>TOTAL (N = 31)</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1 2 (SE)</b>	<b>19</b>

**Note.** SE is used for Special Education

Past studies of homeless students in New York City (New York City Public Schools, 1991; Rafferty & Rollins, 1989) have similarly found lower school attendance rates for homeless students than the citywide average. Average attendance rates for students decreased slightly for each achievement grouping with the Above Average group having the highest rate and the Poor group the lowest.

### Retention

Whether a child was retained (held-back) in grade is an important indicator of future educational risk. Children who are over-age for their grade are more likely to drop out of school (Grissom & Shepard, 1989). Previous studies have shown that large numbers of homeless children attending the New York City Public Schools are over-age for their grade (Dumpson, 1987; New York City Public Schools, 1991; Rafferty &

Rollins, 1989). Byrnes's (1989) study of retention decisions shows how homeless children can be easily targeted for grade retention. In addition to "lack of basic skills or academic failure" and "emotional immaturity" principals and teachers also felt that "excessive absences" was an appropriate reason to require children to repeat a grade.

Eight of the children in this study had been retained in grade prior to their current school year. One child (Kadeem) was ever retained twice. Looking at retention by achievement grouping we find that two children in each of the higher achieving groups were previously held back a grade. In the Poor group, however, four of the eight children had been retained. During the year the children were in the shelter system, only one child, who was in the poorest achieving group, was held back. Therefore, although many of the students were over-age for grade, they tended to repeat a year before entering the shelter system.

Parents gave various explanations for why their children were held back. The most common reason offered by parents was lack of school progress, followed by behavioral problems.

They felt that she wasn't ready for the third grade. She threw chairs at teachers, threatened children. She's not unruly, but says what's on her mind. She did a total turn-around this year. [Mabel, discussing Didi, a high-achiever]

Both repeated first grade. Kadeem repeated because his behavior was bad. They said he was acting bad and his reading wasn't up to par. But I know it was only because of his behavior. Naomi couldn't read. Then we found out she had dyslexia. [Sally, both children are poor achievers, Kadeem is in special education]

She was quiet. She wouldn't ask questions when she didn't understand something. They kept her back to give her a chance to get over her shyness. It helped her. [Regina, mother of Brianna, a high-achiever]

Despite the mounting evidence that shows grade retention alone does not improve and often exacerbates educational problems (Holmes, 1989), principals, teachers, and parents continue to support it (Byrnes, 1989). Byrnes also found that low-income parents were more likely to feel that retention decisions should be left to the teachers, rather than the parents. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the present study mothers either supported or did not question the teachers' decisions to retain their children.

I think that they all will repeat this year. They all better repeat. I don't want them to pass. They are not in any situation to pass. Keith can't read or write and they pass him anyway. They wasn't supposed to do that. Danielle is doing the best, but I think she should repeat, too. [Frances, both children were poor achievers]

Marta, whose son Felix is achieving below grade level, was the only parent who attempted to fight against the teacher's recommendation to keep her son back the previous year. She enlisted the help of a school counselor to observe her son's in-class progress and behavior. Although the counselor could not detect any reason for this decision, Felix was held back anyway.

### Special Education

In New York City, children who have been identified as having special needs due to physical, developmental, or emotional problems, that significantly limit their ability to succeed in school, are placed in self-contained special education classes, or are pulled out of their regular classrooms to receive specialized instruction in "resource room" classes. In the present study, two children (Ramon and Kadeem) were receiving special education in a self-contained classroom. Both children were evaluated for and enrolled in a program while they were living in an emergency shelter prior to moving to the Tier II. Two other

children (Keith and Troy) were placed into a special education program by the time the family left the Tier II facility. All the children receiving special education services were boys, who reportedly had a history of behavioral problems in the classroom. Gartner and Lipsky's (1993) review of special education show how the assignment of "learning disabled" and similar labels to students results in large numbers of low-income students being inappropriately placed in special education classes.

The educational outcomes for children within the special education system are largely negative (Gartner & Lipsky, 1993). However, the mothers in the present study felt that there were some positive benefits for their children. Kadeem's mother felt that it helped to control his temper and fighting impulses, but also felt that academically, it was not challenging enough. Ramon's mother, who initially was skeptical of special education, acknowledged that her son's attitude toward school had changed for the better since entering the program.

They're doing a great job. He likes it. He gets up by himself, gets dressed to go to school. He didn't do that before. The school was different in Staten Island. That's when he was evaluated. He has a learning disability. He couldn't keep up, wouldn't listen to the teacher or pay attention. His teacher didn't have enough patience. She was an old lady. She gave him a test and a counselor talked to him. I figured with all that it must be true [that he needed special education]. I wanted the best for my son, so I agreed to it... [Since then] I've seen an improvement in his reading. He reads more words than before. I never had a complaint of him fighting in this school, in [his last school], but not this one. [Carmen]

Considering the classroom context, it was not surprising why these two children seemed to fare better in special education. Their new classes are much smaller with only five or six other students and there are at least two classroom teachers. Both also

received individualized counseling as part of the program. Such intensive, individualized instruction would be likely to benefit most children.

**Reported Inappropriate Grade Placement.** In five cases the mothers reported that their children's were placed in classes that did not correspond to the children's actual grade level (i.e., that which was listed on school record data). In one school (PS 118 in Manhattan) four second-graders were in a third-grade class. In PS 171 in the Bronx, a fourth-grader was placed in a third-grade class.

Some parents believed that this placement was due to overcrowding, another felt that it was a disciplinary decision, and another felt it was an academic decision. All the children were among those who were below grade level in achievement -- two were in the Below Average group and two were in the Poor group (one had no test scores). The mothers of PS 118 students indicated that their children had initially been in a second-grade class and they had not been informed by the school why the change had occurred. Therefore, in addition to school changes, these students also experienced an additional change in classroom teacher and curriculum during the year they were in the shelter system. To date, the issues of inappropriate placement and teacher or classroom changes have not been addressed in studies of homeless students (Rafferty, 1995). Kozol (1991), however, documented the high teacher turnover rates in classrooms serving children of poverty across the United States.

### **Early Educational History**

Children do not begin elementary school with the same background or experiences. Some children entering kindergarten or the first grade may already have received several

years of education in a preschool setting, while others will have received no prior schooling whatsoever. Some children come to school with the kinds of skills that better prepare them for the school setting, while others enter with deficits to overcome. Knowing more about children's early educational experiences may provide some insights into their current educational progress.

School Entry Screening Data. According to New York state law (Chapter 53), all new entrants to the school system must be screened to assess the probability of their having special educational needs (Herman et al., 1989). In order to get a sense of whether the children entered school with any exceptional strengths or weaknesses, their initial screening scores were examined. Of the 31 children, only 13 children were reported to have taken one of the Chapter 53 screening tests (i.e. the SOI or Brigance), and of those only 11 had their test scores recorded on data tapes kept by the Board of Education.

There are several explanations for why so few children's screening scores could be located. The most plausible explanation is that it involves some data processing error. If school personnel made any errors in completing the test forms (or did not complete them), it would make it difficult to match these children using their school identification numbers. Another explanation could be that due to the high level of mobility of homeless children, it is more likely that they would not be screened or their test scores were lost. However, three of the children with no screening scores attended one single school for their entire educational history, while several children who attended between three and six schools do have screening scores listed.

Looking at the screening scores that were available, there appears to be a distribution of scores that would be found in the general population. Every child scored in the average range with the exception of one who scored above average and one who scored below average. There was no relationship, however, between screening scores and current educational placement. The two children who had been identified as being in potential need of special education and gifted services were not receiving any. Students who had been in gifted or special education classes initially tested within the average range.

Early Childhood Education. Among the students in this study preschool experience was common. According to parents' accounts, almost 19 of the 31 children received some preschool education, typically one year or more. This number is consistent with Molnar et al. (1991), who found that 63% of their sample of homeless children were attending such a program.

While some parents named the type of program their children attended (i.e. Headstart, pre-K offered by the New York City school system) others did not. All the children had attended kindergarten by age five, with the exception of one boy who began the first grade when he was six years old. The children who were among the poorest achievers were the least likely to have attended some preschool program. This finding supports the growing evidence that early childhood education programs help to build children's resiliency and protect them from the conditions created by poverty, including homelessness and community violence (Garbarino et al, 1992; Molnar et al., 1991; Polakow, 1993). The quality of the program is also very important. Polakow

documented educational practices in some early childhood education settings (including Head Start), which she felt placed the children, particularly the children of poor, single mothers, at educational risk.

#### Summary of Family Background Characteristics and Educational Outcomes

An examination of the demographic characteristics of the families in this study demonstrates that there are a number of factors in these children's lives that can adversely affect their educational outcomes. These include long periods of residential instability, often combined with homelessness, which can result in frequent school changes. In addition, many of the children are dealing with the loss or separation from their fathers and/or other loved ones, as well as recovering from the stresses that typically precede such a separation.

However, the distribution of the children's achievement scores suggests that these conditions have not deterred all the children from functioning effectively in school. At least some of the children continued to show educational progress over the time they were in the shelter system. Also, the children showing the least progress, seemed to have had problems even before their family entered the shelter system. Compared to the other children they more frequently changed schools, repeated a grade, or were absent. They also were less likely to have attended preschool.

In addition to the factors that children bring into the school context, the children's educational records also revealed problems within the school system itself that could contribute to students' educational decline. Instances where educational policies seemed

not to be implemented correctly, such as identifying a child as possibly gifted but not acting on that information, could adversely affect children's educational outcomes.

Examining children's performance on achievement tests provides a limited account of their school experiences. The next three chapters go beyond educational testing and closely examine the different facets of the school experiences of homeless children. The meaning and role of school will be analyzed in depth from the perspective of the children, their parents, and teachers.

## **CHAPTER FOUR GOING TO SCHOOL: FACTORS RELATED TO SCHOOL STABILITY**

Regular school attendance is a critical component of the educational process. In a recent review of the impact of federal policy changes on homeless students' access to education, Rafferty (1995) found that across the United States, and particularly in New York City, homeless students continue to show low levels of school attendance. The barriers which prevent homeless children from regularly attending school include residency requirements, guardianship laws, missing school and immunization records, and unavailable transportation (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 1990; Helm, 1992). This chapter will examine how homelessness affects school mobility, particularly with regard to school selection and school attendance.

### Selecting a School

In March of 1987 the New York City school system enacted regulations (Chancellor's Regulation A-780) to promote homeless students' school attendance and to ensure that they were provided with appropriate educational services. According to these regulations, parents can choose to keep their children in their prior schools or transfer them to a school in the vicinity of the facility. Parents who decide to keep their children in their former school, are provided with public transportation passes for their children, although not for themselves. Due to the lengthy process involved in obtaining appropriate educational programs for children with special needs, students attending special education programs are provided with a school bus to attend their previous schools.

The decision to keep children in their former schools or transfer them to a new school was not an easy one for the mothers whom I interviewed. They recognized the benefits and advantages of keeping their children in the same school -- continuity of teachers, curriculum, and friends. However, among the 25 children who were interviewed, only 5 remained in the same school once the family moved to the Tier II facility.

#### Factors Affecting School Transfers

Accessibility to school was the determining factor in whether children continued in their same school or transferred to a new one. All of the children who remained in their same school either lived within walking distance of their school after moving to the Tier II facility, were able to take public transportation alone, or were provided with a school bus. Some parents attempted to keep their children in their original schools, but eventually changed them when the burden of transportation became too overwhelming.

Their other school was too far. I took them [there] twice from here. It was too much hassle so I changed schools. [Luz, mother of Miranda and Reynaldo]

In an earlier study, Rafferty and Rollins (1989) identified similar factors that prevented parents from allowing their children to remain in the same school.

Consistent with the findings of national studies (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 1990; Helm, 1992), insufficient documentation, missing school records and problems accessing special educational services delayed school enrollment for four of the children.

Wendy missed a month when we moved from New Jersey to my mother's house. I was afraid to go back to the house and get her papers, her birth certificate [to

register her for school]. [Yolanda, who became homeless due to domestic violence]

The first time we were in the [shelter] system he missed a week. This time he missed a month. I couldn't find a [special education] placement for him. [Carmen, mother of Ramon]

### Educational Outreach Services

A number of mothers said that they appreciated the school enrollment assistance that was provide by supportive service providers -- Board of Education employees, including school and district personnel, and staff from the Tier II facilities. These individuals helped parents to transfer their children to new schools, to link them with transportation to keep them in their former schools, as well as to find appropriate educational programs for those who needed them.

They were very helpful. The man from the BOE provided bus passes within three days. When he changed schools he got all the paperwork taken care of. I liked the way it was taken care of. [Doreen, mother of Martin]

They couldn't find a place for him because he goes to special education. They had to find a certain school that would take him. I kept talking to a lady from the BOE at the 3rd Street Shelter. She helped a lot. She tried to find a placement for him. [Carmen, mother of Ramon]

Some parents mentioned, however, that they were not informed of their school enrollment options, or that the information or assistance they did receive was inadequate.

The Board of Education recommended it. They said it was the only school that would take them. People here don't help you with anything. You have to do everything on your own. I know that I'm a grown woman, but sometimes I need help. [Frances, mother of Keith and Danielle]

Rafferty and Rollins (1989) similarly found that parents often were not informed that they could keep their children in their former school, and this had an impact on their school

placement decisions. A little more than half (58%) of the parents who were informed of their right to choose, transferred their children to new schools, while the parents who were not informed, all transferred their children.

Once the mothers made a decision to transfer, their children remained in the new school for the rest of the school year, regardless of how the family felt about the school. As is discussed in the next chapter, some mothers felt that the new schools did not meet their children's needs. At the same time, they also felt that it would do the children more harm than good to move them again before the end of the school year. Some mothers did not anticipate the negative outcomes that transferring their children to a new school would have. The mothers of Martin and Troy both expected their children's school attendance to improve as a result of their transferring them. Instead, they felt it became worse. Although the new schools were closer, the boys were frequently absent due to truancy or disciplinary suspensions.

His old school made me transfer him because he was late all the time. He was missing too many days. Here I wonder if he's in school or not... [He's missed school more], since he's been in the new school, but not in the old school. He runs away... The school says to keep him home. [He also goes for] appointments for psychological evaluations. [Doreen, mother of Martin, who had an attendance rate of 58%]

Troy is absent a lot. He gets suspended or he refuses to go. When he goes to school he has to sit in the office. [Mother of Troy, who had an attendance rate of 53%]

In these cases, the children's attitudes toward their school seemed to have much of an impact on their school attendance.

### The Impact of Changing Schools on the Children

Enrolling a child in school may be burdensome to parents, but it is the children who bear the consequences of their parents' decisions. Every time a child changed schools he or she was forced to adapt to a new set of teachers, classmates, curriculum, and rules. Even changes in the physical characteristics of the school required a period of adjustment. For example, Manny, who moved to New York from Florida, felt threatened by the large, New York City school buildings.

And then I was in another school... But I was scared there, because it was all big and stuff. And there's nobody in the hallway -- no grown-up people. And if you have to go to the office, you have to go to the fifth floor, and I was on the second. You have to walk up all of those stairs... I hate to be in big schools, cuz in big schools, you're like, I'm afraid to get lost in them or something. Then you'll be wandering, and then all of a sudden, you just snap, and then you're in like another part of the school or something. [I] like a nice, medium-sized school.

Many children had developed an attachment to their past schools, and expressed a sense of loss when they had to change.

I want to go to my old school. Everything [was better]. All the teachers were nice. I learned my multiplication. I learned how to read. And I learned how to count money. I learned how to tell time. I was there since September 10th. So when school finished, then I came over here when school started in January... Everybody was my friend over there [in my old school]. [Gloria, who is now attending her second school since becoming homeless]

What made the situation worse was that many children had to go through the experience of being the "new kid" in school. This was potentially frightening for children, since newcomers were often targeted for intimidation. In some cases, after an initial "initiation" period the children were able to establish new relationships.

When you go to like a new school, the kids be starting with everybody. Like this one, the first day I went to it the kids used to start with me. Then I used to tell the

man, right. They used to punish them.. [Now] a lot of kids are trying to help me in that school. How to do work and everything, how to read, how to do timestables. [Keith, who attended six different schools, has been in his current school one year]

Luz described how her son, Reynaldo, initially had fights with the other children and did not behave well in school. With some effort, he was eventually able to better adjust to his new school.

My son's behavior has changed. Before it was not so well in school, because he didn't like the school and wanted to go back to his old school. The teacher sent notes about his behavior. I talked to him. Two weeks later the teacher said his behavior improved. I asked him why and he said, "I did it for you." But he still doesn't like the school. [Luz]

Other children, like Troy or Martin, had more problems adjusting to their new schools. Like the other children, they felt singled out for being new. But after many months these problems escalated rather than resolved themselves.

They hit people too much. They start trouble... They think I'm a sucker probably. [They fight] only the new kids. To know if they can't fight. [Troy after five months in current school]

Not only does each school change bring with it a period of adjustment, but consecutive school changes can have a cumulative effect on a child's school experience. Keith, who is now in the third grade has attended a total of six schools, felt it deprived him of an adequate educational base as well as friends.

I don't remember none of [my old schools]... In Brooklyn, I went to school... three schools, all different. One was farther than the other one... I don't know how to read that good... Because I been in three different schools. One in Brooklyn, one in my other shelter and this one. I went to a lot of schools... I don't get to meet that much kids... My mother's going to change me to another school.

Other children who had frequently changed schools, had problems recalling their past schools. They described their school history as a series of moves, which were not particularly memorable, but seemed to represent an ordinary aspect of their lives.

I went to 21 first, PS 5, then St. Johns, but my first school before 21 was PS 202... I only know four boroughs - Bronx, Queens, Manhattan, and Brooklyn... I don't know where in third [grade] because I got left back twice... [in] second. [Kadeem, who attended six schools by grade three]

I want to go back to my old school -- in the Bronx -- PS 1. I mean in Brooklyn Bridge, the Bronx. Brooklyn Bridge, and the school is PS 1 -- in Manhattan... I was in third in the other school. I was in second in the other school [in Brooklyn]... I mean in third grade in PS 1. And I have to go to this school in third grade. I have two different schools. I have PS, I forgot that school, but I was in second grade that time. And then, the other school, I was in third grade, and this school I'm in third grade, too... First grade? I never been at first grade. Only when I was a little baby. Only when I was a little, little baby. [Kadeem's sister, Naomi who is also in third grade]

Having positive feelings about a particular school was not necessarily related to the length of time a child spent there. Both Brianna and Didi, who had never attended any other school, looked forward to transferring once their parents moved out of the Tier II facility.

I'm going to finish out the school this year. It don't make sense for me to leave this year and then get left back. So, I'm going to finish this one and then go to a new school. [I'm] glad. My mother told me that it's at Castle Hill, that's where I'm moving to. The only thing I'll miss about the school is my two best friends. [Brianna, grade 3, in current school for five years]

Conversely, transferring to a new school provided some children with what they considered to be an improved educational experience. Second-grader Wendy attended a total of five schools and her classmate Tamika attend four. Both girls attended their current school for a year or less, but were happy there and wanted to remain.

When I move out of here, I'm not going to go to that school anymore, I'm gonna go to a different school. I don't want to go to a different school. That school is the best school in Manhattan. [Wendy]

I want to stay here for ever and ever and ever... until 1000 and 55 days. [Tamika]

Homeless and precariously housed families, who have little control over their residential changes, take a risk every time they change their children's schools. School changes always require the children and families to make new adjustments, but, in some cases, they present new opportunities for the children. It is impossible to determine whether a new school will suit a child before he or she is enrolled there. The parents who are fortunate enough to find a school that they and their children like, and who serve their children well, do not, however, often have the option of keeping their children in that school.

#### Factors Affecting School Attendance

The second dimension of educational access is represented by school attendance. Homeless children have been found to have irregular school attendance (New York City Public Schools, 1991, 1994; Rafferty & Rollins, 1989). Rafferty and Rollins attributed poor school attendance to frequent changes of residence while in the shelter system and, possibly, a lack of supportive services in some shelter facilities. J. Jackson of the New York City Public Schools also found that the more students changed schools, the higher their rate of school absences (personal communication, January 27, 1989).

As noted in the previous chapter, most of the students in this study had lower attendance rates than the citywide average of 91% for second- and third-graders (New York City Public Schools, 1992). In this section, I attempt to identify what factors

contributed to absenteeism by looking at mothers' accounts of their children's school attendance, and by examining the children's attendance patterns before and after entering the shelter system.

### Examining Absenteeism

To assess children's school attendance I examined mothers' reports of the frequency of and reasons for their children's absences. I also analyzed the children's individual school records. Neither school data nor parents' reports alone provided a completely accurate accounting of children's school attendance. Taken together, however, these data provided a great deal of information about how homelessness affected school attendance.

Accuracy of School Record Data. Although maintaining attendance information on homeless students is mandated by the New York City Public Schools, as well as by the New York State Department of Education, two students had no attendance data listed on their school record file. Others had attendance data for the time they were in the shelter system, but none prior to that period. In some cases, this was because the children were new entrants to the New York City school system. Other children had attendance data for some, but not for all of the time they had been in the shelter system. In these cases, attendance data were missing for the period prior to the families' placement in the Tier II residence. This is significant since parents reported that their children were more likely to miss school when they were living in emergency facilities or hotels, rather than the Tier II facility.

**Accuracy of Parents' Reports.** Parents' reports of their children's attendance did not correspond to the attendance records of their children. Of the 24 parents, only 1 parent provided an estimate of their children's school absences that corresponded with their attendance data. Eighteen parents underestimated their children's absences, and the remaining 5 parents said they could not give an estimate. The smallest discrepancies between parents' accounts and school records were between 5 and 10 days. Rafferty and Rollins (1989) similarly found that parents' estimates of absences were lower than school records.

There are several explanations for the finding that mothers under reported their children's absenteeism. It is possible that mothers, while moving around, lost track of the days their children were absent. Since the mothers were all interviewed in the Spring, they could have easily forgotten the times their children missed school early in the year. Some mothers may have knowingly under reported their children's school absences, especially if they were excessive. At best, poor school attendance reflects poorly on a parent. At worst, excessive absenteeism can be used to suspend a family's public assistance benefits or to place a child in foster care (as was the experience of one parent I interviewed).

### **Changes in Attendance Patterns**

Overall, 17 of the children had some attendance data on their records for different periods of residential change. Of these children, seven had more school absences in the Tier II facility than in their prior living situations, whether permanent or temporary housing. The mothers said that the increased absences were due to the family being in the

shelter system. Two mothers specifically attributed the frequent absences to illness triggered by the conditions of the Tier II.

My son got sick here seven times... my daughter got sick five or six times since December. There's a lot of dust here, is all I can think of -- no ventilation. I've gotten sick, too -- the flu, colds. My daughter had bronchitis. My son got infections and lost his hearing in one ear. The kids were never sick like this before. [Luz, mother of Reynaldo whose attendance was 80%, and Miranda, whose attendance was 76%]

She's out, she's always sick [here]. If it's not one thing it's another. [My children] are all always sick. [Cheryl, mother of Aisha, whose school attendance dropped to 73% in the Tier II from 82%].

Of the 10 children who had data from the time they were living in "permanent" housing, 6 showed improvements in attendance after moving to the Tier II facility. In some cases, the changes were dramatic. During the 1991 school year, while living in the Tier II residence, Devon attended school 90 to 95% of the time. Two years prior, before his family entered the shelter system, his reported attendance was 34%. His mother explained that when she was working, she had problems getting the children to school on time. It is possible that Devon's tardiness accounted for some of the absences recorded on his school records.

They were late a lot when they went to PS 91, when we were living in our own apartment. I used to work and I couldn't get them up on time. [Elena, mother of Devon]

Keith and his sister Danielle showed similar changes. While living in the Tier II residence Keith attended school from 75 to 84% of the time. The prior fall, before entering the shelter system, his attendance was only 66%. The school year before that one he only attended school 57% of the time. Danielle's attendance was even worse, in her first year

of school (kindergarten) her records show that she attended school for only eight days for the entire school year. The following year it increased to 75% and remained at that level while living in the Tier II facility.

School absenteeism seems to reflect the level of disruption in a families' lives. Reynolds, Weissberg, and Kaspro (1992) found a strong relationship between negative life events and school absences for first and second-grade students. The present study also suggests that life events that precede homelessness can be as disruptive or even more disruptive than living in a Tier II facility. Several mothers described how stressful events in their lives -- illness, poor housing conditions, affected their ability to get their children to school regularly.

In our last apartment [they were absent more] ... I couldn't keep money to send them to school. I had health problems -- a heart attack and a stroke. It had a hell of an effect on me. I gave up hope. It affected the children, too. I was always sick and stopped caring. I've improved here. [Mabel, mother of Didi, who had a 79% attendance rate in the Tier II and no previous attendance data recorded]

In our last apartment [my son's] attendance was bad. He was sick a lot because there was no heat or hot water. [Brenda, mother of Troy, no attendance prior to the Tier II was reported]

For many families the period of time when they had first lost their housing but had not yet been placed in the Tier II was particularly stressful. The mothers described how doubling up with friends or family, or being moved around within the shelter system contributed to school absences.

[They missed school the most] at my girlfriend's house. They used to go to sleep late. There was a lot of music and a lot of commotion. [Marta, mother of Felix, who had a 91% attendance rate in the Tier II but no prior attendance record]

Eight children had attendance data from prior shelters or hotels in which they had lived. Of these children seven had higher attendance rates in the Tier II residences than in the other shelters. For example, Tamika's family became homeless for the first time during the 1989 school year. During this time they lived in a hotel and Tamika attended school 77% of the time. The following year, once the family obtained housing, Tamika's attendance increased to 82%. During the 1991 school year, the family entered the shelter system a second time. While living at the Catherine Street shelter, Tamika attended school 77% of the time. After moving to the Tier II residence, her attendance rose to 95% for the remainder of the Fall and 85% for the Spring.

Higher absentee rates seemed to be associated with greater instability. Parents were more like to transfer their children to local schools once they moved to a Tier II facility. For example, when Charles's family moved to the Catherine Street shelter in lower Manhattan during the Spring of 1989 his mother attempted to keep him in his original school in the Bronx. During this period his attendance dropped to 69%. In the Fall, his mother, Cindy, transferred him to a local school and his attendance rate increased to 89%. Unfortunately, Charles' attendance was again disrupted, this time due to family problems. The second part of that school year Cindy entered a residential alcohol treatment program and Charles went to live with his grandmother. His attendance for the Spring of 1991 dropped back down to 69%.

He missed [three weeks] all in the last month. He was staying with my mother [while I was in the hospital]. When living at Catherine Street [he was absent the most]. I took him to P.S. 72 [in the Bronx] for the first two months. He missed school and was late a lot. [Cindy]

A number of the children who lived in unstable conditions prior to entering the Tier II facility had no attendance records for that period. Their mothers indicated that this period was characterized by high absenteeism. For example, Kwadra attended school 84% of the time while living in the Tier II. According to her mother, before entering the Tier II, her attempts to keep the family sheltered, which included Kwadra and her siblings aged 3 years and 16 months, prevented her from getting Kwadra to school regularly. However, attendance data reflecting her first two months of the 1991 school were missing.

We bounced among different hotels -- at first three days at one hotel, then back to EAU, then two days at a hotel, then back to EAU, then one day and one night at a hotel, then back to EAU. Finally, I stayed at EAU. We stayed at the LaGuardia [hotel] about a total of 10 times. I went to my IM worker to try and find a place that was stable -- like a Tier II. They turned me down. A friend told me to go to my Community Board and they made calls to get me in here. My [IM] worker's supervisor said we got what we deserved. He was very arrogant. He didn't care if we were living in the street or not. My [IM] worker would have done it, he would have just put me in [a Tier II]... I had problems getting her to school [in Harlem] from the hotels [in Queens]. While in the system I used to take her as often as I could from Queens. It started wearing on her. She had hardly no sleep... She missed about two weeks [of school] when we were moving in the system. She missed the most school when living at the LaGuardia from September to November. It was very strenuous. That's why I searched for a stable place, for her to go to school. [Keisha, mother of Kwadra]

Shaniqua's mother described a similar experience. Shaniqua had a recorded school attendance rate of 88% while living at the Tier II. Her mother reported that it had been much worse before that time (although it was not recorded on her records). Again, the family, which included two small children (a two and four year-old), was left to float around the shelter system.

At the Anchor Hotel there was no school around. It was not permanent. You didn't know where you would be the next day... She missed two weeks altogether

when we were moving between the Anchor Hotel and the EAU [Emergency Assistance Unit]. [Janika]

Living in Tier II facilities seemed to increase families' stability, which in turn, promoted school attendance. In addition, the attendance of children living in Tier II facilities was closely monitored by staff. As one mother pointed out:

Here, they buzz me in the morning if they don't see the kids downstairs by 8:30. [Blanca, mother of Michelle]

The Tier II facilities were also more likely to provide supportive services to promote attendance.

I didn't get carfare to take them to school when I was at the hotels. I got it here [in the Tier II]. [Luz, who stayed in three different hotels before entering the Tier II]

Consistently poor attendance over a child's educational history seemed to do more harm than irregular attendance over a short period of time. Of the nine lowest achieving students in this study, seven of them had poor school attendance prior to entering the shelter system. The absence of comprehensive school attendance data makes it difficult to compare these rates with students who were doing well. However, Isabel, who had a 69% attendance rate, while in the Tier II facility was the highest achiever of all the children in the study. Her mother reported that her attendance had been good prior to the family's becoming homeless.

### Summary of School Stability Issues

The findings presented above add a new and unexpected dimension to what is known about homeless students' attendance patterns (Rafferty, 1995). While it is true that homeless students had higher than average absentee rates, a number of them actually

demonstrated an improvement in attendance while in the shelter system. This suggests that families who eventually become homeless are living in precarious conditions that are having an impact on their children's education before they enter the shelter system. Also, for a number of students, attendance data that corresponded to the most unstable period of their homelessness was not accounted for in their school records. Therefore, the attendance figures reported for homeless students by researchers like Rafferty and Rollins (1989) may even be worse than they appear to be.

Getting to school every day represents the first challenge homeless students face. In the next two chapters I will describe children's experiences once they are in the school setting.

## **CHAPTER FIVE THE ROLE OF SCHOOL: EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES**

The important, stabilizing role that schools can play in the lives of children experiencing severe life stress, has been documented extensively (Garbarino et al., 1992; Quint, 1994; Rutter, 1987). According to Garbarino et al., schools must possess certain qualities in order for them to be used effectively by children undergoing stress. First, they must provide the children the opportunity to develop close, mutually reinforcing, and growth-enhancing relationships with adults. In supportive schools the teacher's role includes the functions of instructor, caregiver, nurturer, and role-model. Second, supportive schools provide structure and control. Children, whose home lives are filled with trauma and chaos, as is often the case when families lose their homes, particularly benefit from a school environment that is structured coherently -- where they know what to expect and what is expected of them. Third, it is essential that the curriculum is developmentally appropriate to allow children to master new academic and/or social skills. Schools that serve homeless children, or any children who move frequently, must promote flexible instructional strategies that can adapt to the children's individual and varied needs. Finally, all these qualities must be present within an overall school culture or climate of caregiving and learning.

In this and the next chapter, I will discuss the nature of the children's relationships to their schools, and the extent to which the schools included in this study were able to provide a supportive environment for the children. This chapter will cover the children's

and their mothers' attitudes toward school, including teachers, schoolwork, classroom management and school disciplinary practices.

### Children's Attitudes Toward School

One of the primary objectives of this research is to examine children's attitudes toward school -- how they are formed, if they are affected by homelessness, and if they are related to school achievement. Twenty-five children were interviewed in depth with regard to how they felt about their current and past schools. An analysis of whether or not the children liked their schools did not yield very clear or particularly meaningful results. First, it was the exceptional child who presented a clearly positive attitude toward their school -- "I want to stay here forever and ever and ever... until 1000 and 55 days." - or a clearly negative one -- "I hate that school! I rather go to... any school, boy." Most of the children's responses were more ambivalent, such as the child who commented that: "The one [school] that I hate the worst is PS 118," but later stated "I feel good about being there."

On a closer examination of the interviews, I uncovered a more complex set of attitudes toward school. Three distinct themes emerged from the data: (1) school as a place for learning; (2) school as a "battleground;" and (3) school as a confusing or chaotic place. These categories were based upon multiple characteristics, which are explained below. The children were categorized based upon their dominant orientation toward school.

### School as a Place for Learning

The 11 children (8 girls and 3 boys) who fell into this category all emphasized the learning aspects of school. They provided detailed descriptions of their schoolwork and school routine, their preferences in academic subjects, and their academic strengths and weaknesses. These children tended to show an appreciation for challenging or difficult schoolwork, were test conscious (teacher-made and citywide), and explained their homework and their processes for completing it. Those who had attended more than one school were conscious of the differences in academic requirements or standards.

Shaniqua, like all the children this group, showed a love of learning and found this to be the best part of school:

And then when you eat breakfast they let you go outside and play until the bell rings, then you line-up and go to your classroom and do your work. I do my class news, then I do my math, my sentences, and then I do my cloze\*\*, and then.. sometimes.. at 2:00 we have gym. 3:00 come and then we go home, and then I go to P.A.L... We have fun. I like school a lot... [I like] when we have work to do. When we do that reading, and our math and our cloze. And I like when we go to gym... And we get to go to music... I like everything in school... Sometimes it's hard, and sometimes it's easy. My timestables, my division, and that other thing -- it's math, it's hard... Today we took a test and that one was easy... And then when we go to school tomorrow, we gonna take another test and that one, my mommy said, that one is going to be hard.. [Reading] is not hard. I like to read. And I like to do my math problems. I do it all, when they hard... Today, every day I get homework... Sometimes we get a math homework if we don't finish. We get sentences out of the quiz. And we gotta do the cloze. So, sometimes, if you be noisy in the class, she give extra. But, in school, we have lots of fun... Sometimes, when you finish all your work in school, the teacher lets you do most of your homework in school, then you don't have that much to do when you get home... Like, in my old school, you gotta do all your work, and then you gotta get some more work, and more work. And at 3:00, if you don't finish all that work, we gotta do all that work for homework. Then sometimes, we get to color, then

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\*\* Completing a response to a question by filling in the blank. It is often used to assess reading comprehension.

we gotta do more work, after that. Cuz she want us, she said right, you know what she said?: "You know why I'm giving you all this work?" -- cuz she want us to pass that test, the citywide test. [Shaniqua, a high-achieving, second-grader in PS 118 in Manhattan]

Didi, who does not necessarily like her school, describes how learning is important to her and is firmly grounded in her school life.

Morning routine then reading... and script practice, do your cloze power... Do reading, do math, math-remedial, reading lab -- only when we don't have reading lab is on Thursdays... [I like] math, gym, recess, remedial math, reading lab a little... [I like] math harder, reading easier... Some books I can read and some books I can't... You get quick quizzes all the time... [I don't like] science, that's it. You got all those dead insects... I get home by 4:00... after I eat my snack I start on my homework.. that takes me about.. I stop about eight or nine. [I get] about nine pages of everything. Math remedial -- sometimes she gives four of those, plus the spelling words -- write three times each, sentence and meaning. And I don't be able to go outside either... Sometimes, my mother will say "time for you to go to bed". So she do some of it for me... and my teacher don't even notice. [Didi, a third-grader who excels in math but struggles in reading, in PS 87 in the Bronx]

### School as Battleground

Six children, four boys and two girls, fell into this category. These children generally described school as a series of confrontations or "battles." All of these children described conflicts that they had with their teachers and most had them with the principals as well. They felt that they were treated unfairly, were singled out (picked on) by the teacher and principals. These children also tended to fight with their classmates, or did not develop friendships in school. Although some of these children expressed an interest in learning, they were generally unable to pursue these interests in their current school due to the hostile climate they perceived there. All of them mentioned that they currently had problems with their schoolwork. This is not surprising, since it would be difficult for them to focus on schoolwork when their energies are directed toward defending themselves

from or attacking perceived enemies. These were the only children whom I interviewed who admitted to not doing their homework, and who purposely missed school. Some admitted that they were "bad" in school. All of the children in this group preferred their former schools to their current ones, although some of them also seemed to have problems in previous schools as well. Martin, a fourth grade student placed in third grade in PS 171, apparently had a better attitude toward school before he was transferred to his current school.

I hate that school! -- the principal, the teachers.. I hate Mr. Savage and I hate Ms. Dewey. Always threatening me. My teacher threatens me, that she's going to call my mother and I say "I don't care cuz you're not going to call my mother". I get mad and I take things and throw it at her. She gets me mad. She tells me to do everything and the other kids get a break... Mr. Savage, he don't get me in that much trouble, but I just hate him... Ms. Lugo [is an] old principal. She like tell me when I get into fights that I'm always starting everything, and I ain't. So she calls my house and my caseworker. And I don't care. And then when I get home I be getting in trouble, OK... I don't like [the kids in school]... I hate them, they booty. They butt. They don't know how to do anything. I don't like this school... I was doing bad in that school, because I hated that school. I was bad to the teacher. I don't care. I'll just get left back all my life... My homework, I don't want to get into that... If you don't do your homework -- we have this homework chart, if you don't do your homework, she makes a line. If you're absent she makes a "A". If you do it she makes a star. I have most absent. I have more absent than I do right... I like my old school, P.S. 68, whoo, whoo, whoo. Oh, that school is so beautiful. I love it. I love it. I love my teacher. I loved that one. They were close to you.. yeah, close to you... And the principal was beautiful, I loved him. I loved that school boy. I just love looking at it.

Troy was having problems in his old school, but his new school, PS 58, seems to have made them even worse.

I don't like school, that's it... School is whack, it's stupid, it's crazy... I fight in the bus... Don't like the kids on the bus. They ugly, and they start too much trouble... In school I throw food at the teacher. I throw it sometimes when I don't like it. Hate that place. Don't like the food... Teacher ask me if you gonna be bad or good, I say bad, she make me stand in the hallway two hours... I fight a lot. I

have a good time when I break a rule... But when I get suspended I got more freedom with my friend who don't go to school, play baseball, football... Yuk, I hate the teacher. When I fight every time she come in my way so I wanna hit her too... [The principal] he a punk. He ugly and bald-headed -- A Kojak. He laughs [at me]. I don't know [why], I think he's retarded... Homework? She give me homework but I don't do it because it make me mad. She gave me so hard stuff. That's what I hate... Hard, hard, hard, hard... [My mother] she put me in this dumb school and I hate it... [My old school] that was a good school. It more better than that school. I was in there for three years. I'm mad cuz I left. I wanna be in there for four years. We came here - - and I don't wanna go to that butt school.

### School as Chaos and Confusion

The interviews of the seven children (five boys and two girls) who eventually were placed into this category were the most difficult to interpret. These children seemed to be distracted by the events around them. The children in this group were similar to those who felt school was a battleground in that they included a great deal of discussion about the fighting and disruption going on in school, as well as teachers or principals who screamed a lot. They were different in that these confrontations were not necessarily directed at them, but going on around them. Their interviews contained little detail about the content of their schoolwork, but indicated that they were having problems in school. These children tended to prefer the recreational and social aspects of school (i.e. gym and lunch). The children who had attended other schools in the past exhibited a poor memory of them and what they had learned (or not learned) there. Malik is in the fourth grade and has been in PS 121 since the first grade. Although he expresses an interest in learning his description of his school revolves around the countless disruptions that occur and his teacher's attempts to contain the class.

The kids they be coming and the whole hallway be packed... the kids be jumping out the classroom. So then, after they jump out the classroom, then when teachers see people start to fight, the principal stop the fight. After they stop the fight then all the kids go back to the classroom. They gotta do a lot of work because they get a punishment because all the children was out of there. And then after that we eat lunch; and then upstairs in the lunchroom they start to fight, at the gym area back there, they go over there, they see the girl that was fighting, the other girl come and they start having a fight, and then all the kids be jumping on the tables, standing on the tables and they be screaming and stuff... fourth graders, third-graders, all the kids in the whole lunchroom... This other boy named Ernie he used to like to walk out of the room and come back, walk out the room and come back, until lunchtime... And one day he went in the bathroom., and he tried to jump himself out the window and the ambulance and the police came.. My teacher say that's what he deserves... Because he been doing bad stuff, he been walking out the room... When [my teacher] get mad he got like a big stick,.. and every time we be bad he.. knocks on your desk, BAM! -- and he hit it hard. And he be cursing in the room, too. He gets so mad he curse, and when he curse he curse, and after that cursing in people's face he be slamming the door.

Danielle, a second-grader in PS 187, also says she that she likes school, but seems unaware of what is going on there. She is not able to describe what her work is like, and cannot even remember the name of her teacher. Danielle has attended a total of six schools and has had two different teachers this year because she was placed in a bilingual classroom.

The teacher used to give us 20 homeworks, she did it when we were talking. Miss, I forgot her name, Miss Hare. I call her Miss Hare cuz I forget her name... She's bad, she screams... In other class, she gave us papers, and they gave it to everybody so they tell them to give it out... He [the principal] nice. He doesn't have to scream or nothing. He [the asst. principal] screams at the kids. They be having a lot of fights... Cuz I like about school, cuz you do school. What I like about school is the homework... I learn about, I forgot. What's those things again?.. Like, I forgot... Stuff that walk on the floor, that's big and so wide. You know those things that bite, that they found... I learn that all the time. I saw movies. I see a lot of movies... I don't know how to read... In the school, all the boys be having fights... They get suspended for a whole week, until June 6.

There is some relationship between what children felt about school and their academic achievement. All of the children in the highest achieving group were among those who saw "school as a place for learning." The other, lower achieving children could be found in each of the three attitude categories. Therefore, one can conclude that although it is not so important that the children "like" their schools, the school environment must at least be tolerable and legible to them. In order to do well in school a child, at the very least, must possess a certain clarity about the school routine -- a clear image about the types of activities that happen at school, a connectedness to school. However, such a "school as learning" attitude toward school is not, in itself, enough to guarantee school success.

There were also gender differences with regard to children's attitudes toward school and school achievement. The highest achieving group of students were dominated by girls (6 of 7) as was the group of children who viewed school as a place for learning (8 of 11). These findings are consistent with the literature that suggests that boys, particularly those from low-income, racial or ethnic minority groups are perceived to have more academic and behavioral problems that lead them to be retained more in grade (Shepard & Smith, 1989), referred to special instructional programs (Gartner & Lipsky, 1993; Kozol, 1991), and designated marginal roles in the classroom (Polakow, 1993). Rutter (1989) pointed out that boys undergoing stress tend to respond by acting out, which usually brings negative consequences rather than support, and leads to further stress.

### The Classroom Teacher

The classroom teacher plays a significant role in a child's school life, for however long the child is in his or her classroom. There are various accounts of the multifaceted role that teachers must play in schools serving low-income neighborhoods, and how caring, dedicated teachers are a positive force in the lives of troubled children (Diver-Stammes, 1995; Garbarino et al., 1992; Kidder, 1989; Kohl, 1967/1988; Quint, 1994). To understand the relationships between the teachers and the families in this study, both mothers and children were asked to discuss their attitudes toward the children's teachers.

### Mothers' Perceptions of Teachers

All but two mothers, whose children had new teachers, stated that they knew their child's current teacher. They were generally supportive of them and sensitive to the difficulty of their jobs. They were aware of the conditions in which teachers were expected to work -- overcrowded classrooms filled with children with a number of different needs -- and felt teachers did the best they could given these conditions.

Mothers were discriminating in their assessment of teachers and clearly articulated what teacher qualities were important to them. In discussing their attitudes toward their children's present teachers, they drew upon their memories of their children's educational history. They compared their children's teachers from past years, or in some cases, over the same year. Mothers who had more than one child in school often compared their different children's teachers. For example, Mabel drew from her 12 years of experience in dealing with her daughters' teachers, in forming her opinion of her daughters' current teachers.

Didi's teacher is a beautiful person, takes time with students. I don't like Leticia's teacher, she doesn't care about students. She acts like she teaches just to get paid. She's a Black lady with position and doesn't care about anyone else. She's the first teacher I've ever disapproved of. She's disgraceful -- dresses like she's 19, going to a party. Ridicules children -- tells the boys that they stink. She makes slurs about where Leticia lives in front of the other kids. You would think that a Black teacher would want Black kids to get ahead.

The mothers described a number of qualities that they liked about their children's current or past teachers, which could be grouped into three major categories: (1) dedication to teaching; (2) positive personality; and (3) open communication with mothers. Mothers described dedicated teachers as those who "made an effort" or "took time" with their children; they checked their work and tried to help them overcome their problems. This was particularly appreciated by mothers who had children with substantial behavioral or academic problems. Maintaining regular and open communication with parents was also an important teacher quality. Some mothers also mentioned affective qualities -- being "nice." They appreciated teachers who treated their children and themselves with kindness and consideration. For example, although Charles and Martin were both having problems with their schoolwork and their behavior, their mothers felt confident and grateful that their teachers were trying to help them.

She tries to understand, be sympathetic, work with him. I'm satisfied with her... Most teachers would have given up on him. [Doreen, mother of Martin]

She's nice. She wants the kids to learn. She makes an effort to help kids to learn. She seems like she loves teaching. She's sincere. You can see it in her. She has a slow class. [Cindy, mother of Charles]

### Children's Perceptions of Teachers

Overall, the children felt less positive toward their teachers than did their mothers. Only 6 of the 25 children who were interviewed, clearly liked their teachers. Most of the children gave ambivalent or neutral responses. Of the children who liked their teachers, five were girls, four were in the same class, and only two were high achievers. The teacher qualities that were most important to the children were (1) opportunities for both learning and fun; (2) effective classroom management; and (3) a pleasant personality.

The children described how they liked teachers who taught them new things. Teachers were praised for giving "hard work" or "lots of work." At the same time, opportunities for fun or relaxation were equally as important. Children appreciated opportunities for "free time", drawing, coloring, or watching films. Several children mentioned how they liked teachers who allowed them to work together or help each other, which integrated both learning and fun aspects of school.

The teachers' classroom management practices were also important to the children. The children appreciated teachers who kept their classroom in order by consistently enforcing rules, and administering punishment fairly and equitably without yelling at students or getting out of control. At the same time, these teachers also praised and rewarded the children for good behavior or academic work. While the children loved to receive special treats (i.e., cookies, stickers, prizes) or privileges (i.e. being allowed to choose a book and read silently), the nature of the reward seemed less important to the children than the recognition that they received from the teacher.

Children also preferred teachers who were "nice" to them, such as one child who said he enjoyed a "closeness" with his past teacher. Nice teachers treated the children with kindness and did things to make them feel special. For example several children boasted how their teachers had loaned them their books or had borrowed books from them.

A Profile of a Good Teacher. Combining the qualities that were mentioned by both the mothers and children we get a profile of a teacher who provides children with plenty of opportunities for learning and mastery of skills, who motivates them through rest, recreation, and rewards, who enforces limits while treating the children with respect and dignity. This type of teacher communicates with parents regularly and treats them with consideration and respect.

Based on the accounts of the children and their mothers, one teacher in this study, Ms. Ramirez of PS 118 in Manhattan, seemed to fit this profile. Four of the children I interviewed were in her classroom. Both the mothers and children liked her a great deal. All of the mothers valued her weekly progress reports of each student. Wendy's mother appreciated Ms. Ramirez's honesty about her daughter's behavior in school and her effort in working with her.

She's a good teacher. She checks everything -- all the class work, all the homework. [She] sends a little report card every Friday. First week I was shocked. Wendy was grounded -- punished until it got better. Her behavior has gotten better, but her quiz scores are still low. She started the year with a teacher that said she was doing great. The first teacher had a lousy reputation. The new teacher was telling me horror stories -- how terrible my kid was doing. Now [at least] I'm informed.

The children in Ms. Ramirez's second-grade class -- Wendy, Tamika, Shaniqua, and Kwadra -- all liked that she made them work hard in class, and then rewarded them

for their efforts. In addition to rewarding the children with sweets and treats, Ms.

Ramirez's use of silent, independent reading as a reward motivated the children to read on their own and appreciate reading. The children also recognized and appreciated her ability to enforce rules and limits without yelling at students.

Ms. Ramirez [is our teacher]. She's nice. [She] give us candy, and give us soda, and buy us candy. [She gives a lot of work] but I like it... [She] give us easy work. But she said, we can't get that much hard work. Cuz we have to wait until the whole class catch up. Only me, Sharice., Hady, and Maria and Tamika and Delia is the only ones catching up. It's fun. Cuz we finish, we only got work until 12:00, and I be finished before 12:00.. [then] I read books, play. She got toys. She gave me a token to keep at school, not a real token, a prize token [because I] finished all my work before my whole class... These are our teacher's rules: Don't play on the steps. Don't eat gum in class. No talking in class. No saying curses. No rolling your eyes to the teacher. No putting up your middle finger. And no spitting. All of them are good rules... Mr. Kappas [the principal] don't care [if you break the rules], the teacher care. She tell his mother to come; or she tell her mother to come. [Kwadra, a high achieving student]

[My teacher] is nice. And when we be good, she give us lollipops, and tomorrow, I'm gonna see if I can get my book from her. She has my book, cuz I let her read it. I let her hold it today, cuz she like to read her books out to people. I like to read books out to people, Sheneda and all of them, all my friends, Sheneda, Aisha... Oh, Ms. Ramirez don't take [cursing]. She'll tell you in a minute. If you write curses to the class, and somebody raise their hand and tell her, you know what she do? She'll call your mother and then she'll tell your mother to spank you in front of the kids. [Tamika, a below average student]

I like my teacher. Right, if you be good, she give you lollipops and candy to take home... If you don't know some question, the teacher help you with it... She's a nice teacher... [She] never yell at me, but if you be bad, she say: "Stop being bad." But, she nice... We read a book when it's time to go home. She gives you a book to take home to read and come back to school tomorrow. And after we do all our work, she let you stand up and read to the class... Sometimes when we have work, she don't like you to read real loud, she want you to read to yourself, so the class can get all their work done.. so you don't disturb them. [Shaniqua, a high-achieving student]

### Mothers' Dissatisfaction with Teachers

Although the mothers were generally supportive of their children's teachers, they were clear about what they did not like about them or other teachers they had encountered in the past. The mothers described three main attributes of teachers that disturbed them: (1) cruelty toward their children, (2) blaming the child for problems and (3) not responding to parents' concerns.

The mothers complained about teachers who ridiculed, intimidated, cursed at their children or, worse, who were physically abusive -- who hit, pinched, shook or threw things at them.

First, she had a mean teacher. I saw her screaming at a little kid. Two days later my daughter said the teacher pulled her hair and yanked her arm. She was scared to go to school. [Tamika's mother, describing Ms. Ratchet, her first teacher in PS 118]

My daughter's teacher ... would intimidate her -- call her a baby, wouldn't let her go to the bathroom. It messed her up. She didn't trust no more teachers anymore. When I complained they said I was exaggerating. I said I saw the teacher yelling at her... The teacher grabbed my daughter's arm, so I punched her. The Board of Education sent a lady over to go to the school with me and had her class changed. [Elena, describing her daughter Corinne's teacher in her prior school.]

The mothers expressed an awareness of their children's academic or behavioral problems, but had little regard for teachers who did not try to help them to learn new skills and/or behaviors, and interpreted this as "not caring" about them. Instead of working with students having difficulties, these teachers complained about or ignored them. Some mothers felt that the teachers made no effort to motivate the children through rewards or pleasurable activities.

She has not picked up her finger to help Maria... She don't do nothing -- like make Mother's Day cards or parties. She never has time for nothing. Uptown, Maria's teacher would work with her very good. She would give her a happy face or star. [Rosa, mother of Manny and Maria]

The mothers complained about teachers who they felt were not responsive to them or to their children and who did not show good judgment when taking care of children.

[They're] very irresponsible. My daughter was punched in the neck. I spent three days with her at Bellevue. She has problems with swollen glands. I wasn't contacted by the principal. The teacher said she didn't hear her complain... She lied about my daughter, saying she didn't tell her that the kid hit her. [Elena, discussing Corinne's current teacher]

The mothers of the children who were the lowest achievers had the most negative attitudes toward their children's teachers. Five out of the eight mothers rated their children's teacher negatively; while no mother of the higher achieving students indicated a negative attitude toward their children's teachers. Perhaps mothers attribute their children's school achievement to the teachers. If this were true, we would expect to find some mothers of children who were in the below average groups to be dissatisfied as well. Instead, six of the nine mothers acknowledged that although their children were having problems in school, the teacher was attempting to address them. In contrast, the dissatisfied mothers of the children in the lowest achieving group all felt that their children's teachers were doing nothing to help their children with the school problems.

#### Children's Dissatisfaction with Teachers

Although the children generally had more negative views of their teachers than their mothers did, the teacher traits that they disliked were similar: (1) excessive and arbitrary punishment; (2) not enough teaching effort; and (3) cruelty.

The children complained of teachers who constantly yelled or cursed at students who misbehaved, even when the teacher did not yell at them. In addition to yelling, some children described teachers who used physical punishment, (e.g., threw students against the wall), threats (e.g., to send misbehaving children to the principal), and who denied privileges to the entire class to punish one or two students.

I supposed to go to the zoo tomorrow. Cuz the kids act bad [we can't go]... The teacher don't give us a break for nothing. [It makes me] angry. [Charles, a third-grader in PS 58]

I like my teacher. But the only thing I don't like is my teacher shake on me too much -- my new teacher. And she screams at us so. I don't like that. Because she say, if I fold my hands like this she say, "don't move your body, don't go over there, YAH! YAH! YAH!" Then she screams at me, cuz I can't be quiet. I could be quiet but she don't want me in the room because I disturbs her... I'm in the back of the room, and everybody's in the front.. and I feel bad. [Aisha, a second-grader in Ms. Stern's third-grade class in PS 118.]

Children were displeased with teachers who they felt could not control the classroom very well -- who did nothing to prevent fighting or keep other children from "bothering" them.

They [the kids] mean. Some of them are older. They curse. They like to start trouble. They hit. And then, I tell the teacher. If I tell the teacher, or if she sees, she won't do anything. [She] ignores them. She don't care. I don't care either. She be like: "it's no other school to go." It's plenty of schools out here, better than that school. [Charles]

Kids be bothering with me and I tell them to stop and I tell the teacher and the teacher don't listen to me. These kids be messing with me and I tell the teacher, but the teacher she don't do nothing about it. And I tell them to leave me alone but they wouldn't. And then they always fighting with me and then I get in a fight. And then, I get in trouble. I tell the teacher, I tell everyone that I think can help, but nobody will do nothing about it. [Anthony, a second-grader in Ms. Stern's third-grade class in PS 118]

The children were also dissatisfied with teachers who did not give them work that fit their skill level. Some complained that their work was too easy, "baby work", or there

was not enough of it. Others felt that the work was too hard for them. The difficulty of the work itself was not what bothered them, but that the teacher did not make an attempt to teach them how to do it or would become angry at them when they did not know the answers.

**I don't like my teacher because we always watching movies. Today we didn't get to watch movies, but we got to draw. [Keith, a poor achieving third-grader in PS 187]**

**[The teacher gives] hard work, hard work, not the easy. She'll do nothing [to help you]. She say: "When the test come, you gonna fail." That's what she say... [Anthony, a second-grader achieving below grade level, in Ms. Stern's third-grade class]**

**I go to a reading teacher and try to read. Sometimes she get mad because I don't know a couple of the words. But then she gets mad but she don't do nothing when she gets mad, cuz she's only a reading teacher. [Danny, a poor achieving second-grader in Ms. Stern's third-grade class]**

Some children were particularly unhappy with their teachers because they felt disliked by them or that they were being treated unfairly. They complained that they were denied privileges that the other children received, that the teacher ignored them, or that the teacher made mean remarks to them.

**She's a mean teacher. She don't like me. I don't know why... I just gotta sit and put my head down and just rest, like this, and just close my eyes. Cuz she don't wanna look at my nasty face, she said. [Aisha]**

**[I don't like] the teacher... My teacher is stingy. Because she gave those two brats a keychain. One is bad and one is a little good, and I'm better than a boy that is a little good. [That makes me] mad... She always call on this boy name Hellis, go to the board and do something. And Christopher, too, a boy by the name of Christopher, the teacher always calls on him. I hate them two. They act like they never been in the board before, but they do be in the board. They be in the board every single day. I never get a chance. [That makes me] mad... She won't let me. [Devon, a poor achieving student in Ms. Lopez's bilingual class]**

### Comparing Parents' and Children's Views

According to the views of the mothers and children, truly exceptional teachers, who inspired and motivated children, who helped them to learn and feel good about themselves, were a rarity. Truly horrendous teachers, who intimidated and humiliated children, while making little effort to teach them, were equally as rare. The typical teacher was one who tried to instruct the children, but due to difficulties maintaining classroom control, including his or her composure in front of the class, had limited success in accomplishing this. Mothers and children attempted to work with the teachers, given their strengths and weaknesses, as best they could. Many children who said that they did not particularly like their teachers, seemed to desire and attempt to maintain a positive relationship with them. Children who were not able to do so, such as those who saw school as a battleground, had the worst attitudes toward school.

### Appropriate Curriculum

Children develop a sense of competence through their accomplishments and achievements. Effectively meeting new challenges is an important component in the development of resiliency. Therefore, to promote resiliency in children a school curriculum would contain enough difficulty to challenge the children, as well as provide them with the opportunities to successfully meet these challenges. Such an approach to instruction seems basic, but may not be easy to attain in many classrooms. Teachers in New York City, as in many urban areas, often are faced with large classrooms of children with diverse educational needs. Although the average class size for second to fourth-graders is about 25 students (New York City Public Schools, 1992), Kozol (1991)

documented that the City's schools serving low-income children, often have higher than average class sizes (i.e., more than 30 students). The 15 teachers who were interviewed in the present study reported having classrooms of between 25 and 32 students, with 28 students as the average. Planning and implementing lessons to engage all the children in a classroom is a considerable challenge, particularly in schools that have a great deal of student mobility.

#### Mothers' Awareness of their Children's Schoolwork

Mothers were asked whether their children's schoolwork was appropriate in terms of grade level, and if they were satisfied with what was being taught. With the exception of the mothers of the lowest achieving children, all were satisfied with their children's schoolwork (two indicated a lack of awareness). Half the mothers whose children were doing the most poorly in school indicated that they did not know what their children were being taught, and the other half were dissatisfied with it.

To get a sense of what and how their children were doing in school, mothers reviewed report cards or test scores, checked papers, in-school assignments and homework assignments, or spoke with teachers. Some mothers also observed their children in daily situations (e.g., reading signs) to get an indication of their skills. When the mothers in this study replied that they were not aware of what their children were learning in school, it indicated the presence of a serious problem. In each of the cases described below, the mothers expressed that they were aware that their children were having problems in school, and had been to the school to see the teacher or principal, but the problem was not resolved.

Frances complained that her son, Keith, never had homework and his notebook was always empty. Her daughter Danielle would bring home some work, but it would be written in Spanish, which Frances could not understand. Frances had been to the school to tell Keith's teacher that she was concerned about his absence of work and to complain about Danielle's placement into a bilingual class. She said they refused to listen to her, so she no longer had any contact with the school. At the end of the school year Keith was placed into special education.

Brenda was constantly at school discussing her son Troy's behavioral problems with his teacher and principal. The school conducted an evaluation and were planning to place him in special education. In the meantime, Troy had been frequently absent from school due to disciplinary suspensions or because he refused to go. As a result, Troy was absent the day they gave the citywide tests. Since he does not do schoolwork or homework, Brenda said she does not really know how he is doing in terms of academic work.

Alex was not doing well in school and did not bring home his homework regularly. Milagros, his mother, concerned that he would be left back, said she met with his teacher often. She felt that his teacher, although well-meaning, did not have the time to address Alex's needs. Alex's mother said she was willing to work with him at home, but would like to be able to observe him in the classroom to get a better sense of what his problems were. Milagros said that the school personnel told her she could not visit his class. At the same time, the teacher apparently did not help Milagros to develop a plan to work with

Alex at home. As Milagros expected, at the end of the school year, Alex was not promoted to the third grade.

### The Need for a Challenging Curriculum

The mothers discussed the importance of schoolwork fitting the educational needs of their children. They felt that the work should be both challenging and interesting to keep the child motivated and learning. Mothers whose children were having academic problems particularly felt that their children should be given extra help with more difficult work, rather than easier work, in order for them to obtain the skills they needed.

The children, not surprisingly, gave more detailed information about the elements of their schoolwork than did their mothers. Among the children, those who saw "school as a place for learning" gave the most details about their work. For example, while nearly every child who was interviewed mentioned that they had some type of language arts, which they typically referred to as "reading," children in the "school as learning" group also included: "spelling" or "quiz words", "cloze", "synthesis", "doing sentences", "script", "homonyms", "tell stories", and "language arts." Children who saw "school as chaos" provided some of the most vague descriptions of their schoolwork -- "I got to look at words"; "She gave us papers"; "You do school".

The children were similar to their mothers in their desire for a balanced curriculum that was challenging, but within their ability to master. Overall, the children said they liked a combination of hard and easy work, depending on their academic strengths. For example, children who did better in math than reading said that they liked to get harder work in math and easier work in reading.

Some work is hard, some of it is easy. But he give us hard work because he don't teach for fourth grade, he teach for college, he said. He give us three books, we get fourth grade books, sixth grade books, and fifth grade books. But he gave this sheet from college, it was hard. I needed help. I like getting hard stuff because I can learn more. [I like it] when they give us like hard or easy work, cuz they teaching us more and more and lots of stuff. [Malik, a fourth-grader achieving below grade level]

The children complained that work was either too easy, too hard, or there were too many activities rather than schoolwork.

When we were in Ms. Ratchet's class she didn't teach us nothing.. only drawing. I said: "Uh uh, honey." I told my mommy only what she teach me is drawing, drawing, drawing, drawing. I said: "Mommy, I wanna get out that class." [Tamika, a second-grader achieving below grade level]

I [do] easy work, baby work.. class news, math, take-away, pluses, that's baby work. And we got one plus one and two time four, that's easy, that's baby work... Do you hate school? I do... I like the work is hard and easy. [Devon, a poor achieving, second-grader, in a bilingual class]

Children's perceptions of their ability to successfully complete their schoolwork affected their feelings of self esteem. They took pride in their accomplishments -- "Getting a 100 on my test, passing all the things, that [makes me feel good]." -- but were anxious and concerned about their real or perceived areas of weakness. Children in the highest achieving group were both most conscious of the areas of weakness and concerned about their performance in school.

Sometimes it's easy. Sometimes it get me confused. Sometimes I get nervous. Sometimes I think and sometimes I get the right answer... I like to get work that I know how to do instead of sitting and getting confused [Brianna, a high-achieving third-grader].

The children were highly sensitive of how they were doing in relation to others. One of the criteria that they used to judge progress was the amount of time it took to complete an assignment.

I used to hate [school]. Cuz every time we do math, I be the last one finished... Because I was slow in math. Now I'm fast... [Kadeem, third-grader in special education]

Devon does not like it when his classmates tease him about the amount of time it takes him to do his work:

Sometimes everybody do their work faster than me. And this girl, she finish her work faster than me and she say: "Devon, I'm finished", like that, teasing me. "Devon, I'm finished." She's a tease.

But this does not make him sensitive to other children who are in the same position:

This boy in Miss Quinn's named Colleen, he's dumb. You know why? Every time when I work, he says: "Wait, wait, wait", until he gets up to me. He is.. I don't know how he is. I wait for him. I wait for his lazy, little self. He's a lazy kid. He tells me to wait, but that's not right. He gotta work on his own.

Although the findings that children are pleased with themselves when they do well in school and concerned when they do not are not particularly surprising, they are important to keep in mind in understanding the children's orientation and attitude toward school. Numerous studies have shown that through "tracking," grade-retention, and remedial educational programs, low-income children tend to be placed into low-level classes (Cummins, 1993; Kozol, 1991; Polakow, 1993; U.S. Department of Education, 1992b). The children's awareness that they have been labelled as low-achievers has a negative impact on their development of their sense of themselves as learners (Bynes,

1989; Quint, 1994; Sapon-Shevin, 1993). Denied of opportunities to learn and demonstrate their skills, these children eventually may withdraw from and/or reject school.

### Barriers to an Appropriate Curriculum

Obtaining a match between the curriculum and a child's educational needs was an issue for children who changed schools frequently. Often the educational demands would change from school to school and the children would end up in a classroom that the mother felt was too advanced or too easy.

Tamika got four "U"s on her report card... We keep moving. Each school had different work... When she was going to the other school her report card was good. I can't blame her now. They started off Tamika with timestables, but they didn't teach her how to do it. They gave her homework without teaching her.  
[Tanya]

Worse still, 9 of the 31 children in the present study were placed in an inappropriate grade or class when they transferred to their current school. The mothers felt that placing their children in the wrong class or grade was preventing them from learning effectively or perpetuating learning problems.

The mothers of the four children in the bilingual classes complained that their children were confused in that class, and that it did not make sense for their children to be taught a second language (Spanish) when their skills in English were so poor. Others felt that the English portion of the class was not advanced enough.

Devon doesn't speak or understand Spanish and they put him in a bilingual class. He doesn't know what she's saying. They said he has to stay there. I tried to change him. I told them I don't even speak [Spanish] well. I can't blame him if he wants to wander around class. He's falling behind. Danny was placed from the second grade to a third grade class. They put Corinne in a mixed kindergarten and first grade [instead of a first grade]... She's getting too much kindergarten work.

**They're not going to explain to her how to do the harder work. It's because it's overcrowded. [Elena]**

**Manny's bored. He's not learning anything. They force us to get our kids to school; but nobody is doing anything to force the school to teach them. My son is too advanced for that class. I told them that he would be bored in that class. They said that's the only place that there's room. I'm afraid that he's not going to advance himself because the work is too easy [Rosa].**

**The mothers of the five second-graders who had been placed in a third-grade class also indicated that their children were falling behind in school. They could not understand why a child who was having trouble with second grade work would then be placed in a higher grade, where it would be less likely for him or her to get the attention needed.**

**There's only one second-grade class. Aisha's in a third-grade class because it's overcrowded. I can't do anything about it. There are two second-graders in there. She'll come home with a couple of pieces of math one day, one day with nothing. She's not getting any homework now. I can see her work is not complete. Putting her in third-grade put her behind. She doesn't know what she used to know. They need to put her in the right grade. [Cheryl]**

**These cases of inappropriate grade or class placement, contributed to feelings of confusion, dismay, or anger among children. For example, non-Spanish speakers, Danielle and Devon, who were both placed in bilingual classroom against their mothers' wishes, did not seem to understand why they were there, but believed it was related to their family background.**

**They [teach Spanish] and I don't know Spanish. Do all Puerto Ricans know Spanish? My grandpa say Puerto Ricans know Spanish, they gotta know Spanish. I know a little. Uno, dos, tres... I went like one, two, three... That's what I did in school... My teacher's name is Ms. Lopez. I say: "Ms. Lopez, talk English, everybody in the classroom can talk English." She say: "You raise your hand right now!" Like I never do it. I always raise my hand. I raise my hand like this, and they act like they don't see it. [Devon, PS 118]**

I'm in bilingual class, and I don't know that much Spanish. She be telling the whole class to do whatever she says. If she say speak Spanish, after she speaks it in Spanish, and then she says it in English... My mother wants me in a bilingual class because I'm going to Ecuador... Now I learn everything in Spanish, and I don't know Spanish. I know a little bit. I can speak a little English. I just tell them I don't know Spanish... They don't tell me nothing. I tell them I don't know Spanish, so they just say, say it in English... [Danielle, in PS 187]

Aisha and Danny who are among the poorest achievers and were reported to have behavioral problems in school, were moved from a second-grade to a third-grade class after transferring to PS 118. Danny has interpreted this as a promotion, while admitting he does not know the work, and has continued to perform well below grade level on his tests. Aisha, a social and precocious 8-year-old, was very distressed by not being able to participate in class.

I'm supposed to be in second grade. They skipped me cuz I was smart. [I do] times and I don't know times. I gotta do it. My tutor taught me how to do some times. She [the teacher] give me a different work, because they skipped me. Then she let me does second grade work, but when she tell times, I raise my hand and I told her the answer. I like being in third grade. Cuz I really like to tell times and divided by. I don't even know how to do divided by and only a little bit of times. Cuz sometimes they could get ready in third grade... I just gotta do it, so I could learn. I just skip stuff [that I don't know]. I know how to do it. But, at times I make a little bit mistakes. Sometimes [she helps me] and sometimes she don't. [Danny]

I likes my work. I like my math, I like my reading, I like all stuff... She gave me some little bit paper to do, and I didn't know how to do it, cuz it was so hard. It's fourth grade work, and I was only in the second grade. And she could teach her kids fourth grade work, and third grade work. I don't know no third grade work and I don't know no fourth grade. She said: "Well, you gotta know it cuz you in my class", so and I don't knows it. I don't knows it!.. She don't teach me nothing, cuz I don't know that third grade work... [I like] in between [work]. [Aisha]

Residential and school mobility make it very difficult for children to receive a continuous education. At the same time, school practices can further disrupt children's

learning experiences, by assigning to children to different classes, particularly those which are inappropriate to their academic ability.

### The Relationship Between Schoolwork and Behavior

Many mothers attributed their children's behavioral problems in school to a low level of or inappropriate schoolwork.

At St. John's Kadeem was getting high scores. He took biology, sciences. He don't get the same things now... He's real smart and learns fast, then he gets bored, then he starts getting into things. I tried to explain this to his [new] teacher. His [old] teacher in PS 22 said that he learned right away, but his mind wanders sometimes. I tried to explain that he's bored quickly. You have to do something to excite him. [Kadeem, a poor achiever, currently in a special education class]

Children's feelings about the content of their schoolwork, its appropriateness and level of difficulty, also was expressed in their classroom behavior -- "When I was in first grade I was bad. Cuz I didn't know nothing in first grade." The children who saw "school as learning" generally described their schoolwork positively, and described few confrontations with their teachers, and these were minor ones. All of the children who saw "school as a battlefield," however, expressed dissatisfaction with their schoolwork.

Most people realize that children who feel stupid or bored may respond by withdrawing or by causing disturbances in the classroom; or that children who are expending their energies clowning or fighting in the classroom cannot, at the same time, be engaged in learning. These two separate processes can become linked and self-perpetuating.

In the case of Troy, the cycle of behavioral and learning problems has been allowed to continue for several years, leaving him feeling enraged and cheated of his school experience. In the following passage he cries out for someone to intervene:

Why is that I'm so bad and I get promoted every time? They always promote me, good probably don't promote you. When I be bad all the time they always promote me... I know why they promote me. They want me out the school quick -- cuz I'm so bad. I ain't learning nothing in school... It make me sense, they can promote me every time. I be bad in kindergarten they promote me, I was bad in first grade and they promote me to second grade. I was terrible in second and they still promoted me. And in third I'm terrible, they still promoting me. I always try to be bad and they still promote me.

Kadeem's school experiences illustrate that this cycle can be broken by intervening in one area or the other. Once Kadeem's fighting was brought under control, he was introduced to new material which he could master successfully. Motivated by his initial successes, he seems more focussed on learning, and does not seek out opportunities to get into situations that will lead to fighting again. Kadeem is among the lowest achievers, he was held back twice and then placed in a special education class. But for the first time in his school history he has a positive outlook toward school and more confidence in his ability to succeed. Given the odds against his future success, a learning environment that continues to motivate him is critical.

In my other schools, math was hard in those schools. I didn't know how to do division until now. I didn't know how to do nouns, but now I know how to do them... But my teacher, now in this school, she give us easy math first and then she go up to higher and higher and higher.

### Understanding Placement and Curricular Decisions

The children who were among the lowest achievers all were exposed to curriculum below or inappropriate to their age level or language background. They all had either

been retained in grade, placed in special education, or placed in an inappropriate grade at least once by the end of the school year in which they were in the Tier II. Placing children in lower level classes (i.e., special education, bilingual education) or the wrong grades seemed to exacerbate their academic and behavioral problems. This is a typical cycle of school failure for low-income children, particularly those who are perceived to have problematic backgrounds (Cummins, 1993; Polakow, 1993; U.S. Department of Education, 1992b).

Many educators consider grade retention, tracking, remediation, and special education to be effective educational practices. However, it is hard to understand on what educational basis a school would decide to place children in the wrong grade, or English-speaking children in bilingual classes, particularly against the expressed wishes of their parent, which is also a violation of the City's educational policies. In the case of PS 118 in Manhattan, the mothers point to overcrowding and an inability to deal adequately with a constant flow of homeless students as contributing factors. However, who decides which children will be placed in the appropriate grade with an effective teacher (e.g., Ms. Ramirez) and who will be placed in the wrong grade or class with teachers who seem to be much less capable (e.g., the classes of Ms. Stern and Ms. Lopez)? A U.S. Department of Education study (1992) found that among low-income students, those having the most unstable school histories and other problems were most likely to be found in "dysfunctional" classrooms with the least challenging curriculum. Kozol (1991) argues that school systems allocate their resources in accordance with who they believe will make the best use of them. Therefore, affluent children have access to the best teachers and

more educational resources, since there is a belief that these would be wasted on children of poverty who would be likely to fail anyway. A similar process could occur at the school level. Perhaps, PS 118 and other schools who had similar practices, at some level decided that the educational needs of those children whom they perceived to have the least chance of educational success were not a priority.

#### Activities that Supplement the Core Curriculum

Schools generally supplement the core curriculum of language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies with some art and recreational activities as well as field trips. These activities held much more prominence for the children than their mothers. With the exception of school trips (for which the mothers must give permission) few mothers discussed these "co-curricular" activities. Every child, however, mentioned them to some degree.

The children included art, music (which included watching videos), gym, and field trips as part of their school activities. The children were critical of the quality of activities and complained about events or assignments that they found boring. Having a school day that integrated enjoyable activities with work enhanced the children's overall school experiences. At least eight of the eleven children in the "school as learning" group described gym, music, and art as components of their school day that they enjoyed. For the children in the "school as chaos" group descriptions of these types of activities were often their clearest accounts of school. In contrast, in the "school as battlefield" group the three of the six children who mentioned any of these activities, generally felt as negative about them as they did other aspects of school.

The only thing we have is drama.. It's only, they give paper out and color. It's boring. [Gloria, PS 171]

Co-curricular activities were valued by the children, not only because they were "fun", but since participation in them was contingent upon good behavior, they also provided the children with a sense of reward and accomplishment.

In this school, you don't get to go to gym if you be bad, and I was good and I got to go to gym by myself. And we played, this boy and me and two girls. We only went to gym by ourselves and the gym teacher. He was playing dodge ball. We had fun. [Naomi, PS 171]

Today we didn't have gym, but we had music, and we watched the Wizard of Oz. We sat down, we been quiet, and all of that... We just watched it cuz we was good today... but some people didn't see it because they owe my teacher. They owe my teacher cloze... it's work -- a cloze book -- reading... If you don't do it, you sit down, even if it gym, you sit down in the class and do it. [Tamika, PS 118]

Some children valued these activities because it gave them an opportunity to demonstrate their special talents or skills or to pursue their personal interests.

And one time I was drawing, I was drawing that (points to picture on the wall) and then all I know is that when I got up, there was a crowd around me. Then they were all saying: "Can you draw that for me, can you draw that for me, can you draw that for me?" I felt like if I was hearing echoes. All you hear is them saying: "Draw this for me, draw this for me, draw this for me." [Manny, PS 118]

We went to track and fields, that's the only trip I went on... I got two medals... [I liked my old school because] you go to art, you go to shop. I made a jar for my mother at shop, I made rooster for my aunt, and I made a little key chain for my sister. In art I just made different things, Christmas things, different kinds of things... Baseball and basketball makes me feel good. I'm good at basketball some. I won a big trophy, its about this size. In track I won two medals... [Kadeem, PS 212]

I liked a trip when we do art and stuff. That's what I want to be when I grow up, an artist and a singer. I want to be an artist designer and a painter. I want to draw, design, and clothes design. I try to do clothes design, but I mess up. I'm a good drawer... We had [art] in second grade, we don't have one now. The teacher gave it to us to do. She gave us art this Thursday. [Brianna, PS 121]

Activities that encouraged physical movement (i.e. gym and recess) were also appreciated by the children.

We go outside and we have fun. We can bring a skateboard and a football and ball and a glove or a bat... I play on the third [grade football team]... We be winning them a lot, cuz we always making a good plan... I don't like [this school]. It's boring... But I want to go that school, that's up there, PS 32. That one right there, it has a pool. I wanna go swimming... [I feel good] when I come home out of school. Cuz I glad, I hate to sit down on a chair, they make me sticky. [Felix, PS 192]

For children who are having a difficult time in school, it is important to find ways to motivate or engage them. Providing a range of activities may help to get them connected to school at some level. For example, in Martin's case, gym and computer classes are his oases in a totally detestable school environment.

They have music and art, art in a studio. I like music best. I don't like drawing, I hate drawing. I don't like to "draw that, draw that, draw that"... If we have something like art, it will be Ms. Williams coming and then we go upstairs and we do blah, blah, blah... [I like] gym and computers. We have fun there. We play throwing the ball at each other and you have to jump up and not get hit. I really like gymnastics. Gymnastics I like. [Martin, PS 171]

Unfortunately, although Troy has an interest in sports and music, they are not available to him in school. While having these might have made school a little more tolerable for him, not having them increases his feelings of frustration and anger.

I don't get gym in that school. They don't give me no gym, not in my class. Gotta wait five weeks for gym, but I wanna go to gym today and tomorrow. I don't care... I like sports, but I like only football. They don't let us get football. Throw a football, hit the teacher once... The teacher say we can't go to gym so I play in the class. Like I'm supposed to do. Nobody let us go nowhere... But you could sneak outside and play -- if you had to... Never got on a trip before. If I were to stay in my old school, when the end of school come we could go to Sesame Place. [Troy, PS 58]

### Benefits of Co-curricular Activities

Access to co-curricular activities benefitted the children in several ways. These activities helped to motivate the children by providing them with a sense of reward and accomplishment as well as fun and relaxation. For children who were having problems academically, co-curricular activities provided them with opportunities to demonstrate their skills and proficiencies in an area outside academics. Co-curricular activities also provided children with opportunities for self-expression that can be an important tool in helping them to work through the stressful experiences in their lives (Garbarino et al, 1992). Activities that promoted physical activity were also important, particularly for those children who spent their after-school hours in the Tier II facility and had no other opportunities for physical activity.

### Structure and Control

When families become homeless, they enter into a period of tremendous uncertainty. Where will they live and for how long? Where will the children go to school? What will they do with their belongings?..Within this cycle of chaos and unpredictability, the school offers a promise of stability and routine, if the family is able to connect with one.

Garbarino et al. (1992) argue that a well-structured school environment can offset the most deleterious home conditions. At the same time, chaotic school environments do not provide children with the psychological space needed for learning. Children who are

already undergoing trauma at home, and whose coping abilities are diminished, are most adversely affected by school environments devoid of structure and order.

In virtually every discussion of resilient children, we see emerging the importance of structure and control -- the need for order and predictability in a safe, disciplined, but not rigid environment (Garbarino et al., 1992, pg. 157.)

Effective disciplinary standards promote order and control by communicating the school's expectations to its students. The children know what is expected of them and what to expect in the school setting. Policies to promote school safety are also essential in promoting feelings of control by eliminating or minimizing the stress associated with random, and uncontrollable threat.

#### Mothers' Perspectives on School Discipline

School discipline serves a dual purpose. First, it is used to maintain control of the educational setting so that children are provided with a safe and orderly environment in which to learn. Second, disciplinary practices teach children the behavioral norms of school as a social institution, including how to negotiate and resolve conflicts within the boundaries of appropriate behavior.

All but one mother, who felt that "discipline should be left to the mothers," expected the schools to provide some discipline. In describing their views of discipline four themes emerged (1) enforcing behavioral standards to promote learning; (2) addressing behavioral problems; (3) adequate adult supervision; and (4) cruel and unusual punishment.

**Enforcing Behavioral Standards.** Mothers expected the schools to have and appreciated disciplinary practices that kept children on the right academic track (e.g., homework policy)

**They're very good with [discipline]. They were hassling her when she forgot her book. They make sure the kids are well prepared for class. [Eva discussing her daughter Isabel, PS 118]**

However, the mothers were strongly opposed to disciplinary practices interfered with their children's learning process. The most common complaints were against school suspension and the removal of children from the class.

**To me they're not disciplining. When the kids are bad, the teacher puts them in a higher grade. How can you put her in a higher grade when she can't read at a first grade level? [Janika discussing how the policy affects other children. Her daughter Shaniqua is a high-achiever and has no problems in school, PS 118]**

**Addressing Behavioral Problems.** In discussing discipline the dominant theme expressed by mothers was how the school addressed behavioral problems. Many mothers readily admitted that their children misbehaved in school, and they expected them to be punished accordingly. However, effective disciplinary practices, from the mothers' perspective, attempted to identify and resolve the problems that were causing the behavior. This sometimes meant enlisting the help of professionals, such as the guidance counselor or the special education staff.

**If there's trouble, they try to work it out with the kids, then they talk to the parents. Kadeem was put in Special Education because of his behavior. He has a bad temper and gets into fights... Now they are helping him to control his temper. [Sally, Kadeem's mother, PS 212]**

**They try to give him attention. They don't give him discipline. They try to work with him. [Doreen, Martin's mother, PS 171]**

However, if problem behavior persisted and was met with more punishment, but no attempt to resolve the underlying problems, (i.e. boring schoolwork, threatening schoolmates) mothers grew frustrated and dissatisfied.

The teacher is saying he's picking up bad habits. But he gets bored, because the class is too slow. She [the teacher] don't do nothing... She complains all the time. [Rosa, Manny's mother, PS 118]

Cruel and Unusual Punishment. The mothers strongly objected to the use of punishment that was not directed at correcting a problem, but only served to humiliate or intimidate their children. They felt that the verbal abuse (i.e. screaming, cursing, name-calling) or physical aggression (i.e. pushing, hitting) their children received in school was inappropriate and only exacerbated the problems.

The coach is rough with the kids when they fight. He was banging kids' heads against the wall [Elena, whose children attend PS 118]

The principal calls him a little punk. [Samantha discussing her son Anthony, PS 118]

One time when my son was in the hallway Mr. D. cursed at him, because he wasn't supposed to be in the hallway. [Luz, discussing her son Reynaldo, PS 118]

Adequate Adult Supervision. According to the mothers' perspectives, behavioral problems often stemmed from the schools' inability to adequately supervise the children. These mothers felt that more child supervision and the enforcement of school disciplinary practices would promote their children's safety in school and deter school violence.

They need more people taking care of the kids in the lunchroom. They don't discipline them. [Blanca, mother of Michelle, PS 16]

The fifth graders have knives and weapons. They need to be stricter and more aware of what the kids are doing. They should suspend these kids for a month. [Regina, mother/guardian of Brianna and Malik, PS 121]

Overall, mothers felt that enforcing behavioral standards through disciplinary practices was a necessary and appropriate role for schools to have. Most felt, however, that adequate discipline was not provided. They recognized that having and enforcing rules would help their children to learn and adult supervision would ensure their safety. Therefore, they interpreted a lack of supervision, the use of physical or verbal aggression to control behavior, or the absence of an effective, equitable disciplinary process all as indications that the schools had little regard for the welfare of their children.

There is no discipline, no real caring. When two kids do something, only one is punished. The teachers don't care. The old principal tried to resolve problems. [Mabel, mother of Didi, discussing PS 87]

#### Children's Attitudes Toward Discipline

According to the children's accounts, the disciplinary structure of the school was typically described as rules and punishments that were only tenuously connected. While children could list rules and punishments, they frequently expressed that good behavior did not necessarily prevent a child from being punished, nor was discipline an effective deterrent to bad behavior. For example, the common practice of punishing an entire class for the misbehavior of one or two children was both incomprehensible and exasperating for children who were well behaved.

My teacher say if one spoil it the whole can't do it. If we do an activity and one person spoil it we can't do it... I think that she should let that person suffer, take care of their part of it, while we play... They do that in lunchroom too. If someone get out of your table, then it spoils the whole, so that we can't go outside, even when its hot, burning hot. It could be 81 degrees and we still stay inside. [Didi, PS 87]

A bad rule is when one or two kids do something the whole class is punished. That's what we do every day. Why you just can't let them two get in trouble. Why

can't we just go to gym. We get in all trouble, every single day. Two people's getting us in trouble, and we all in trouble. Let them getting punished, and we go outside to gym or music. [Brianna, PS 121]

The children appreciated comprehensible rules that protected students' safety and health or promoted learning. They expected teachers to make sure students completed their assignments, even if it meant missing their free time, gym or music periods. It made sense to them that students who acted up in class were separated from the others (i.e., sent to the corner or the hallway) so as not to disturb them, and that children who threatened and hurt others would not be permitted to go to school.

They don't want you screaming. Mr. Kappas [the principal] don't like to hear that much noise. And the other rule is, he don't like you to break his rules: no talking, no running around in the lunch room, no acting stupid, no fighting with people, no punching, no kicking, no spitting. [They're good] so they won't fight. [Shaniqua, PS 118]

No smoking. Cuz these kids, they used to smoke in there with cigarettes, and there's a bunch of cigarettes box under the gutter. Especially no smoking [is a good rule]. [Anthony, PS 118]

Teacher's nice... If you do something it better be no witnesses. If it is you're in big, big trouble... The teachers put you in a corner for about four hours and stuff and you don't come out until the teacher says so... But when the work starts they gotta sit down. [Kadeem, PS 212]

I show the teacher my homework. She check it... If I don't do it, I just don't go to gym and I don't go to music. But I always do my homework. [Tarnika, PS 118]

Several children commented that although there were rules, they were not enforced. This made it difficult for the children who wanted to behave in school, particularly for the boys. When the schools did not enforce standards of behavior, children were placed under greater pressure to behave as their peers did -- for better or for worse.

No talking when you're doing work. No fighting. No spitting. No punching. No kicking. No pushing... They have rules for they won't do it... There's only three kids that follow the rules. There's me, my two friends, their name is Israel and Eddie, and this kid Antonio, he don't talk, he just listen to the teacher. He don't likes to talk. He keeps his mouth shut. [Felix, PS 192]

Ms. Reagan [the principal, says], "you stand up, you gotta go to the main office." I don't know [why]. Well, it could be a rule, but the kids don't follow it. Like a lots of other rules that they don't follow. You talk when it's silent time: "Get up, go to the main office"... Don't take a pencil in the hallway or a magic marker or a crayons. They be still taking it in the hallway... No talking while you on line -- they don't follow that one. No running in the hallway -- they don't follow that one. Everybody runs in the hallway... Don't run in the hallway -- that's a good rule. But.. they do it anyways. [Didi, PS 87]

I got friends in school, bad kids in school that's my friends. Sometimes I'm bad and sometimes I good. Sometimes I'm good and they don't talk to me cuz I'm good. This boy named Jose he's good but he likes to be like this boy named Ramon. And Ramon is bad and Jose he likes to be like Ramon. Cuz Jose thinks Ramon is his only best friend. When I'm good they don't like to talk to me. They like to let me be bad and when I'm bad, they talk to me. [Devon, PS 118]

This kid named Steven, he my friend, so he be going in the hallway with this boy named Mark, he's one of the bad boys, and he be going around the hall and he be choking him and stuff, and they be playing fighting in the hallway... That boy Mark he be bothering me sometimes... All the boys I don't like. I know one boy in that class that I like and don't start trouble. His name is Pablo, he don't start no trouble and this boy Adrian. So those two don't start no trouble, but then the rest of the boys start trouble. None of the girls don't start no trouble... I don't like hanging out with no girls. [Malik, PS 121]

The way school staff enforced the rules was also important. While, some adults managed to stay calm when dealing with troublesome students, almost all the children described verbal or physical intimidation as the primary method of controlling students' behavior. The children also recognized that these strategies, whether they liked them or not, were effective ways, at least in the short term, to maintain control.

My teacher, she hits a lot of kids. One time I seen her hitting Orlando. He's one of the real bad kids, and she hitted him in the back... One time he hit her back.

She hit him first. And she takes this bell, and she be hitting kids with it. She sits at her desk and she'll throw it. It's steel. And she'll throw it at kids or something, because they're talking. She hits them. Then everybody is really quiet. They're like folding their hands. They're really quiet. They're like saying: "I don't want to be hitted with that bell." [Manny, discussing Ms. Lopez, PS 118]

She yells, yeah, when we ain't doing nothing, she say: "Put it down before I slap it down." That means to put your head down before she slap your head down. And she put my table next to this door, and the, you know, the thing that holds the table up is a little broken and every I go (leans), like it go "CRACK" and bend. And she say, next time that thing bends she gonna slap me through that wall... One time she grab me by my neck. [Anthony, discussing Ms. Stern, PS 118]

This raises an important issue regarding the impact of the schools' disciplinary practices on students' socialization process. It seems that school personnel are, through their behavior, teaching children that verbal or physical aggression is an appropriate way to get others (especially less powerful others) to do what you want them to do. Brianna, for example, is learning that it is okay to curse at children who are "nasty."

My teacher is not that mean as other teachers are cuz she don't curse in the classroom... Some teachers do. Malik's teacher do it a little. Cuz he got 31 kids and some of them are very nasty. [Brianna, PS 121]

### Comparing Mothers' and Children's Views of School Discipline

The mothers and the children held several expectations with regard to discipline. They both expected the school to have a set of rules that would ensure that the children stayed focussed on learning and would protect them from danger and harm. They also expected that school personnel would enforce these standards in ways that protected the students' sense of self. Overall these expectations were not met.

### The School as a Safe Place

Issues of school discipline and school safety are integrally related, since rules and regulations are instituted to protect children's personal safety. It is impossible to imagine how children could learn in an environment where they felt threatened. In discussing school safety issues, mothers and children described the conditions within the school building and grounds as well as the area surrounding the school that connected it to home.

Safety in the School. The mothers' main concern with regard to their children's safety within the school was the threat of physical assault. Mothers frequently complained that their children were threatened or beaten up by other children in school, or that some children brought weapons to school.

The school experiences of the children lent credence to their mothers' worries. They were steeped with descriptions of varying degrees of violence. All but one child described fighting as a regular part of their school experience. For some children fighting was part of a constantly reoccurring series of confrontations and retaliations with the other children. Others experienced few fights themselves, but witnessed and were disturbed by the fighting of others.

In my class are two boys that are bad. For one, they be always fighting each other. She, the teacher, have to be over there arguing with them. So the kids, if they ain't finish writing the answer, they write the answer and just look. Like, this is good entertainment... I don't care. As long as I got my answer I don't care. As long as nobody hit me, I don't care... Somebody hitting [starts it]: He hit him, they hit him, talkin' 'bout my mother, talkin' 'bout my father. They find ways to hit each other. [Didi, PS 87]

Although both boys and girls, as young as kindergarten age, were involved in school fights, older (fifth and sixth grade) boys were considered to be the most threatening.

I stay away from the dirty crowd -- the dirty crowd, the nasty boys. They a team, a tag team. They a tag team at school. They in the fifth grade. They come in your face, they bothering people. [Martin, a fourth-grader in PS 171]

Sometimes I'm afraid of big kids, like in six grade. Cuz the six graders, they're big and they pick on me more then the others. They beat me up -- boom, boom, boom, and drag me and they'll throw me in the bathroom and start wrestling.... Sometimes big kids always gotta pick on me. They just wanna pick on me and make me mad. They say: "I can beat you up. I can beat you up. I can beat you." That's what they always say. I always gotta fight with them. And then other kids go jumping on me -- those big, fat kids. They always gotta jump on me... I wear too much stuff [so I don't get hurt]. Sometimes I take a book and hide it in my stomach so nobody can't punch me and I get hurt. [Danny, a second-grader in a third-grade class in PS 118]

But these boys, they mess with me and they big boys. They go like "the end". They say "the end", cuz you gonna die. They gonna beat me up, that's what they do. [Anthony, a second-grader in a third-grade class in PS 118]

Although, fighting in school is nothing new, the severity and intensity at which it occurred was troubling to me. Children described common school materials being used as weapons and children being seriously injured in assaults.

Like today we had drama in the morning, everybody was fighting. This boy took a scissors [from] Mr. Carter's desk to stab a girl. [The teacher] was just playing with the puppets with five kids and I was sitting at my desk. People was holding him, so [the teacher] got the scissors from him... Every student is mean. [Naomi, PS 171]

And there's another kid, his name is Ronald, and he's really bad. He threw this girl down the stairs, and now she has a broken arm... Sometimes he touches little girls' behinds. I'm not kidding. And then she sends him to the principal's office. [Manny, PS 118]

Mothers and children agreed that increased adult supervision and intervention would help reduce the amount of fighting and improve the safety of the school. It was very important to the children to be able to depend on adults to protect them from threats. This means intervening before a fight occurs (i.e. when one child provokes another),

punishing children who instigate fights, establishing and enforcing clear rules about fighting. Children who felt that the adults were responsive and committed to protecting them felt positive about school.

I like PS 118 and PS 2. Because them was the best schools in the whole nine world. Because it was no fighting. The boys followed the rules. We followed the rules... What I didn't like... I didn't like boys fighting, girls fighting. Every time when we go to gym, people be staying up there. Only one person go to gym, and that's me. I was so embarrassing. [Tamika, PS 118]

On my way to school [nobody bothers me], but when I'm at school, a little bit. The class bully, a boy [in] sixth grade, he hits me, he kicks me. [I] tell the principal and he gets suspended. But he doesn't bother me anymore. I told his mother once and he got a beating... [I feel I belong to this school] because, they never bother me because, the last time one of them bothered me, I told the principal. He got suspended for a week. In the other ones [schools], they let the kids do whatever they want. They let the kids pick on the little kids. They let the kids curse, they let the kids beat up other kids -- the principal, the teachers, that's it. [Wendy, PS 118]

For example, in Kadeem's case, his attitude toward school dramatically changed when he was placed into the special education program in a new school. Kadeem understands that his fighting prevented him from learning a great deal and probably was the reason why he was put into a special education program in the first place. But he does not mind. On the contrary, he is grateful for the control and discipline provided in his new classroom and the opportunities it has opened for learning.

Love it [school]. Not at my old school, I used to hate it... It was boring, too much. I kept fighting every day. That's why... I used to always get in fights. I used to... Cuz every time people be saying that I be doing it, the other person be doing it and I be getting in trouble and then... we start fighting after school... Cuz every time when somebody say I did it, I would get real mad... I think that I was fighting too much... Some kids, if you fight about five times, then they'll send you to special ed. But if you fight once they gonna send you to the principal's office... [The special education teachers] help us not to fight because, the teachers is nicer than the other teachers in regular ed. Because the regular ed. teachers just let us

fight. But special ed. they break it up so we stop fighting. That's how they help us not fight... When I first went to that school, I was scared, but when I first got into the classroom I wasn't scared anymore, because I met three teachers and they wouldn't let us fight. If anyone mess with me they wouldn't let us fight. [Kadeem, PS 212]

When fighting is not controlled it can create a culture of violence in the school.

Children who were left to deal with their aggressors on their own quickly learned that they also had to fight to survive in school.

[When kids bother me] I told the teacher. They just stand there like they don't know nothing. Then the next time they bother me I don't say nothing to the teacher, I just beat them up... They punch you and stuff. But I don't let nobody punch me. If they punch me, I start a fight with them. [Malik, PS 121]

Mothers found themselves allowing or even encouraging their children to fight to protect themselves. These students were then considered to be discipline problems along with their aggressors. Tanya, Tamika's mother, felt she had no choice but to advise her children to fight back in school.

Kids have been hitting [my son] in the head. Tamika says kids are picking on her in school ... girls and boys beat her up. She comes home with scratches all over her face. The girls jumped her and she didn't fight back. Every two or three days I'd go up to school and complained to the principal. The principal didn't do nothing. I told her "do what you have to do." She went back and had a fight. Now he wants to suspend her for fighting. If they suspend you -- so what. Now they don't pick on her. [Tanya discussing PS 118]

And Aisha balances her mother's admonition to protect herself with possible repercussions from the principal.

Well this girl pushed me. So, then I just had the right to push her back and the principal won't let me. So I say, well I gotta push her back, but sometimes, if she hits me I have to hits her back, so I can't take no shots, my mommy said. My mommy said, if I take any shots I'm gonna get a whipping, so don't take no shots from nobody, she said. She said, if I take any shots I'm gonna get my butt whippin'. And she means it, cuz if somebody told her that somebody punched me

in the face or hurt me, I gonna get in trouble cuz she don't want nobody to hit on me, cuz she don't never like nobody to hit me. Cuz people hit me, she wants us to hit them back... I can't let nobody hit on me, cuz I'm gonna get in trouble... If they don't hit on me, I won't hit on them -- plain and simple. [Aisha, PS 118]

Some children, who were not able to fight well enough to protect themselves turned to their peers for assistance. Martin describes how he helps Roberto in first grade to defend himself in school.

People get in his [Roberto's] face, right. And then one time after school I was picking him up. So, he came to me crying in tears and I asked him "What happened Roberto?". And then he said "those two boys bothering me". Anyway, right, so he went back over there, right, and he hit him, and the boy didn't do nothing, because he saw me there. And he cried. The other kid cried cuz he [Roberto] punched him in the face. [Martin a fourth-grader in PS 171]

Devon also aligned himself with a group of boys for protection.

And this boy he always fight me. He's like a bully. He beats up everybody. He got a lot of friends. He's like, he got his own gang. And I got all my B-R-O, Bros, to beat him up. And he won't say nothing. [Devon, PS 118]

Children, who were threatened in school acknowledged that they had limited recourse. They could ignore the situation and risk it continuing, tell an adult and risk getting in trouble themselves and looking like a baby, or fight back and risk getting in trouble, possibly suspended. Most of the children wished that the adults did more to intervene and neutralize these situations.

Because the principal, if he hear talk, we get in trouble. So we gotta talk low or just walk away. I mostly walk away. Cuz one day it was in February.. there was this kid that he kicked me. Cuz I was playing with my friend and we were playing at the gates, where the principal is at. So, he kicked me and I said I was gonna tell the teacher. He said "If you tell teacher and I'm gonna get in trouble and I'm gonna smack you." So I just ignored him and everything, then he moved... Don't bother anyone if they bother us first -- that's stupid. [We have to] ignore them or tell. The ignoring, I think that's good, but the other one, telling, that makes some kids feel like a baby, like we can't stand up for our rights. [Isabel, PS 118]

When somebody hits somebody and that person gets mad, they have to calm that person, because that person wants to hit the other person back. Then they [the person who was hit] will have to go to the principal's office, and then they get their mothers' called to the school, and the teacher and the principal have to talk to their parents. If one person hits the other person and the other person doesn't hit the other person, that's what I like. [Wendy, PS 118]

External Threats to Children's Safety. While schools have some control in maintaining a safe internal environment for children, they have limited control over the neighborhoods in which the schools are located. When going to and returning from school each day, children and mothers had to assess the potential dangers of the neighborhood and develop strategies to increase safety. These dangers included traffic of a gas station near the school, and drug dealers or other threatening people who could be found near or on the way to school. Understandably, mothers living in new, unfamiliar neighborhoods felt particularly uneasy about the neighborhoods in which the schools were located. Manny and Aisha, who lived near the Port Authority Bus Terminal in Midtown Manhattan, were warned by their mothers to avoid the men who congregated there.

It's bad around there. It's just that because they do bad things around there, bad things. Everybody around there. It's bad around there on 42nd -- between this street, and the other street by my school and the other school over by PAL. It's bad around PAL. It's bad around my school... Well, they do bad influence... Well, they do bad things. I don't know what they called. Cuz they live around the streets. Cuz they do things on the street. They do bad things on the street... What I do? My mommy said just keep on walking cuz the bum was speaking to my mommy, so my mommy said just keep on walking. That's it. [Aisha, Residence E]

It's only a couple of blocks [to school]. There is [strange people on the way]. We just keep on walking. We just ignore them. We act like they ain't even there. They just start saying things in Spanish and stuff. We just act like they're ghosts. [Manny, Residence E]

In one school district, a bus was provided for children living in the Tier II facility, although the school was not that far away. Charles preferred the potential threat posed by the walk to school rather than looking childish by taking the bus, or perhaps, being identified as a child who lived in a homeless facility.

I don't like taking that bus that much. So many little kids. I like to walk. I like to do things by myself, walk by myself... [My mom] she don't want me to walk... [She's] afraid about the neighborhood... It's alright. [Charles, Residence C]

Some children had more directly experienced some kind of danger in the vicinity of school. Frances' children, Keith, Danielle and Clara, barely missed getting caught in the crossfire of a shooting that occurred right outside their school.

Last time they was shooting people, and this boy's mother was out there, and the boy got mad, and he went out the schoolyard, right, and then he called the police, and then he ran and he took his mother. Then, after they left, after they took everybody, we went outside and we saw all bullets on the floor. And we saw blood, cuz they killed somebody... We get scared. That's why my sister runs home. We run home... In my other schools we used to have a lot of fun. There used to be no shoot-outs. We used to go outside. [Keith, Residence A]

Recognizing the dangers of the area, Clara, who was the fifth-grade, described a lesson on street safety that she received.

Every Thursday, we used to get this cop that used to come to our classroom and talk about drugs and everything... We learned not to use drugs. We learned like, when you hear like firecrackers going "boom, boom, boom", we bend down, roll over to a car. Instead of getting slapped by your mother: "Don't pull me down!", I'd rather get slapped then get killed. [Clara, PS 187]

Despite the conditions of the neighborhood, most mothers felt that once they were inside the school their children were safe from these types of threats. Security guards, who did not allow anyone (including mothers) in the building without identification and/or an appointment, helped to protect students from whatever dangers the outside

environment held. However, several incidents where children were threatened on or close to school grounds, challenged this belief. While these incidents were not frequent, they shattered the children's sense of security. In addition to the shooting, Keith also recalls his classmate being threatened by a man near the schoolyard.

There's this man, he was drunk, and he was telling this boy from my class to come here, that he is going to give him money, and the boy didn't come to him. And then the man ran after the boy, and then he told the boy "You listen to me next time". And the boy told the teacher. And the boy had dirty marks from him right here. He liked holded this, cuz, the man's hands was dirty. And the teacher could tell that the man had him... Cuz the boy didn't ask the teacher if he could go outside, or if he could go outside the schoolyard. And then he went out, and the man was right there, and the police were right there. The police arrested him. They took him to jail. I think they took him out already. [Keith from Residence A]

After an incident where an outsider was able to gain entrance to the building, Didi no longer feels secure in school.

The school too bad... It had an intruder. I think he pulled a gun on Ms. Gonzalez [the principal]. I don't know. The doors were open, so they just came in. I think they pulled out a gun on Mrs. Gonzalez. I said, right I don't wanna go to that school no more. So next year I don't have to go... I heard it, I'm not sure of it. I think so. Two more things -- the kids, the writing on the walls. [Didi, Residence D, PS 87]

Blanca, Michelle's mother described how the schoolyard fence had broken, allowing a man to enter the school grounds. After this incident parents began coming to school to supervise the children at recess. Michelle, however, continued to be frightened at school because of a second incident where, Michelle believed, a child was killed in a fire.

Sometimes they kill a girl or boy. They killed them and then Mrs. Ortiz called all the childrens, they talked with them, they asked questions, who killed the girl... Before there was one [security guard], now they put two... That school is right there. That the school burned right off.. There's a lot of security guards. When they burned two windows, they bringed more security guards. They killed somebody inside, a student... I was in the window. They started in the bathroom,

and somebody burned the desk and they burned the other window in the other class. That's why my mother doesn't want to live here. She wants to live in Queens. It's more better. They don't kill anybody. [Michelle, Residence D, PS 16]

### The Schools' Capacity to Promote Order and Safety

Based upon the accounts of the mothers and children, there was no school in this study that was a model of order, security, or control. Instead, the behavioral standards in the schools appeared to be unclear and inconsistently enforced. With few exceptions, the examples of school discipline described by the mothers and their children showed little regard for the children's social, emotional, and intellectual development. In this climate it is not surprising to find a prevalence of school violence. The modelling of verbal and physical aggression as a way to control the students' behavior may reinforces the students' violent behavior toward each other, rather than help eliminate it. In my view, in order for children to feel safe in school they must believe that there are responsible and responsive adults accessible to them. A lack of adult supervision can contribute to all kinds of security problems. Many children also learned that because they could not rely on adults, they had to take things into their own hands or rely on their peers for protection.

Diver-Starnes (1995) and Polakow (1993) both found that the teachers in the schools they studied freely used disparaging and hurtful remarks to control their students who came from impoverished families. Quint (1994) studied a school serving large numbers of homeless and other poor children that replaced these practices with increased supervision and disciplinary strategies that respected students and made them more

accountable for their behavior. Teachers and students there reported that these changes resulted in a more orderly, pleasant, and learning oriented school environment.

#### Discussion of Issues Relating to Educational Practices

Teacher qualities, the content and implementation of instruction, and disciplinary practices and policies are all related and have an impact upon children's relationships toward school as well as their school achievement. Not surprisingly, schools that were described as having responsive teachers, who instructed children according to their ability levels, and who enforced rules and set limits to create a safe and orderly classroom were most highly valued by students and their mothers. Such schools created positive educational experiences even for children, like Kadeem, who have had a past history of academic and behavioral problems.

Most of the schools the children attended did not have all these qualities. But as long as the children continued to maintain a tolerable relationship with their teacher, they were able to maintain some degree of participation in the instructional process. Those who did not tended to act out in school or withdraw.

The findings presented in this chapter suggest that some schools have educational policies that neglect the needs of the lowest achieving students. Instead of addressing the needs of students having substantial academic difficulties or related behavioral problems, it seems that they are placed into classes where they can do the least amount of harm to the "good" students. The result of such placements was an escalation in behavioral as well as academic problems by the misplaced child. Children who were unable to participate in class or who became bored tended to act out and were then labelled as behavioral

problems. This in turn affected the mothers' relationship to the school. The mothers recognized that the schools were not serving their children adequately and their efforts to address the issue were ignored by the schools.

Other studies examining the educational experiences of children living in poverty (Diver-Stamnes, 1995; Kohl, 1967/1988; Kozol, 1991; Polakow, 1993) document that poor children of racial and language minorities, tend to have many of the same experiences described in this chapter. Being homeless would tend to intensify those problems. Polakow explains that while many children find themselves in a learning environment that is not suited to their needs, children who are hungry, homeless, or suffering from other problems have a more difficult time fitting into that environment which often exacerbates their problems. Since many homeless students attend school on a temporary basis, perhaps the schools believed that they would not be held accountable for such irregular educational programming. For example, the mothers seemed willing to endure what they knew were bad decisions, since their children were not going to remain in that school. However, it is the schools' responsibility to ensure that each child receives adequate educational services regardless of how long he or she is in attendance.

## **CHAPTER SIX THE ROLE OF SCHOOL: THE SCHOOL CLIMATE**

The aspects of school that have been described in the preceding sections are all interrelated and influenced by the schools' underlying norms, values and rules (whether formal or informal), which come together to create an overall school climate or culture. Effective schools are distinctive in their organization around a specific unified philosophy that is clearly articulated at the administrative level and is implemented in the daily practices of the school (Garbarino et al., 1992; Gonzalez, 1992; Quint, 1994). An organizational structure that is suited to children at risk of school failure, such as homeless children, promotes educational programming that recognizes and addresses the individual needs of children. This includes providing nurturing relationships with adults, appropriate curriculum, and an orderly, structured environment (as was discussed in Chapter Five) as well as effective administration, a range of supportive services to meet the children's individual needs, and strong, constructive relationships with their families. These latter issues are discussed in this chapter.

### **The School Principal**

The principal is typically cast as the central, guiding and overseeing agent of the school (Gonzalez, 1992; Quint, 1994). It is the principal who sets the "school climate" -- the overall tone or atmosphere of the school. In her study of the Benjamin Franklin Day Elementary School in Seattle, a school serving large number of homeless and impoverished students, Quint describes how a new school principal, Carole Williams, dramatically transformed the philosophy, organizational structure, and educational

practices of the school, which resulted in improved academic performance for its students. In 1989 B.F. Day was the lowest ranking elementary school in Seattle, in terms of academic performance. In 1993 it ranked 38th out of the 65 schools.

In the present study, I attempted to assess the principals' presence and role in the schools through the mothers' and children's views of them. Overall, the mothers' and children's descriptions of the roles of their school principals were narrow in scope. Mothers generally discussed the school principal as a mediator of problems, particularly around behavior -- "You only have contact with the principal if there's a problem." This included dealing with complaints from teachers about students, from parents about teachers, and from parents about other students. Only one mother described the principal's role as being responsible for the effective functioning of the school.

#### Mothers' Satisfaction with Principals

Since mothers viewed school principals as mediators of conflict or problems solvers, it is not surprising that their opinions of them were related to the way they handled some problem concerning their child. Principals who dealt with problems effectively were valued by mothers:

The principal is very helpful and concerned. When I complained that I was not being notified that my child wasn't coming to school, she hit the ceiling. She tried to find the answers. [Doreen, mother of Martin, PS 171]

We had an incident where my husband tried to get her out of school. The principal wouldn't let him. He called the house... He's very responsible. He needs details about everything. I feel good that my daughter is in his responsibility. [Yolanda, mother of Wendy, PS 118]

Once Mr. Kappas called me here. He said my son stabbed a kid with a pencil. I said that the other kid stabbed my son first. The other kid's parent came in [to

school], we talked about it. I was satisfied with the way he handled it. [Luz, mother of Reynaldo and Miranda, PS 118]

In contrast, dissatisfied mothers often described incidents where they felt the principal had handled a situation concerning their children poorly. Four mothers from Residence E, whose children attended PS 118 in Manhattan, all complained that the principal refused to reprimand teachers and would, instead, cover up for them. "His teachers are never wrong, regardless of the situation." commented the mother of Shaniqua, who was one of the high achieving students.

Mothers appreciated principals who were responsive to their concerns, helpful, concerned about the welfare of their children, responsible, nice, and fair -- "His outlook for the children is pretty good." Similarly, mothers disliked principals whom they felt were confrontative and uncooperative. They criticized principals for ridiculing the children -- "He calls my son a little punk.", as well as for not contacting parents, not listening to or being condescending to parents.

I never saw him talking to a parent. He's always coming or going. He doesn't care. He acts like he's there because he has to be. [France, mother of Keith, Danielle, and Clara, PS 187]

Some mothers attributed the principals' behaviors to racist, sexist, and classist attitudes.

There is a lot of prejudice from the principal toward the Black kids. [Mabel, mother of Didi and Leticia, PS 87]

I felt that [the principal] was trying to antagonize me. He said Shakeel needs psychological help and that I was too emotional to handle it. I said the child had no problems before this; and that I need to talk to the child first [to find out what's wrong]. The principal seemed like he had a chip on his shoulder. He said he didn't believe me about Shakeel not having any problems before. So, he called his last school. Then he called me back and apologized. It's because we come from here [a shelter]... They feel that these children don't have a father and mothers are not

capable of raising the children. I observed the principal talking to a father in a totally different way. [Samantha, mother of Anthony and Shakeel, PS 118]

### Children's Satisfaction with Principals

The children, without exception, viewed the principal as being the ultimate enforcer of discipline in the school. The children liked principals who had specific standards for behavior, enforced rules judiciously, and rewarded students' good behavior. They spoke highly of principals who dealt firmly with students who disturbed or threatened other children. The principals who dealt with these difficult problems by discussing them with the children (without yelling), trying to get different points of view, and, in some cases, giving the students a second chance before punishing them were particularly appreciated.

If I get in trouble in a bad fight, he'll give me a chance, but he won't tell nobody. [Martin, discussing the principal in his former school]

He's not like a principal that just punish you for nothing, punish you for something that you didn't do. He first let you explain before he suspend you. [Brianna, PS 121]

She's nice. She doesn't scream at you, she talks nicely to them. She take them to her office and talk to them, and takes some people who saw the fight. [Gloria, discussing the assistant principal in 171]

On the other hand, children disliked principals who used excessive or capricious disciplinary tactics. They complained at being constantly yelled at, made fun of, or handled roughly by principals. They criticized principals who were too impatient, and punished children quickly and excessively for minor infractions, without taking the time to identify the guilty parties.

He's nice, but he's a little rough. He screams at kids. When the kids don't do anything, he screams at them. When the kids do something, he don't screams at them. But when he sees them doing something, he don't punish them. He's always getting somebody that he's always getting. He always punishing kids when they don't do nothing. [Keith, PS 187]

Children were disturbed by principals who they felt did not care about them, particularly principals who they felt disregarded their complaints of other students hurting or bothering them.

Hady's lip was bleeding right here today. [A boy] in our class [pushed her]. She told Mr. Kappas. Mr. Kappas don't care. He don't care about no nothing. He only care about if he gonna get fired or not, fired from the school. [Kwadra, PS 118]

He don't say nothing [when kids fight]. The school is DOOOOOOOOH. He just be a principal, that's all he do. Just sit and be lazy. [Charles, PS 58]

The feeling that the principal singled out particular children for punishment was a strong theme among the children of Residence A who attended PS 118. Of all the children whom I interviewed, these children had the most to say about their principal, Mr. Kappas, and the strongest opinions of him -- both positive and negative. Based upon the reports of the mothers and the children, Mr. Kappas comes across as a principal who was very involved in daily school life. He seemed to place a great deal of emphasis on control and compliance, and made it clear to the children who he felt did not tow the line. "Good" children were rewarded with praise and prizes; those who broke "his rules" were severely punished.

He nice. If you be good, he let you have extra gym and extra play time. But if you be bad, he make you sit in the lunchroom. Cuz he don't like bad kids in his school. He like nice kids. Because if you be nice to Mr. Kappas, he be nice to you. He talk to kids. He give, sometimes, he give kids prizes. I got two Barbie dolls and a car.. I was happy. I told him thank-you. This other boy in my class, he got Ninja

Turtles. He's a real nice principal. I like my principal, this girl she got a prize. Her prize was a big, fat teddy bear. It was big. He said: "What a nice student." He's nice. [Shaniqua, PS 118]

The principal, he calls me a little creep. He says I'm a disgusting creep, when I'm not... I don't say nothing bad to the principal. I feel like he was a pain in the neck... I don't like school. Cuz I always get punished for nothing by the principal... And I hate the principal because he always punish me when I ain't doing nothing. The principal here is not nice. [Devon, PS 118]

But the principal is too mean. He pushes people around. He yells at them, and sometimes he just grabs them by the shirt, by the back of the shirt... [Isabel, PS 118]

I like the principal a little bit, but he yells at me, too. He goes: "You break my rules, and I don't like it!" That's what Mr. Kappas say... He says if we run on the black part of the schoolyard, we breaks his rule. And we have to run, cuz we little kids, we don't know no better. And there's this little boy that go, he's in kindergarten and he went on the black part so he punished him, and it was a little kid.. If we get out the table and don't listen to him, we break his rules and he yell at you. And we don't break his rules, he breaks our rules.. Cuz he thinks he's a nice principal. [Aisha, PS 118]

In this type of school climate, one can see how easily children who do not fit into and comply with the structure of the school can become marginalized. This seems to be a particularly risky setting for homeless children, particularly boys, who may act out in school due to the problems they are experiencing at home. For example, Anthony, who attended PS 118, felt that he did not feel like he "belonged to" his school because the school belonged to the principal:

The principal say that this is his house, he don't want none of these creeps in his house... The principal thinks it's his school. He say: "This is my house." It's nobody's school.

In some cases, the school principal was an important factor in a child's attitude toward the school. For example, a new school principal dramatically changed Mabel and

her daughters' attitude toward the school they had attended for the last five years. Both Didi and Leticia had been happy with their school. But last year, the principal left and was replaced by a new one. Mabel, once an involved parent said that she no longer participates in school affairs, and will not even talk to the school staff. She blamed the principal for the deteriorating conditions in the school -- overcrowded classrooms, insufficient textbooks -- and for creating a school climate full of racial tension. Her daughter Leticia in the fifth grade, describes how the changes have affected her.

We got a lot [of rules] but, nobody follows them anyway... When my old principal was there, Mrs. Barr, the school was like this [okay], but now it changed. The school is dirty all the time. There's writing on the walls now. My old principal, she used to walk around the whole entire school building. That's why she retired, because nobody else was doing it but her. The teachers that last year didn't care about nothing, so she quit. The school changed a lot... I don't like that school. I used to like it, now I don't. It's changed, that's it [the principal], everything else is the same. She changed the school, period.

Whether the principals' presence in the school ranged from invisibility to daily appearances in the lunchroom or hallways, their roles were perceived uniformly -- as the highest authority on school problems. None seemed to demonstrate an exceptional involvement (i.e. with students, families, teachers, and the community) or presence (i.e. in hallways, classrooms, at events) in their schools.

### The School - Family Connection

Strong, positive relationships between schools and families can only benefit children's educational development (Shorr, 1988). Parents' school involvement can vary a great deal. Some parents are satisfied with knowing what and how their children are doing, some may enjoy participating in school events or initiatives, while other parents

pursue positions of leadership in an attempt to take part in the school's governing process. There are a variety of interrelated factors that can interfere with parental involvement. Some are related to the parents -- time constraints, mistrust of or negative attitudes toward school or other social institutions, not enough interest (Diver-Stammes, 1995; Quint, 1994); some are related to the schools -- no programmatic opportunities for parent involvement, mistrust of parents, devaluation of parents' potential contribution (Fine, 1993; Quint, 1994).

For families in the shelter system, establishing a relationship with school can be especially difficult. Parents, when homeless, are often burdened with a number of activities focussed on basic survival, and are often required to juggle appointments with a host of social service providers, typically within a rigid time frame (Polakow, 1993; Quint, 1994). Parents whose children change schools often or who perceive their children's schools as temporary, may not make much of an effort to establish strong ties (Gonzalez, 1994). Also parents who feel that the school discriminates against them or their children due to their homeless status, may avoid school involvement (Gonzalez, 1994).

Therefore, this discussion of parent involvement will first describe how the mothers felt about their children's schools, it will also examine the level of contact between the mothers and schools, and then will address issues of discrimination, particularly concerning homelessness.

### Mothers' Attitudes Toward School

Using their accumulated knowledge of their children's past schools, the mothers were discriminating in their assessment of the current ones. They indicated that different

schools had different strengths and weaknesses -- "Academic-wise his old school was better; dealing with students, this school is better." They also considered how the schools met the specific, individual needs and interests of their children. In making their judgments the mothers were careful to indicate which aspects of school they felt were pervasive or systemic qualities (i.e. school administration) and those which were temporary or related to chance (i.e. one bad teacher out of many good ones).

Each mother was asked to discuss whether she felt the school was doing a good job and whether they would keep their child or children in that particular school if it were possible. Seven mothers felt that the school was doing a good job and would like to keep their children there; and nine responded negatively to both questions. However, six mothers from Residence A whose children all attended PS 118, indicated the school was doing a good job, but they wanted their children to go to a different school.

It is remarkable that of the 11 schools included in this study only PS 118 elicited a mixed response, and it came from six mothers. All mothers alluded to the idea that there was something amiss at the administrative level of the school, affecting curricular issues, staff supervision, or discipline. However, this "institutional climate" of the school, did not necessarily hinder (for the time being) their children's educational progress.

**They're doing good by my child... I would not like them to continue at this school.. don't like the way it's run. There's only one second-grade class. There are kids that are way below average. Shaniqua is the top kid in the class. It's putting everybody back... There should be more than one second grade. That's what the problem is. Every group [the teacher] helps, the others are missing out. [Janika, mother of Shaniqua, a high-achieving student]**

I don't like the school. The work they do is good, excellent. As for the children in there, they're bad... [They should] tell parents about the kids who are hitting other kids. [Luz, mother of Reynaldo and Miranda, both high-achieving students]

A possible explanation for these mixed responses may be attributed to the mothers' collective information about this school. This particular school was described as having at least two teachers who had been physically abusive to students. At least four mothers complained that their children were placed inappropriately there. A number of mothers and children also described problems with school violence. The mothers of the children attending this school interacted with each other regularly. Therefore, it is likely that they were aware of the range of existing problems in the school, even if their children did not experience them directly.

Looking at the mothers' responses in relationship to their children's achievement test scores, an interesting pattern emerges. Mothers of the lowest achieving children were the most negative in their assessment of school, mothers of the children in the below average group were the most positive, and mothers whose children were the highest achievers were the most mixed in their responses (see Table 4).

Achievement Group	Good Job and Want to Stay	Bad Job and Want to Leave	Good Job and Want to Leave	No Opinion
Above Average	1	1	5	0
Below Average	5	2	1	1
Poor	0	5	0	2

Taken together, these findings suggest that mothers, in forming attitudes toward schools, take into account their children's needs, whether or not they are being addressed, and the institutional qualities of the educational environment. The mothers of the children in the highest achieving group appeared to enter the school setting with the expectation that their children would succeed, and therefore demanded more of the school; while those in the below average group appeared to be more than satisfied if their children made any academic progress. At the same time, mothers of poorest achieving students felt that the school was simply not meeting the needs of their children. These attitudes, as described below, also are related to the degree of contact mothers have with schools.

#### Communication Between Mothers and Schools

Open lines of communication between parents and school provides both parties with information to meet the needs of the children. Mothers were asked to discuss issues of communication. The most common form of contact between mothers and schools was face-to-face meetings. Scheduled meetings (usually to address problems) and informal encounters, such as when children were picked up from school, provided mothers with information on their children's school progress and behavior. Notes and, less commonly, progress reports were other ways teachers and mothers communicated. Several mothers mentioned that they received phone calls from the school, but this strategy was usually reserved for specific problems (i.e. illness, poor attendance, disciplinary problems).

The frequency, degree, and type of contact between mothers and school may vary by mother, a child's teacher, and the school itself. Mothers who had more contact with the

school were not necessarily those who were more satisfied. Rather mothers regarded school contact as positive when they regularly received balanced (both good and bad) information about their children's progress, obtained immediate notification of problems, and found school staff to be responsive to their concerns and willing to try to resolve problems in partnership with parents.

Tamika's new teacher sends a report every Friday. It's good. [It has] her work, what she did, how she's doing. I'm supposed to go to school for a teacher's meeting, and I'll ask Lionel's teacher to send a weekly report. [Tanya, whose children attend PS 118]

The teacher calls when he's doing good or bad, not just when he's doing bad. [Doreen, mother of Martin in PS 171]

Shaniqua started school with 100s and then her work started going down, from 100 to 35. The teacher called me in to discuss the problem... She didn't waste time in contacting me. [Janika, PS 118]

In contrast, teachers and school staff who only contacted mothers to complain about the children's behavior or school performance, but did not listen to the mothers views, or respond to their overtures to collaborate with the school, were viewed negatively by mothers.

They wait until a problem is out of hand until they call you. The teacher waited a month before she contacted me. [Samantha, mother of Anthony and Shakeel, PS 118]

They call me for every little thing. [Tanya, mother of Tamika and Lionel, PS 118]

[I get information] from the teachers. It's all the time bad. When there's a problem, they call my sister's house, not here. [Lourdes, mother of Gloria and Roberto, PS 171]

Some mothers who encountered resistance or a lack of responsiveness from school staff decided to stop communicating with school personnel altogether. Others used a third-party (e.g., BOE or Tier II staff) to obtain information on their children's progress. Unfortunately, due to differences in the way school districts manage their resources, these educational liaisons were not regularly available to all families. Siblings in school, friends of the mother, and the children themselves were also identified as sources of information about children's progress, behavior, and the school itself.

I don't want to be bothered with the school. The school only contacts you when there is a problem. I go to the BOE [Board of Education] person here. She gives a good progress report. [Mabel, Residence D, mother of Didi and Leticia, PS 87]

When Darlene [education liaison] asks about Maria, her teacher said everything was fine. When I asked, there was a problem. I had already told her that Maria had a problem. She ignored me, I guess. [Rosa, Residence E, mother of Manny and Maria, PS 118]

I go there a lot. Ms. Lopez told me that Devon is starting to mess up -- not paying attention. When I went to talk to her, she walked away and made faces. Forget it! I left. I won't speak to her now, so I don't know how he's doing. [Elena, Residence E, mother of Danny, Devon, and Corinne, PS 118]

Communication seemed to play an important role in mothers' overall attitudes toward school. Each of the nine mothers who were dissatisfied with their children's school described an incident where her attempt to communicate ended negatively. Mothers' satisfaction with school contact also differed by their children's achievement level. Seven of the eight mothers of the lowest achieving children rated school contact negatively (the remaining mother gave a neutral response), while only one mother each in the higher achieving groups reported that they were not happy with the type of communication provided by the school.

### Factors Affecting Parental Involvement

The level of school involvement of the mothers in this study was mainly limited to discussions of the children's educational progress or problems with teachers or other school personnel. One mother indicated that she had volunteered to supervise children in the schoolyard once, and another said she donated a cake to a school bake sale. No mother reported that she was currently a member of a school's parent association or had participated in any educational or recreational parent activities offered by the school.

School Policies. Some mothers indicated that the school provided opportunities for them to become more involved, but they did not take advantage of them. For example, one school had set up a "Parent's Room", but it was not used by any of four mothers who had children attending that school.

They have a Parent's Room in school. I don't go. I should have, but it's too late now. It's the end of the year. [Doreen, mother of Martin, PS 171]

In other cases, mothers felt that the school should provide more opportunities to get and keep parents involved in school both through formal programs (i.e. Parents' Association) as well as through the school policies that were more inclusive, welcoming, and less restrictive to parents.

They don't have no force in making the parents come. The school needs to get on the parents more... They had a lot of nice stuff in the old school, for parents and kids -- a nice Parents' Association, family activities. I always participated in parent activities. I haven't heard of any Parent Association here. I don't know who were running the cookie sale or pictures. I think it's run by teachers. The parents are not involved. [Janika, mother of Shaniqua, PS 118]

Some mothers felt an "open door" policy deterred behavior problems, since their children would be better behaved knowing that their mothers might be on the premises without

warning. Mothers became frustrated and suspicious of schools that denied them easy access.

In most schools, the parents were welcome. At this school, you're not allowed to go nowhere unless someone escorts you... In Brooklyn, I lived across the street [from school] and could catch him [misbehaving]. He stopped misbehaving... Kids get feeling different when they know their Mom's going to the school... [They need] to have parents more involved and to keep them more informed. [Samantha, mother of Anthony, PS 118]

I want to be able to sit in the classroom. The teacher in his old school loved me to come. I used to come and help her... [Here] they never give you a tour of the school like they should. I don't really know what the kids are doing... I go and surprise him at school. I want to see what he's doing for myself. They don't let me in, so I sneak in. I say I'm going to the Parent's Room and I never do. I go to his classroom instead. They say to me, "The teacher tells you when to come for meetings, you don't come when you want, it's disruptive." The teacher never says anything to me. [Milagros, mother of Alex, PS 171]

If they don't want you in, they must not be doing what they supposed to be doing. [Elena, mother of Danny and Devon, PS 118]

Mothers also felt that being denied school access prevented them from learning about the schools' available resources and services that might benefit their children. Particularly frustrating for mothers was that while they were not provided with opportunities to learn about existing resources they were expected to provide financial assistance in securing them.

The school is always asking the parents for money for different things. I don't know where the school funds go. [Mabel, mother of Didi, PS 87]

Schools that desire greater community and family access have greater challenges in providing security. As I described previously, school safety was a major concern for mothers, and a number of them felt good about security guards who interrogated all who entered the school. Recognizing the prevalence of family violence in our communities, it

is not only strangers but the parents themselves who may be perceived as "safety risks" by the schools.

**They are very strict. The parents aren't even allowed to go into the building. They had a shooting there. A little girl got hurt. [Frances, mother of Keith and Danielle, PS 187]**

In one school that I visited, the principal, as he photocopied my letters of introduction, my permission to interview, and my driver's license, explained that no one was above suspicion. He described how a man recently had called asking for the address of his child who was attending that school, and they refused to give it to him. The next day the mother came into school furious at the principal. He explained that they did not give out their address to the child's father. She responded that just by acknowledging that the child was attending the school, the father would continue to search the neighborhood until he finds them. She then indicated that she would have to move in order to protect herself and her family.

Yolanda, one of the mothers, also described how her estranged, abusive husband had attempted to take her daughter Wendy out of school without her knowledge. She was thankful that the school immediately called her and did not allow the father to take the child. She also felt that this school successfully balanced safety and parental access.

**I go right upstairs. They I.D. you. You don't need an appointment. [The school is] safe. We had an incident where my husband tried to get [my daughter] out of school. The principal wouldn't let him. He called the house. [Yolanda, PS 118]**

Increasing parent involvement is a challenge for both schools and parents.

Homeless parents need to be considered a force and a resource in their children's education, even if they only attend a school temporarily. In one school, several mothers

who became increasingly dissatisfied with a teacher, whom they described as both physically abusive and irresponsible, decided to take action. Together they confronted the principal about her behavior. From this experience the mothers learned that they could have a direct impact on their children's education.

First she had a mean teacher. I knew that she was off the wall... A bunch of mothers who lived here got together and had a conference with the principal, the teacher and the parents. She kept denying everything. The principal didn't say anything. After a couple of days she wasn't there anymore. [Yolanda, mother of Wendy]

The children also learned that their mothers were capable of taking action and effecting change. Tamika, in her typically dramatic style, described the mothers' heroics.

I had this bad, little witch, a teacher named Ms. Ratchet. She be throwing people all in the class... That's why she don't work there no more... My mommy came to that school that other day, and then she was cursing Ms. Ratchet out, in front of the principal and all of that. Now I'm glad she don't work there no more, either... One day, she slapped Wendy in her face, and Wendy started crying. She told her mother, her mother came down there, she said: "You want somebody smacking your daughter?" She went POW! Wendy's mother went POP. She smacked the teacher right in front of [the principal, and [the assistant principal].

Although it is difficult to piece together what actually happened, the children learned that confrontation was an effective way for their mothers to effect school change. It is important that the children also learn that their parents can be involved in school in positive, proactive, ways as well.

#### Teachers' Perspectives on Parental Involvement

Communication is a two-way street. The teachers who were included in this study unanimously agreed that parent involvement was a critical factor in the children's learning process. They described their strategies to communicate with parents -- official as well as

informal meetings, letters and phone calls; and reported that contact with parents varied tremendously. Every teacher acknowledged that despite their efforts they had not been one hundred percent successful in reaching parents.

Contact varies. I see some parents every day. Some stop by and say hello. They make sure the kids have everything -- pencils, notebooks -- check to see if they are low. I communicate with them often. I write messages in the child's notebook. Sometimes the kids rip it out, and I mail big envelopes. [Teacher in PS 58]

About half [the parents] I see daily. They meet me when I walk out and they pick up the kids. They ask about them. [I see] the other half once in a blue moon. A couple of them I never see. Eighteen out of 25 showed up at the parent-teacher conference. [Teacher in PS 58]

Those who expressed the greatest satisfaction with their ability to reach parents described having an "open door" policy -- even when the school administration opposed it.

I have an open-door policy. Parents can come in whenever they want. I have a very good working relationship with parents -- discussing behavior and class work. They drop in at all times. I'm one of the fortunate ones with regard to parents. They have been very receptive, not disruptive. It shows concern for the child. [Teacher in PS 58]

I have a few official meetings, but I don't need them. They always visit. My class is open to all. The principal doesn't like it. I see parents every day or every other day. They invite me to all events. The mothers tell me a lot about their personal life. [Bilingual teacher in PS 121]

I keep an open door policy. The principal doesn't like it. I see parents at parent-teacher times. I try not to be too negative, as little as possible. When there's no other outlet, I call home [or] if there's an accident. I see parents in the neighborhood. I see them in the street. I'm connected to the community. [Mr. Jones, Malik's teacher, PS 121]

Teachers always attributed communication problems to parents and/or the children. They felt that the most difficult to reach parents were those whose children were exhibiting the most problems.

Contact varies. Parents whose kids do well, you see more. The ones you want to see the most, you see the least. I send letters to parents, they're ignored, kids rip up the notes or forge signatures. Parents don't come as often as they should. For the ones who are not doing well, they come less. I call frequently, but some have no phone... Parents complain that teachers aren't teaching. [Teacher in PS 58]

I see some every day, some you can't get in touch with. A lot of parents are hostile or mistrustful towards teachers, particularly White teachers. Racism is a real problem, It's getting worse here. I never have seen it so bad. Racism is a big thing. The [families] hate White people. Kids aren't naturally racist, they have to be learning it at home. The Black teachers aren't any better. They teach kids how to be racist. [Ms. Arturo, Troy's teacher, PS 58]

The teachers, based upon their previous experiences, felt that their communication with homeless parents was no different than with any other parent. Similarly, contact varied depending upon the situation and the parents who were involved.

The mother would always maintain contact and communication. I would listen to her frustrations. I would try to discuss how to get her son from one point to the next, encouraging and helping her. We worked out something through the school, we got them clothing. It turned out to be a positive experience, they felt supported. [Teacher in PS 58]

One child [Brianna], I never had any problems with the child. I never called her mother. I sent positive reports home. The others -- I tried writing letters, never got responses. One of the mothers was involved with drugs. [Brianna's teacher in PS 121]

These findings show some consistency among the views of mothers and teachers that the relationships between parents of the poorest achieving students and their teachers were the most fragile. As was reported above, the mothers of the children who were the poorest achievers felt the most negatively about their contact with the school. Some of those mothers admittedly stopped communicating with their children's teachers. For various reasons, perhaps related to their prior, negative school experiences, or lack of confidence due to their own lack of education, these mothers may approach school full of

mistrust, doubts, and defensiveness. While an analysis of mothers' attitudes toward their own schooling is beyond the scope of the present study, it may be helpful to examine their educational level in relation to their children's.

**Mothers' Educational Level.** As was reported earlier, the mothers generally had limited educational backgrounds with only nine having earned their high school diploma or its equivalency. The mothers of the lowest achieving children, however, were the least educated among all the mothers -- two had dropped out of school before entering high school. The mothers of the poorest achieving children were also different in that they had lowest expectations for their children's educational attainment.

**Mothers' Expectations of Educational Success.** All the mothers of the children in the two higher achieving groups, including those who had dropped out of high school, expected their children to complete high school. In the poorest achieving group, however, none of the mothers expected their children to attend college and two were not confident that they would even finish high school.

Shaniqua will go to college. She wants to be a lawyer. She thinks she can make it. [Janika, mother of high-achiever Shaniqua]

All three are going too slow. They always said [Felicia (in high school)] was an excellent student. Now she's having problems. I don't know if they'll graduate [from high school]. [Sally, mother of Kadeem and Naomi, poor achievers.]

He'll be a high school and college graduate. [Doreen, mother of Martin, below average achiever]

It is understandable that the mothers of the highest achieving children had higher aspirations for their children. However, the mothers whose children were achieving below average in school were also confident that their children's current academic or behavioral

problems would not impede them from successfully completing their education. The mothers who believed their children would succeed communicated these expectations to their children, and seemed to feel that they had some influence over their children's decisions to stay in school.

**I hope he finish high school. I keep pushing him, keep telling him he has to get his education. I hope he won't drop out. I hope he'll go to college. [Cindy, mother of Charles, below average achiever]**

Mothers of the poorest achieving children communicated a different attitude about their children's educational outcomes. They were not as sure that their children's educational problems were resolvable, perhaps because of the intensity and longevity of those problems, combined with a lack of faith in the educational system's ability to address them. They seemed to feel that they had little control over their children's decision to stay in school. Given the constellation of problems Troy has had both academically and behaviorally over his entire educational history, for instance, it is understandable that his mother might reasonably doubt whether he would make it to the end of high school.

**I don't know about Troy. He doesn't like school. He says he doesn't need an education. He'll make a living another way. [Brenda]**

It is remarkable that some mothers, whose children are still quite young and who have not experienced as many problems as Troy has, also seem to have given up hope that they will succeed in school. Gloria's mother, who previously said that her children did well in school before they were homeless, now has doubts that her children will complete high school.

Parents' expectations for their children not to complete school are probably communicated to them at some level, even if they are not direct or conscious. Lourdes, for example, allows Gloria and Roberto to stay home from school if they do not feel like going. The attitude that regular school attendance is not important can undermine the children's progress. These attitudes and beliefs, then become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

#### Improving School - Family Connections

The findings reported above demonstrate that families who are homeless desire and can benefit from school environments where parents feel comfortable and valued. Quint (1994) and Gonzalez (1992) both describe how schools can become more responsive to and inclusive of parents of homeless families, regardless of how long the children will be there.

The relationship among mothers' lower educational achievement, greater frequency of difficulties and dissatisfaction with school communication, lower educational expectations for children, and the children's lower level of academic achievement is extremely important. It suggests that the mothers who themselves had the worst educational experiences have carried those negative experiences into their relationships with their children school. In turn, the schools responses to these "difficult" mothers serve to confirm the mothers' views of school as a hostile and alienating environment. It is up to the schools to disrupt this cycle and change the nature of these relationship in order to increase the children's chances at school success (Quint, 1994).

Teachers and school staff may benefit from learning new strategies to deal with parents, particularly those who are considered hard-to-reach. However, Garbarino et al

(1992) caution that even the most parent-centered school programs may not reach every parent.

Unfortunately, however, despite the sophisticated skills of the social work staff, parents sometimes cannot or will not develop a strong relationship [with the preschool program]... This lack of response is not unusual in inner-city programs and occurs most frequently in precisely those families where the problems are the most extreme -- where the children show the greatest evidence of dysfunction (p. 149).

For this reason, it is also important to remember that whether parents become involved in their children's educational process or not, it is the school's ultimate responsibility to educate all the students in its care.

#### The Stigmatization and Discrimination of Homeless Students

Stigmatization has been described as a common experience of homeless students (Crosson Tower, 1992; Eddowes, 1992; Gonzalez, 1992; Maza & Hall, 1990; Rafferty, 1991; Rivlin, 1990). The threat or actual experience of abuse or rejection by classmates is considered to have a tremendous impact on students' experience of school. Others have documented insensitivity and harsh treatment of homeless students by teachers and other school personnel (Gonzalez, 1992; Polakow, 1993; Quint, 1994; Rafferty, 1991). In this section both teachers' and schoolmates' attitudes and behavior toward homeless children are addressed.

#### Mothers' Perceptions of Discrimination

Half the mothers felt that their children were treated differently in school due to their homeless status; and all but one felt that their children were treated more negatively. More mothers (9) identified teachers rather than the other children (6) as the source of

discrimination; and five of these mothers felt it was only the teachers who treated their children differently, not the other students at all.

When mothers described the types of experiences that led them to believe that their children were stigmatized by homelessness, it became clear their perceptions were based on how they interpreted different school incidents, that were of a somewhat ambiguous nature -- fights with other students, rude treatment, rumors, and hostile looks.

He thought he was [treated differently] by the teacher. He said the kids would be looking at him. He's ashamed sometimes. The counselor talked to the teacher about that. She said that it wasn't like that. She said that it's not true and that he wants the teacher's attention. [Cindy, mother of Charles, PS 58]

Kids treat them like they are "nobodys". I wonder if the teachers also treat them that way. [Frances, mother of Keith, Danielle and Clara, PS 187]

By teachers -- My friend told me they are. I don't know how true that is. So far, I haven't had any problems. [Jeanie, mother of Arlene and Richard, PS 118]

Other mothers described similar incidents but attributed them to other factors -- being a new kid in school, personal styles of teachers and staff. In fact several mothers mentioned that although they expected and may have at first believed their children were treated differently, they later changed their minds.

I think the school is just like that. I expected them to [treat them different] but nothing yet... At first I thought it [the school] was a bunch of volunteers that wanted to act like teachers and principals for us homeless people. Then I found out it was a real school. [Elena, mother of Danny and Devon, PS 118]

The first day my son went to school they threw pencils and crayons at him, called him names, because he was new -- not because he was living here. [Luz, referring to Reynaldo, PS 118]

Regardless of whether the stigma of being homeless is actual or perceived it still can cause a child a great deal of anxiety and pain. Each new move was likely to bring with

it a new set of social challenges and the possibility of rejection. Several mothers described their children as embarrassed, worried, or ashamed that people would discover their homeless status, and both mothers and children attempted to conceal this information.

I used to think that [they were treated differently]. The teachers and principals know. I don't know how they know. That's why I wanted her to go back to her old school. I didn't want people to know she was living here. [Cheryl, mother of Aisha, PS 118]

It bothers him. He worries. He thinks some of the kids know. He doesn't tell all the kids, thinks they will misjudge him. [Milagros, mother of Alex, PS 171]

Some mothers also described a second type of stigmatization that was somewhat less blatant. These mothers indicated that teachers and school staff assumed that their children were more needy or had more problems because they were homeless. Mothers found these attitudes discriminatory and objectionable, particularly if they felt the teachers' prejudices led them to give up on or not teach their children.

I heard [the teachers] use a phrase. They said to me and another parent that the kids were different because they came from the shelter. I found myself getting angry. I said: "That's not fair to them or other children here." It's a public school and they should be treated equally. [Keisha, mother of Kwadra, PS 118]

The teachers know the kids' situation. They think these kids need more. The teachers say that they have problems because they live here. I don't think so. [Lourdes, mother of Gloria and Roberto, PS 171]

[The teacher] complains about the "shelter kids". She has not picked up her finger to help my daughter. [Rosa, mother of Manny and Maria, PS 118]

In contrast, in a case where attention to the child's homeless status was followed with positive, constructive treatment, the mother viewed the school favorably.

The teachers [treat him differently]. They try to understand, be sympathetic, and work with him. [Doreen, mother of Martin, PS 171]

Many of the mothers who felt that their children were not treated differently, attributed it to the teachers' and/or other students' lack of awareness of the children's homeless status. Homelessness was most easy to conceal when the children continued to attend their same school. Some mothers whose children attended a school with a large homeless student population, felt that because the school staff was accustomed to homeless families, they did not treat them any differently.

Overall, mothers did not expect their children to receive any special treatment in school due to their being homeless. They did, however, expect their children to receive help if they were experiencing problems, whatever the causes.

#### Children's Experiences of Discrimination

While perceived or anticipated prejudice caused the children considerable stress and anxiety those who directly experienced discrimination were devastated. Although the children were not asked whether they were treated differently in school, two voluntarily described how students made fun of them, or teachers who humiliated them by mentioning their homelessness in front of the other students.

Sometimes [my teacher] she'll say: "I already have five kids that are from [Residence E]." She'll yell it out. And I don't want people to know that I'm here. And then all these kids, you hear them like whispering to these other kids' ear. There's a lot of kids [from Residence E] that are in there. There's like, there was five in that [class]. When we act bad she'll say: "That's what happens when you're in [Residence E]." [Manny describing Ms. Lopez in PS 118]

For Gloria, this made her want to avoid school altogether.

Everybody [bothers me in school]. They tease me and they said that I live in a shelter... [I do] nothing, I just stay quiet... That teacher, if I tell him, he's not

gonna say nothing, he's gonna scream at me... The only one I tell is Martin. Martin doesn't tell the children that he lives in a shelter. Cuz, if he did tell, they say that to Martin, Martin is gonna beat them up... [Because] people tease me... [In the morning] I stay in the bed, like I don't hear my mother. Sometimes [she lets me stay home]. [Gloria, PS 171]

Most children, however, did not describe any direct incidents of discrimination. This does not necessarily mean that the other children did not feel stigmatized in some way. For example, it is likely that Charles and Troy, who both attended PS 58, were reluctant to take the school bus was because the children would associate it with Residence C.

Looking at children's school relationships can provide some sense of how they fit in at school. All of the children mentioned that they had at least one friend in school. The Tier II residence was a source of school friends for many (15) of the children. At the same time, all but four children mentioned that they had made new friends in school, who were not from the facility. Of these four children, three attended the same school. Gloria, mentioned in the paragraph above, was one of these children. Perhaps, because of Gloria's experiences, or their own, these children avoided or were rejected by the other children from school. The children in this study generally said they were able to establish new friendships with classmates, or maintain their former ones, after they had become homeless.

#### Teachers' Attitudes Toward Homeless Students

To get a better understanding of teachers' awareness of homelessness and their perceptions of homeless children and their families, 15 teachers, 10 from PS 58, and 5 from PS 121 were interviewed as part of this study.

All 15 of the teachers were familiar with the issue of homelessness, although not all of them had homeless students in their classes. Ten had between one and three homeless students in their classes that school year; five had never had a student whom they knew to be homeless. These five teachers, however, said that they did have children who were either formerly homeless or who were living in foster homes or in other situations marked by the instability and mobility they believed to be characteristic of homelessness. According to the school profiles (New York City Public Schools, 1990, 1991), of the 11 schools in the present study the 2 schools in which these teachers taught were among the six having the lowest numbers of homeless students (less than 10). It is possible that teachers in schools with higher concentrations of homeless students, could have somewhat different attitudes toward them.

### Identifying Homeless Students

As the mothers indicated, before teachers can make a judgment about a homeless student they would have to know whether the student was, in fact, homeless. The teachers all reported that they were not routinely informed if a student was homeless. In most cases, the teachers discovered this information in the course of investigating the possible reasons for students' problems. Teachers noticing behavioral (e.g. lateness, absenteeism, sleepiness) or academic problems typically asked the mothers what was happening at home and/or examined the child's school records, particularly if they were not familiar with the child.

I noticed the student was absent about eight days in a row. He always had good attendance. I inquired and found out about the kid's being in a shelter. [Teacher in PS 121]

The parents told me, because the kid was always late. When I asked why they said they were living in a hotel in Manhattan [the school was in the Bronx]. [Teacher in PS 58]

In the absence of problems, the teachers felt that it was possible that a student's situation could remain unknown to them.

I'm not sure [if there are homeless students]. I'm not always informed. I only know when there's a problem... When a student is late a lot that is one sign of a problem, it might be homelessness. Unless there is a problem, you wouldn't know, you wouldn't investigate. [Teacher in PS 58]

Teachers don't have much information, the school secretaries do. If you ask about [the kids] they'll tell you, [but you don't] unless you see a problem. Absenteeism is a sign of homelessness... I don't look at record cards [initially]. I don't want to prejudge the kids. I wait till the middle of the year. [Brianna's teacher, PS 121]

I didn't know [my student was homeless] until the last week of the term. He had been there for all year and I never had a clue. I never knew. He did well in class, always on time, always had his homework. [Teacher in PS 58]

Teachers found that even after following a line of inquiry they were not always sure if the students were homeless or not. Some mentioned that the children and other family members might try to conceal this information.

There were frequent absences. The quality of their personal hygiene declined. The kids started wearing the same clothes every day. I inquired about these students... I was never able to pin it down. I tried to find out. All the relatives said different things. Records don't necessarily tell you. I notice problems, but I don't always know why. [Teacher in PS 58]

I have many children who are homeless or living in impermanent situations with other relatives. Sometimes I'm not aware [if a child is homeless]. There is reticence from parents to receive help. They distrust social workers. You can't tell from records. Children often don't have the same last names as the parents. [Ms. Arturo, Troy's teacher, PS 58]

The mother didn't say, she said they moved. The school secretary sent me a form from the social service agency. They called about attendance. [Mr. Jones, Malik's teacher, PS 121]

A few teachers had more confidence in their ability to identify students who were "officially" homeless, than to uncover the sources of other family problems.

If they're in shelters, I know. I'm not always aware of who is living with their primary guardian. Acting out is a sign. I don't find much of a difference between shelter kids and foster kids. [Ms. Arturo, Troy's teacher, PS 58]

My students seem as if they come from homes. When most of the children come in, I feel that there is a parent there, and there is supervision and guidance. They are clean and well-groomed. I'm not always sure if they are from dysfunctional or intact homes -- they seem to be [intact] -- as long as there is someone in the home taking care of the child. [Teacher from PS 58 who does not have homeless students]

Although teachers were not always aware whether children were homeless or not, they were often aware of and concerned about students who changed residences and schools often. A number of teachers drew parallels between homelessness and other situations that created a lack of permanence and stability for children, such as foster care. Many teachers felt that for whatever the reason, when children were not in a stable family setting, it presented problems for the children that were played out in the classroom.

I have a lot of children that move a lot. I don't know if it's related to homelessness, I'm not informed. I was having a problem with one child and checked his records. He moved 10 times and went to 11 different schools by the first or second grade. I have problems with foster care children. I have a child in a foster home who comes late every day. I never know which situation is worse... Students in this school come from many other situations that cause problems. Some are in foster care, others have parents in jail, transiency is a real problem. Kids change schools a great deal. I don't know if these kids are homeless or if moving around a lot is related to becoming homeless, but it presents problems. [Teacher in PS 58, who does not have homeless students]

The students that I thought were homeless were not. They were in bad home situations. I often have problems with children living in foster homes... Many of the children are living with relatives, not with their immediate families. I don't know if this due to homelessness or some other reason. It happens a lot. [Teacher in PS 58 who has homeless students]

Mobility is a real problem. I have kids from all over. The average student stays two years [in this school]. Sixty percent of my class is stable, forty percent is mobile... It's heartbreaking. I had a child in school two years ago, she went to Puerto Rico and came back a year later. They put her in the next grade when she came back. She lives with her aunt in the projects. The girl came one or two days. She was supposed to go to school in Queens. She never went to school, had three or four changes of address. All the kids are put ahead. They lose one year each time [they move back to Puerto Rico]. [Bilingual teacher in PS 121, does not have homeless students]

It is interesting that none of the teachers I interviewed indicated that they should or wanted to be systematically informed when there was a homeless student in their class. Perhaps they assumed this would be an invasion of the child's privacy. Or perhaps teachers felt that it was more important to deal with whatever issues the children brought into the classroom, regardless of their causes.

### Perceptions of Problems Associated with Homelessness

The teachers showed an awareness of the various problems associated with homelessness. Many felt that homelessness was often accompanied by other factors that seriously threatened children, such as family violence, drug and alcohol abuse, or criminal behavior of parents.

Some are foster children. Some are raised by their grandmothers. There are large gaps in age, they can't relate to the kid in the same way as a younger parent. They may not be as active. Some come from one parent families... Some kids are

hungry. Some kids in the afterschool program eat there and that's the last meal of the day. Some parents have drug and alcohol problems. A lot of parents are very young. School is part of the problem. Home is a bigger problem, what the kids have to deal with at home. [Teacher of homeless children, PS 121]

The teachers demonstrated an understanding of how becoming homeless and living in temporary housing conditions could completely disrupt all aspects of children's lives. They mentioned that in terms of physical needs homeless children may suffer from hunger, fatigue, poor hygiene, and illness. They also described how homeless children often lost all their worldly possessions, including their clothes, which affected their sense of self as well as their relationships with their classmates.

Their need for space becomes evident. They become almost territorial, you cannot violate their space. To go from having their own to not having anything. They need something to claim for their own. Most of the conflicts [between children] are around property and space. There's a more intense focus on things. They don't have access to the same things [as the other children]. [Teacher of homeless children in PS 58]

They don't have their own possession, like clothing. They don't want to admit they need anything. Someone tried to give a child clothing. He had no clothes. A teacher gave him a bag of clothes. The kid left them outside the school. They don't have their own space, own desk. [Teacher of homeless children in PS 58]

It's the age old problem of "haves" and "have-nots." Children are always saying what they have. When there's sharing of what's going on in family settings, homeless children are unable to participate in these conversations... They start creating their situation, fantasize about their activities in order to participate. It shields them from others knowing that they don't have, or can't do anything. The negative environment becomes part of their experiences. The proximity of environment while living in shelters, the closeness, the environment has come to you, you can't shut it out. [Teacher of homeless children in PS 58]

The teachers also assumed that most shelters, being noisy and crowded, provided neither adequate conditions for the children to study nor, equally as important, opportunities for children to play, socialize with friends and "be children."

[It would affect] their ability to socialize, how much time they would have to play, to share things. [They have] no normal family life. They grow up before their time -- [you can see this from] the kind of language and thoughts that they have. [Teacher of homeless children in PS 58]

It's hard for it not to carry into schoolwork. They don't have the conditions to study without interruptions -- small space, little time when there's no ongoing distractions. [Teacher of homeless children in PS 58]

Hotel facilities are unsanitary... There are mice and roaches. It can scare children. There are other siblings around. There's just not a lot of supervision given to children. Hotel situation breeds a lot of adult interaction that children shouldn't be a part of. [Mr. Jones, whose cousin lived in the Martinique, Malik's teacher, PS 121]

Finally, the teachers recognized that the burden of coping with and attempting to resolve homelessness most often fell on mothers, who were already carrying heavy responsibilities. The result was that children received less parental attention and affection when they most needed it, and academic activities at home would be sacrificed to fulfill daily survival needs.

Parents who don't have time supervise homework for reasons A to Z [is a problem]... The teacher has to understand that homework is an afterthought [after] taking care of siblings, medical needs. [Mr. Jones, Malik's teacher, PS 121]

Most of them are unable to function academically due to the stress of having nowhere to live. Parents become less affectionate, become hostile. Children don't understand certain things in life. Some parents don't have the psychological background, they take it out on the children. Physical or emotional abuse or neglect results. [Teacher in PS 121, has no homeless students]

There's always a constant need to fulfill household functions that don't get fulfilled... [Teacher in PS 58, has no homeless students]

The teachers felt that homelessness affected their students' psychological and social development as well as their academic functioning. They described how homeless children

commonly exhibited anger or hostility, anxiety, an inability to concentrate, depression or withdrawal, and feelings of shame or low self-esteem -- all making learning very difficult.

I think [homeless children] have emotional problems in terms of stability -- being unsure of where they're sleeping, a sense of uncertainty, not sure if they're going to have food to eat... [They are] unable to focus skills and stay on task, have control. A lack of stability causes inability to control [one]self.... In order to be a good student you have to be free of emotional problems and have a sense of stability, to be open to learn. It gives them a sense of self-worth when they have stability about them. [Teacher in PS 58, has no homeless students]

[There is] anger -- knowing other kids have a home, anger about kids who have things they don't have. They feel deprived and bereft... [I have seen] severe anger, seemingly unprovoked, that snowballs into physical abuse of others -- myself and other children. Instability is part of their daily life. It is part of their anger. They are shifted to grandmother, mother, father, not wanted by any. When they know they're not wanted they act out. They resent the well-taken-care-of kids. It's seldom verbalized. It only comes to life after abusing other children and the teacher. Physical abuse to other children is not just from shelter children, it's from the children not knowing [where they will be living]. [Ms. Arturo, Troy's teacher, PS 58]

If so much of what a child is gathering is from an adult whose values are not developed, they will pick up those mannerisms. The child won't be able to pick up a normal way of acting. A child can pick up profanity. The child won't know [what it means] but will use the word. Children come in contact with adults, have nowhere to play, are left in hallways or streets. The adults are concerned with other siblings or other adults. There is no place for the child to be a child... The child is exposed to adult conversations and behavior. Most people in that situation are on public assistance with the whole mentality that goes with it. I have worked there [in shelters]. Adults become so overwhelmed. A lot of folks won't take advantage of [the services offered] in shelters. [Mr. Jones, Malik's teacher who reportedly "curses" in class, PS 121]

### Perceptions of Strengths and Resiliency

While teachers were well aware of the problems that they associated with homelessness, they all pointed out that either (a) not all homeless children exhibited problems; (b) the severity of the problems were related to mitigating circumstances in that

particular child's life; (c) that homeless children also exhibited strength and abilities, and (d) it is possible for children who have serious problems in school to overcome them, sometimes within the same school year.

One child was [being abused by his father]. BCW put the child in a foster home. He was abused by his foster parents. Then he went back to his father and was abused again. The child begged not to be put in a foster home. He will stay with his grandmother for now. He's getting counseling now... The abuse in the foster home and by his father made his behavior erratic. He doesn't trust anyone... I have to calm him down, call the [grade] supervisor, because of his behavior. I explained to the other kids how to deal with [him] -- that they should ignore him when he acts up. It helps. I explained to the kids that sometimes people have problems and we have to work on them together. We have to try and help him... He's an observant child. He has potential. He can read and do math, has all the academic skills. He knows it, but that doesn't mean he does it. His need for attention inhibits his ability to do work. He will do anything to get attention. He's a frail child and wants to be hugged or caressed every once in awhile. [Children] are supposed to be able to trust parents and his father abuses him. [Teacher who has homeless students, PS 58]

One girl was extremely withdrawn. She was one year older than everyone else in the class. She had no friends in class and was frequently absent. She was one of 14 children. I don't know the causes. The mother allows the child not to attend school. Eight year-olds cannot make those decisions. The mother doesn't care, she's overwhelmed... She was a lovely, wonderful girl, the nicest in the class. She did excellent work, doesn't let anything slide, takes pride in her work, reliable, asks questions. I praise her. [Teacher who has homeless students, PS 58]

It depends on the child. One child was extremely bright. He couldn't write at first, but was a very quick learner. He needed praise and self-confidence. He went to the top of the class, [even though] his home environment held him back.

When reflecting upon how homeless children continued to succeed in the wake of such trauma, teachers identified several factors that they believed helped the children. A strong family structure was seen as critical.

It depends on the situation. If the family structure is strong, if the family lets them know it's temporary, if the teacher has a good rapport with the child [the child can

succeed in school]. Otherwise there is emotional strain and stress. [Teacher in PS 121]

One child was okay academically. Second child was knowledgeable, but didn't perform. Another child [Brianna] was pleasant, well-kept, nice and on grade level. She lived with her cousin in a shelter. The family structure seemed to be there. She lived with her mother. [Brianna's teacher, PS 121]

Both families had strengths regarding their responsibilities to their children. They were able to remove themselves from their [homeless] status. They were strong families. The family bond remained intact. There was a conscious effort [toward school], although not always successful. There was a sense of responsibility to fulfill classroom responsibilities -- a commitment to maintain normalcy. You could see that in a normal situation, this was a very concerned parent. There was open communication between the mother and myself. The mother was contacted to give her extra [work] there [at home]. I felt that I was providing help. [Teacher in PS 58]

In situations where the children came from troubled families, the teachers felt that the children drew upon their inner strength and abilities. They also felt that the more successful children were able to take advantage of the support and structure of the school environment and to respond positively to the assistance and encouragement offered by teachers and classmates.

One child was homeless for the first two years of her education -- changing schools, new curriculum. She missed a lot of work because she was absent. She couldn't read when she came to this school in third grade. Her behavior was unsatisfactory. The child had ability. She needed structure. In a structured, supportive environment she began reading on her grade level. She became a strong reader by the third grade... Another boy seems to have given up. He goes to a reading program for at-risk children. He does things on purpose to sabotage his situation. He said he wanted to quit [school] -- like his mother. I tried to encourage him. He said he couldn't be bothered. I offered to spend my lunch hour with him if he tries to do the homework. I also had the other teachers and the children try to encourage him. He's doing better this year. His class now is structured, strict and supportive. It's better for him. [Teacher in PS 58]

[Malik] was a potentially good student. Due to situation, being in a shelter, he slacked off academically... I never had a problem with him. He had good

attendance, always was neat. He came on public transportation and always on time -- was only late three times. He was not in a strange [school] environment. He knew me and the school and he felt good about coming to school... Another girl was a model student. She came to school neat and quiet. I had no problems with her. She wasn't neglected, but her mother didn't take time to groom her properly. The girl didn't have an attitude or behavior problems. I thought it had to do with her personality. School was an oasis where she could participate and relax. She said she had to watch her younger brother [at home]. She couldn't always do homework. [Mr. Jones, Malik's teacher, PS 121]

I have had kids who lost their apartments. A sense of immediate loss is shown, they're withdrawn. They feel that they caught some kind of social disease. I really have to extend my interaction beyond the [usual] student-teacher relationship... [In one case] the child was visibly depressed at first, preoccupied with being homeless. His grades went down. The other kids [in the class] brought in clothing for [his family]. He realized he was not going to be ostracized. He was able to respond to the kids' response. The other children were sensitized because we had been talking about how life can change suddenly just before that happened. [Teacher in PS 58]

### Altering Instruction

The teachers identified three ways in which their instructional strategies might change to address the needs of homeless children: (a) flexibility around homework requirements; (b) individualized instruction due to curricula differences; and (c) increased affection and attention.

In terms of assigning homework, I have to be more aware of the conditions, more flexible. [Teacher in PS 58]

[There are more] fragmented lessons -- aborted lessons. One lesson can take three days to complete. I have to be very flexible. I get called out of class a lot. I write more notes home. I look for counseling or support for kids a lot. It takes time away. The children are missing out. [Ms. Arturo, Troy's teacher, PS 58]

I try to start at their level and work them up -- more individualized instruction. I try to fill in what they missed. [Teacher in PS 121]

The teachers pointed out, however, that this also pertains to children who were precariously housed -- those having moved often, or who lived in poor housing conditions. Since these conditions affected many of the school children, homeless children would not be approached any differently from an instructional standpoint. Instead, the teacher would deal with whatever problems their students were having, regardless of their cause.

To an extent, working with kids in this neighborhood [has affected my teaching practices]. I had to come down on homework, be less strict. I don't keep a homework book and don't send notes home about homework. There are a lack of facilities to do homework. Many households have too many people, radios, TV, drugs, alcohol, violence. [Mr. Jones, Malik's teacher, PS 121]

I have a gifted class. If I know there's a problem [I do something]. I tried to give one boy additional work when he missed the morning work. Other children said they couldn't do homework. I gave them extra help. They are expected to do the work in a gifted class. [Teacher in PS 58]

The teachers also felt that when looking at the impact of homelessness school-wide, it becomes shadowed by broader social and environmental conditions which affect children's educational success. In this light, homelessness becomes one of the many possible problems that the teachers and students must deal with on a daily basis.

I can't see [homelessness] changing things in one way or another. Some kids with homes have more problems. [Teacher who has no homeless students, PS 58]

I think all of us have become like in a crisis center, including administrators. Plans are always open to interruption. At the drop of a hat all hell breaks loose, regularly, daily. The school is already overcrowded. Next year it will be worse. [Ms. Arturo, Troy's teacher, PS 58]

There are more problems with people moving, like from New York City to Puerto Rico, from place to place. There are not a lot of homeless kids [or] I don't know about them... The students (in general) come from non-nuclear families. There are several siblings all having different fathers. There is a lot of physical reprimanding in the homes. Kids are taught to be tough, to hit back. They have to

or they will be beaten up. Academics are not valued, not seen as something to strive for. [Teacher having no homeless students, PS 58]

Overall, the teachers who were interviewed did not demonstrate any blatant prejudices against homeless children and their families. In fact, they showed a considerable awareness of the complexity of issues around homelessness, a sensitivity to the children's situations, and recognition that homeless families had strengths and resources, and that schools were able to provide support to children and their families. Although only three of the teachers who were interviewed actually taught the children in this study, the stories of the children told by the other teachers closely resembled the lives and circumstances of the families included in this study.

Teachers' views were also consistent with the mothers' views that children should be treated in accordance with their abilities and difficulties. They also agreed that homeless children do not need special treatment because they are homeless. Rather, teachers and schools need to address the problems of all students.

#### Supportive School-Based Services

All children come to school with different needs as well as strengths. Children who are at a greater educational risk due to conditions which include poverty, family problems, residential instability, as homeless children are, can benefit from supportive school services. The contained nature of the school setting makes it an ideal place to identify problems and deliver services to children. However, not all schools provide enough supportive services to meet the needs of the children.

### The Availability and Use of School Services

This section examines the types of services that were available to the children, and the extent to which mothers felt that the schools met the children's needs. Assuming that homeless children have a particular need for supportive services during this traumatic event, the accessibility and use of school services throughout the children's educational history is examined. Table 5 lists the services that were assessed and the extent to which they were used both before and after the children entered the shelter system.

TYPE OF SERVICES	PRESENT AND PAST	PRESENT ONLY	PAST ONLY	NEVER USED
Afterschool Program (school-based)	1	4	9	10
Afterschool Program (community-based)	2	12	0	10
Academic Assistance	2	5	8	9
Bilingual	2	4	0	18
Special Education	0	2	0	22
Gifted	0	0	5	19
Transportation	0	11	2	11
Guidance	4	2	5	13
Health	9	4	5	6
Meals	23	0	1	0

Academic Assistance/Remediation. Academic assistance (i.e. tutors, individualized instruction) was a service that was frequently identified by mothers as needed but not available in their children's schools.

I wish they offered extra help, like in Math. I don't know what to do about her [lack of] concentration. [Yolanda, mother of Wendy, PS 118]

Even mothers who reported that their children were receiving some type of additional academic instruction, felt that it was not sufficient to meet their children's needs.

They both get pulled out of class twice a week for 30 minutes to an hour. It helps Maria because the [regular] teacher doesn't work with her. [Rosa, mother of Manny and Maria, PS 118]

[He's getting help in] both reading and math... But he's still having problems in math. His other school was better. He went every day. Once a week is not enough. He needs it every day. [Doreen, mother of Martin, PS 171]

Most of the children currently receiving these services had not received them before their families entered the shelter system. A troubling finding was that a third of the mothers indicated that their children were no longer receiving any academic assistance since entering the shelter system. If children needed extra help before, one would expect that they would need it more so once homeless.

They used to get it before, both in reading and math. They have limited teachers here. In their other schools, they would test them and teach them at their level. [Elena, mother of Danny and Devon, PS 118]

One might expect that the children having the lowest achievement levels, and therefore having the greatest need for help, would most likely to be receiving some type of assistance. However, this was not the case. Of the eight poorest achieving children, only one was receiving any type of remediation and that was because he was enrolled in a

special educational program. Children in the two higher achieving groups received more academic assistance.

This suggests that perhaps schools do not wish to "waste" valuable resources on children who are perceived to be failures. For example, in PS 118, Shaniqua a high achieving child was getting extra reading instruction, in contrast Danny and Aisha in the lowest achieving group were placed in a third grade class where they, for the most part, were not taught at all. Shaniqua's mother picked up on this differential treatment.

Shaniqua is in an advanced reading group. She goes out for 45 minutes. To get help you have to be advanced. If you're behind, they stick you anywhere. In her last school they had good classes for kids who were behind in reading and math. The teacher really tried to help them. [Janika, PS 118]

Afterschool Programs. Most of the mothers indicated that their children had attended some kind of afterschool program since entering the shelter system. These were mainly community-based programs, sponsored by the Police Athletic League (PAL), rather than school-based ones (typically called "latch-key" programs). Some children only started using the afterschool program after the family entered the shelter system. The mothers felt it would provide their children with a diversion from the boredom of the Tier II facility.

Mothers were generally satisfied with the afterschool programs for the range of services they provided -- academic help, activities, recreation, arts and crafts. They also appreciated the extra hours of childcare it provided. Mothers' satisfaction with the program was related to their expectations of how they saw the program meeting their children's needs. Mothers whose children needed more academic assistance complained

about programs which were primarily recreational. A mother whose children needed more opportunities for arts and recreational activities was dissatisfied with the program for being too homework oriented.

There's an afterschool program in the school across the street. Didi used to go for help in reading. She refused to go back saying she didn't learn anything. It's just a place to do homework. Kids running around. She said she could do homework at home. I spoke to the teacher about it, said Didi wasn't satisfied, but nothing happened. Leticia goes to an afterschool program for ceramics. She makes beautiful things. [Mabel, mother of Didi and Leticia, PS 87]

She's in an afterschool latchkey program. They keep her at school until 4:30, but they don't really do anything for them. The kids just run around. [Blanca, mother of Michelle, PS 16]

At Catherine Street they went to an afterschool program. They liked it there. They said they worked more there. They don't do their homework in PAL. They say they couldn't find the reading teacher. They just play there. I told [Tier II staff] to make the kids do homework. [Tanya, mother of Tamika and Lionel]

Guidance/Counseling. Many mothers felt that their children could benefit from school-based counseling services. The mothers described how their children were currently undergoing a great deal of emotional distress that was related to becoming homeless, losing a parent, friends or other family members, or being exposed to family violence or other family problems (e.g., divorce, a parent's infidelity). Although the mothers could acknowledge their children's pain, not all of them felt that they were equipped to deal with it effectively. Some felt that the conditions of the shelter facility, with its physical and programmatic constraints made it difficult for them to focus on their children's needs. Others felt that no matter how much attention and love they could provide their children, they needed support from other adults as well.

He never had counseling before. He needs it now, but doesn't have it. He needs more attention than [the teacher] can give him. He needs more help. He needs more than just me. He needs counseling. Ms. Day [Tier II Director] said she would try to get him a counselor. [Milagros, whose son Alex recently lost his father due to abandonment and whose surrogate father recently died of AIDS, PS 171, Residence A]

Kadeem is seeing a guidance counselor. They are helping him to control his temper... Charlene [teenage daughter] ran away twice -- the first time, for a couple of days, the second time for a month. I didn't know where she was. I put out a missing person's. She was mad because she was punished. She was with her cousin... When Kadeem was taken from me [by child welfare] I was giving him more attention. I can't give him that same attention now. Once we have our own place I'll talk to them. I used to talk to them one at a time. I would talk to them about their day. I can't do it when we all live in one room. I try not to put too much pressure on them now. I'll wait until we get our own place. They have enough on their heads now. I don't want to put more pressure on them. [Sally, Residence A]

A number of children were receiving school-based counseling services, and several other children were seeing child or family counselors outside school. All of the mothers appeared satisfied with these services. However, in two cases mothers refused the schools' recommendations to obtain therapy for their sons. They felt the school staff had misjudged or were over-reacting to their children's behavior.

I talked to the school counselors once. It was useful. They suggested that I take him to the Child-Adolescent Center. I don't think he needs it. He's just [being] a boy. There's nothing wrong with him. [Cindy, mother of Charles, PS 58]

School- and community-based guidance/counseling services are not uniform but vary in scope and focus. In many schools, guidance services are limited to the evaluation, referral and placement of children who are identified as having problems. These children may then be referred to Special Education or to an outside provider of child clinical services. Some schools have a Substance Abuse Prevention and Intervention Specialist

(SAPIS) who deal with a range of children's issues and have an "open-door" policy where students can come and discuss problems.

He sees a guidance counselor ... when he acts out. In the old school he used to see the drug counselors. They helped him. He could talk about his problems with them. He liked it better at the old school. [Doreen, discussing Martin, PS 171]

Some children lost access to guidance services once they entered the shelter system, and either changed schools or, in one case, the school lost its counselor.

In Brooklyn he had a guidance counselor. He saw him lots of times, but not here. [Samantha, mother of Anthony, PS 118]

The year that he was left back in school he was seeing a school counselor once a week. It was helpful to him. There is no counselor this year. [Marta, mother of Felix, PS 192]

For other children, a change in school meant that procedures that had been initiated to assess their problems were discontinued. Therefore, children who badly needed services did not receive them for that school year.

Keith was supposed to get an evaluation. It's so much paperwork. It was a psychological and school evaluation. He did poorly on all his achievement tests. He's very emotional and violent. [Frances referring to Keith's past school]

In Brooklyn I wanted Anthony tested -- either for gifted or to find out what was the problem. We moved before he was tested. [Samantha]

Guidance and counseling services, when available, were often used and appreciated by mothers. They benefitted the children by giving them an opportunity to express their feelings, or by getting them other services that they need. Unfortunately, when the children became homeless and in greater need of such services, they were not always available.

**Bilingual Services.** Bilingual programs were the most accessible educational service available to the children in this study. No mother reported that this service was needed and unavailable, and no mother indicated a loss in service after entering the system. The only complaints about bilingual services concerned inappropriate placement.

Of the six mothers whose children were receiving bilingual services, only two indicated that their children received them before entering the shelter system. These two mothers were pleased and spoke highly of the bilingual instruction their children received. The remaining mothers whose children had not previously received bilingual instruction felt that the placement was inappropriate and harmful to their children's education (see appropriate curriculum).

**Special Education.** Two of the children in this study (Kadeem and Ramon) were receiving special education. Both started attending special education classes while living in the emergency shelters and were presently attending the same program. Given the lengthy evaluation and referral process to obtain these services, homeless students are bused to their prior schools to ensure that they do not lose their access to special education classes. Both mothers mentioned, however, it took about two weeks for them to get the bus service. In the interim, Kadeem's mother sent him alone on the subway, from Residence A in the Bronx to his school in Lower Manhattan. Ramon's mother accompanied from Residence E in midtown Manhattan to PS 197 in Harlem.

By the end of the school year, two additional children (Troy and Keith) also were referred to special education beginning the new school year. Both their mothers had

mentioned that their children had been evaluated while in the shelter system, and hoped that special education would provide them with the help they felt they desperately needed.

Gifted Programs. Gifted programs were not frequently used by children in this study and became unavailable once the family became homeless. Of the five children who had been enrolled in a gifted program before becoming homeless, none were currently receiving these services. One mother mentioned that after becoming homeless her son could no longer maintain his academic performance to continue at that level. The other mothers reported that there were no comparable services in their children's new schools, and it was too difficult for them to get them to their old schools each day.

Two mothers, whose children attended PS 118, believed that their children were in a gifted or accelerated program, when it does not seem that they were.

She's in a talented/gifted class. She was tested in her old school and placed in the talented/gifted class [there]. It's on her school record. The school told me she would be placed in a talented/gifted class. [Eva, mother of Isabel, a high-achiever]

My son is in a second to third-grade class. They're accelerating him. [Jeanie, mother of Richard, a poor-achiever]

It appears that this school presented their third-grade class to mothers as a "gifted" class.

Mothers of children who were formerly in gifted programs, either in third or second grade, were offered this class.

At PS 44 she was attending the School of Arts Gifted Program, but not here. They wanted to skip her to the third grade instead. I didn't want that. [Keisha, mother of Kwadra, a high-achiever]

However, second-grade students who were achieving well below their grade-level were also placed in this class. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that this was a gifted class, despite what the mothers were told.

*Maintaining gifted services for homeless children did not appear to be a priority for the school system. It seems likely that these children would lose ground academically, at least in the short term.*

Transportation. Transportation services (i.e. bus or subway passes) are one of the few services that are guaranteed to homeless students to enable them to attend their former schools. However, most mothers did not use them because it was easier for them to send their children to school within walking distance. Mothers of special education students, however, greatly appreciated having access to a school bus, so that their children could continue attending the same school. Also, mothers of children who did use public transportation were very grateful for the bus passes provided by the BOE as it allowed them to save money. In Residence C, all the children attending PS 58 were provided with a school bus. Although the mothers appreciated the safety and security of the transportation, the older boys did not like taking it to school.

Health. A number of mothers indicated that their children used school-based health services (i.e. school nurse, vision or hearing screening) either before or after becoming homeless, however, they were not described as being particularly important to them. The mothers seemed satisfied with relying upon their community-based health care providers for these services. Two mothers mentioned that there were dental services available through their children's school, which were particularly useful.

**School Meals.** The school system provides breakfast and lunch to children of low-income families. Therefore, all children in the shelter system are eligible for this service. All but one mother, whose child refused to eat school food, indicated that their children received at least lunch in school and often breakfast as well. The school breakfast program was most beneficial to families who lived in Tier II residences that had no individual kitchen facilities.

Sometimes I can't give her a hot breakfast. They give it to her. Before [we were] homeless ... I made breakfast at home. [Yolanda, mother of Wendy, Residence E]

The mothers' biggest complaint regarding school meals was that their children did not like them or became sick from them.

The breakfast is no good. I send them out for breakfast or give them cereal in the morning. Keith came home sick from the food in school. [Frances, Residence A, PS 187]

They both have breakfast and lunch, sometimes they have breakfast. Sometimes Naomi says she won't eat the food. It's not good. They need better food. [Sally, Residence A, PS 171]

Several mothers whose children attended PS 171 complained that their children were denied access to the breakfast program, and they did not know why.

The teacher didn't give my son a number to get breakfast so he can't get breakfast. She has no patience for kids. [Lourdes, referring to Roberto, PS 171]

Many mothers were aware of and used a variety of school services. Although changing schools sometimes resulted in increased access to services, it more often resulted in the loss of a service that had been used in the past. Children with the greatest need seemed to be more likely to go without services. This is consistent with Rafferty and Rollins (1989) findings that only 54% of the 97 children who were receiving services in

their study, continued to receive them after entering the shelter system. Johnson (1992) suggested that homeless children may be denied access to school services because the selection process for some programs (e.g., gifted, after-school) is conducted at the beginning of the school year. Homeless students, who move in the middle of the school year, can miss the cut-off date for services or the programs become filled to capacity.

The types of services that mothers felt needed to be expanded included academic assistance, counseling or guidance, and arts and recreation. These are the same types of services that are routinely recommended in studies of homeless children's educational needs (DaCosta Nunez, 1994; Helge, 1992; Johnson, 1992; Rafferty, 1995; Stronge, 1992; Quint, 1994).

#### Teachers' Awareness of School-Based Services

Fifteen of the teaching staff of PS 58 and PS 121 were asked about the kinds of school services that were accessible to homeless students and their families. In both schools the teachers described a range of supportive services that were available to students, including those who were homeless. These included -- guidance, substance abuse prevention services, social workers and psychologists (who were described as part of a School-Based Support Team).

We have a guidance department, a drug counselor. We had a Victims' Assistance Program last year. I felt it was good. Its major focus was abused children. It looked at other situations that needed attention, too. She helped counsel the homeless child [in my class]. It was another source of support. [Teacher from PS 58]

We have a SBST [School Based Support Team] from Fordham. It has been very good. They made great strides working one-on-one with children. I can't do that with children. I have an entire classroom. [Ms. Arturo, Troy's teacher, PS 58]

The three mothers whose children attended PS 58 knew about these services.

Two children (Charles and Yvette) had been referred to child counseling services by the school, and Troy received counseling and evaluation through the school's SBST. The two children attending PS 121 did not use these services.

Parent activities were also mentioned by teachers in both schools. These included parent education workshops as well as a Parent Association.

There are lots of parent programs -- coping, parent education, drug counseling -- lots of things for parents. [Teacher from PS 58]

We have an active Parent-Teacher Association. The parents are busy, they help a lot. [Teacher from PS 121]

None of the mothers of the children attending either school mentioned that they knew about or participated in these programs.

The teachers mentioned that while some academic assistance was available, it was either targeted to students with special needs, such as special education or bilingual education, or was provided as part of the afterschool program.

They have to be two years below academically to be referred to Special Education or resource room for reading. I have a number of children in resource room. Everything is geared toward academics -- latchkey, PACE is geared toward reading problems, "Cities in Schools" is more creative and covers homework. [Teacher from PS 121]

Ana's two children were both in the bilingual program in PS 58. Regina's daughter (Brianna) and nephew (Malik) both received homework assistance through the "latchkey" program in PS 121. None of the mothers indicated that their children were currently receiving any remedial instruction.

Extracurricular activities were more limited, however. School-based afterschool (latchkey) programs provided the main source of arts and recreation (as well as homework help). Malik and Brianna both attended the PS 121's afterschool program. According to the teachers, PS 58, unfortunately, had its afterschool program eliminated due to budget cuts. Other than afterschool programs, field trips were the only type of school-based extracurricular activity mentioned by the teachers. Only Malik and Brianna, however, said that they had gone on any field trips.

We have.. an afterschool latchkey program... Latchkey provides recreation and academic help. [Teacher from PS 121]

We have trips, for enrichment, self-esteem. We have a self-esteem trip to Fordham. We show them that there's a place like Fordham in the Bronx, that there's something to strive for afterward. [Teacher from PS 58]

We had an art club - no more. We had teams for older children. We had an afterschool center. They were all cut. [Teacher from PS 58]

Some teachers were aware of community-based recreation available to the children -- PAL, the Boy Scouts, and baseball leagues, and felt that these were valuable to the children.

There are places to go after school -- the Boys' Club, afterschool centers, PAL. These are the kinds of places that need to stay in existence. They have so little in their immediate environment. [Teacher from PS 58]

Two mothers whose children attended PS 58 were aware of the PAL program, but their children did not attend it, one due to her son's behavior problems. The other was advised by staff at Residence C to avoid it, because the neighborhood children were considered to be of bad character.

Health and nutrition-related services were mentioned by a few teachers. They felt that the school meals program was a valuable resource to families. School-based health services were also considered to be valuable, but underutilized.

We have.. a good health program that most [people] don't know about. They can get check-ups and medication. We have a breakfast and lunch program. [Teacher from PS 58]

None of the parents mentioned the health program. All of them used the meal programs, at least the lunch component. Residence C had cooking facilities so the children tended to use the breakfast program less.

Although the teachers valued the array of services that were offered in their schools, they also felt that they did not adequately meet the needs of all the children. The teachers recommended that services be expanded and also discussed the barriers that prevented families, particularly homeless families from obtaining access to services that were available.

#### Teachers' Recommendations for Services

Similar to the mothers, the teachers identified expanded counseling or guidance services as a critical need. They felt that increasingly larger proportions of their student population were being exposed to social conditions that warranted more intensive attention than they could provide. They were extremely concerned about the effects of family and community violence on the children.

For all students they need more expanded counseling and guidance. I have many foster children, parents using drugs. We could use more counseling [services], such as bereavement counseling. I have very aggressive and hostile children. Children need to express their feelings. They witness shootings, are living under

violent conditions. They can't go outside. They have no experience playing outside. [Teacher from PS 58]

Drugs and violence are serious problems. The children talk about shootings. There was a drug bust and there were kids arrested who had been in this school. [Teacher from PS 58]

We need a lot more support services. There should be affordable counseling outside of school... In general, the kids are sexually oriented at an early age. We have problems with touching at nine or ten, boys molesting girls... [At home] anger, fighting, verbal abuse is what they hear. They don't know any other way... I've seen mothers slap their four or five month old babies in their carriages around here. [Ms. Arturo, Troy's teacher, PS 58]

Some teachers mentioned that support groups or counseling specifically targeted to homeless students might be beneficial to them, as long as the children were not labeled in the process. Only one teacher suggested that teachers be trained to develop a greater awareness of and sensitivity to homelessness.

They need some type of support group or group counseling targeted to homeless students. They need some kind of teacher training to develop sensitivity -- how to deal with the situation. [Teacher from PS 58]

Homeless children need counseling. They're thrust in streets among strangers, it must be depressing. They lost friends, familiar surroundings. They need it more than other children, they have problems. [Teacher from PS 121]

If there's a separation there could be a stigma. If they could create a situation -- no labeling but a support group. But it might be hard to work out if the child is in Manhattan and the school is in the Bronx. [Mr. Jones, Malik's teacher, PS 121]

In addition to counseling, more programs offering arts and recreational activities were recommended by teachers.

More extracurricular activities would help -- more sports, arts, dance, more competitive spirit. It would be beneficial to all students. If they could find a gym, get dance instruction, develop kids creative ability -- poetry, writing, reading. [Teacher from PS 58]

We need music teachers, art teachers, science experiments. A lot of kids are very artistic. Kids need that. [Brianna's teacher, PS 121]

### Barriers to Obtaining Services

Many teachers felt that available services were not used adequately either because parents were not informed of them or that they were reluctant to receive assistance from the school. They recommended that more effort was needed to be able to effectively reach out to parents.

For the whole school we need full-time social workers. Parents have problems and need help. They carry a heavy burden, the mother is running around. They need it in the time we live in. Money is a problem. Homeless children need [services] more so. William's [a homeless student in her class] mother could have been helped if she were directed by the school. [Teacher from PS 121]

We need some way for parents to get more involved in the learning process. We need parental support. Parents don't want to participate. Parents are illiterate. They're not confident about their own level of schooling. They need educational assistance. [Mr. Jones, Malik's teacher, PS 121]

I don't see any need [for more services] except for parents [involvement]. I have five or six parents that come to [parent activities]. We have workshops, but can't seem to draw a crowd. Eight years ago we had parents who were dedicated. We need family workers or social workers. It's very important -- to have someone to get to the house. [Teacher from PS 121]

It's overwhelming [for parents] to have five or six children. They're afraid to ask for help. It's perceived as a threat -- afraid of child abuse cases. There's ignorance about how to seek assistance, distrust of other families. They're afraid of the environment and the community. They perceive helping institutions as threats. [Teacher from PS 58]

A few teachers said that the procedures involved in obtaining help for children made it difficult for them to obtain provide assistance. The process was often lengthy and time-consuming. Children could be denied services if they did not meet all the specified criteria, or if someone did not adequately follow-up.

I have a child who is emotionally disturbed. The SBST won't take him. He's attempted suicide three times. He won't do work, but passes his reading and math tests. He comes from a "model family." Something's going on there that's having an effect on him. He tried to jump out the third floor window during the math test for attention. They put him in my class because the other teachers can't handle him. Academically, his needs are met on paper. [Mr. Jones, PS 121, Malik's teacher]

I think that school is like a reserve station. We have social workers, but the system takes too long to go through. We need more social workers. A lot of children, not only homeless children, need counseling. [Brianna's teacher, PS 121]

Once this year a child started to be absent and late a lot. I alerted the guidance counselor, truant officer, and [grade] supervisor. I looked at the records. There were frequent absences, the kid had no home. He was staying with different relatives. I said that they would put in a 407 [long-term absenteeism] for educational neglect. [He would] fall asleep and was absent often. I wrote a complete review. I talked to the [grade] supervisor about him. She was supposed to follow-up. She never did. [Teacher from PS 85]

Overall, the teachers felt that school services were equally accessible to all students, homeless or not, as long as the students lived in the vicinity of the school.

However, homeless students, who traveled to school from other areas, would have more of a difficulty in participating in afterschool activities.

One little girl [who was homeless] couldn't go to the afterschool program because she went on the school bus. Malik goes to latchkey and his mother or aunt picks him up. [Mr. Jones, Malik's teacher, PS 121]

What prevents homeless students from participating? There is nothing really. My student went to the afterschool program. He had family in the neighborhood, he was tied to the neighborhood. [Teacher from PS 58]

Transportation [prevents them from participating]. For a child who lives 20 to 25 blocks away and is homeless [transportation is a problem]. The afterschool program is only good for the kids in the neighborhood, they need more for homeless students. [Teacher from PS 121]

These findings reveal consistencies between the teachers' and mothers' perceptions of school services. Both groups felt that school services needed to be expanded, particularly in the areas of counseling, arts, and recreation. The mothers were unaware of the availability of any parent programs. The teachers recognized that participation in these programs was low, partially due to the schools' ineffective outreach strategies. Many of the teachers described conditions of the children's lives that they felt were difficult to deal with in the classroom. However, only one teacher mentioned that they should receive training in strategies to address these issues. A major difference between teachers and parents, however, was around the issue of academic assistance. While mothers identified more academic assistance or individualized instruction as needed, the teachers rarely mentioned this as a need. It is interesting that even teachers who described themselves to be overwhelmed, did not suggest that they be provided with any extra help in the classroom -- like a teaching assistant. Perhaps in the current climate of increasing budget cuts to education, the once familiar role of teaching assistant is considered a dream too far out of reach to even be considered by teachers.

#### Mothers Recommendations for Educational Success

Mothers discussed their prescriptions for educational success -- what would help children to do well in school, graduate from high school and, perhaps, go to college. Half the mothers felt that ensuring children's educational success was a joint responsibility, between the mothers, the schools, and the children themselves.

It will take persistence on both our parts. I have to keep telling her how important education is. She has to want to do it. Schools can only tell kids what to do; the

kids have to do it. I know if I'm there for her she will [finish college]. [Yolanda, mother of Wendy, below average achiever]

They need to keep with school. I tell them not to get discouraged. I make it comfortable. I tell them to stay away from drugs. I always encourage them. I told them to do it for themselves. Schools could encourage them by showing them that they care. If they think the teacher or a Mom don't care then they're lost. The teacher don't have to love them, just show them they care, not ignore them or step over their problems. [Rosa, mother of Manny and Maria]

### The Schools' Role in Promoting Success

Mothers felt that it was the schools' responsibility to provide the type of school environment that would make children want to be there and motivate them to learn. To accomplish this they suggested improvements in several areas: (1) instruction; (2) school services; (3) staffing; and (4) parent involvement.

**Instruction.** The mothers indicated that in order for children to be successful in school it was important that the curriculum fit their individual needs. This included promptly identifying problems, being sure that the children were placed in the appropriate class and grade, and matching the children's schoolwork to their ability level.

They should recognize children who have problems and help them more. When they see a child is bored, put him in the class where he should be, not slow him down. [Samantha, mother of Anthony, below average achiever]

They also thought it was important to stimulate and maintain children's interest in school, by providing a varied curriculum, which integrated more arts and recreational activities, as well as by maintaining the equipment and supplies needed to support such a curriculum (i.e. books, computers, materials for science experiments).

They need more art [programs] for [children like] my daughter. She doesn't like school so much, but she likes art. [Regina, mother of Brianna, PS 121]

I think the school could show her a lot more educational things, like computers. Things like dance and drama would help, too. [Keisha, mother of Kwadra]

They need to teach him more interesting things -- about everyday things, about their neighborhood. They need to teach them that it's important to have an education. [Doreen, mother of Martin]

He needs more things in school that he likes -- more reading, more interesting reading, things to keep his mind occupied. He gets bored quickly in school, like me. [Samantha, mother of Anthony]

They need to learn about different kinds of courses -- remedial courses, science, math, history, typing, before they get to high school. Tutoring would help. [Luz, mother of Miranda and Reynaldo]

School Services. After instruction, expanded school services were mothers' most frequent recommendation for change. The mothers suggested that children receive some type of additional help in school, such as tutors or persons who could provide one-on-one instruction. Afterschool programs and activities as well as counseling services were also recommended.

They need more help in school from teachers. They need help with reading. They need afterschool reading programs. [Sally, mother of Naomi and Kadeem]

They need counseling. They need someone to talk to them, to show them that school is what's happening. [Brenda, mother of Troy]

School Staff. Mothers felt that a positive relationship between teachers and students was the key to educational success. Beyond instruction, mothers felt that teachers' needed to better motivate the children by rewarding them for progress and good behavior. They also felt that their children would learn more in school if teachers and other school staff provided adequate supervision and discipline. Mothers felt that teachers

needed to be both competent and caring, although some recognized that this would not be possible without decreasing the student-teacher ratio.

They need teachers who care and who can take time with them. It makes kids not care about school when teachers don't care. Didi is in a double-class this year. Last year Leticia was in a double-class. [Mabel]

Good relationships with teachers is important. I would be disrespectful if my teacher didn't believe in me. My kids' teachers from last year loved them. Danny started learning to read. They were doing great. They were in love with those teachers. [Elena, mother of Danny and Devon]

Parent Involvement. Providing parents with more opportunities for them to be involved in the educational process was another suggestion for improving children's educational outcomes.

I need to spend more time with her, reading books, playing spelling games. She needs less playing and more help. School could send me home extra books so I would know what to help her with. [Janika, mother of Shaniqua]

### The Parents' Role in Promoting Success

Most of the mothers (17) recognized that they played an important role in their children's education. They felt that their support and encouragement was one of the most important things they could give their children to help them to succeed in school.

He needs for me to keep encouraging him, that he can do good, be what he want to be. It's mostly up to me. [Carmen, mother of Ramon]

To accomplish this some mothers used their own life experiences to convince their children of the importance and value in completing their education.

[I expect him to go] all the way. I tell him he can be anything he wants if he stays in school. I would be so proud if he went to college. I tell him he should not be like me -- homeless and on welfare; and he should not be like his father. He should always take care of his children. [Milagros, mother of Alex]

I'm hoping they make it to college. I tell them to make something of your life, not like me. [Tanya, mother of Tamika]

Some mothers recognized that their children's chances for educational success would be improved once their living conditions improved -- by leaving the shelter system, getting a permanent place, having a more "normal" life, or perhaps by leaving New York City altogether.

They need their own place. They need me to be there for them. That is why I go to counseling. I tell them they have to work for things, that they have to develop skills, to finish school, in order to become somebody. [Marta, mother of Felix]

They need to have little things -- things that normal kids have, like Nintendo, like being able to have friends over. They've never had these simple little things. They need them so they don't feel like they have to get over [take advantage of others]. [Mabel, discussing Didi and Leticia]

They need their own place. It would give them confidence. Now they can't do what they want. My kids will become something if we have our own place. [Ana, discussing Yvette and Luis]

Other mothers felt that it was necessary to find their children a better school, one felt that her daughter would fare better in a private school.

#### The Children's Role in Promoting Success

About a third of the mothers felt that their children played an important role in their own success at school. These mothers mentioned that it was up to the children to work hard and be persistent with their schooling. Also important was that the children maintained a positive attitude toward school and recognized the value of education.

There is a great deal of consistency in mothers' recommendations for educational success and the characteristics of schools that effectively serve children who are homeless or undergoing other life trauma (Garbarino et al., 1992; Gonzalez, 1992; Quint, 1994).

Similar to the mothers' views, these researchers recommend sufficient numbers of school staff who are adequately trained and responsive to children's needs, a small class size, developmentally appropriate curriculum, strong parent involvement programs, support services, and effective administration to promote academic excellence. Despite the mothers' limited education, they recognize quality education and believe that their children should have access to it.

#### Summary of School Climate Issues

Most of the schools in this study were far from a model of effectiveness. In terms of achievement, 8 of the 11 schools had math and reading achievement rates lower than the citywide averages (New York City Public School, 1992). The attendance rates for all 11 school were also lower than for the city overall (91%). The schools also tended to have high student mobility. Citywide, 60% of the student body remained in the same school after three years. Of the 11 schools six had stability rates that were lower, ranging from 46% to 58%.

In terms of school climate indicators, although the principals varied in terms of their involvement with the school and families, they were not exemplary leaders in the mothers' or children's eyes. Judging from the limited amount of school involvement reported by the mothers, the schools in this study had not developed strong relationships with families, and their weakest connections were with the families whose children were having the most problems. Overall, mothers felt that there were limited opportunities for

them to be involved in their children's schools, or they indicated that they did not take advantage of the types of parent activities offered by the school. Interestingly, in two schools where teachers described underutilized parent support programs, they also commented that the school administration, frowned upon having an "open door" policy for parents, which was exactly the type of policy many mothers favored and probably needed. This suggests that offering programs and activities to parents may not be sufficient if parents do not feel as if they are an integral part of the school (Quint, 1994).

PS 118 in Manhattan provides an interesting example of the importance of school climate. By conventional standards PS 118 was one of the best schools in the sample. Although they had one of the largest homeless student populations of the 11 schools (17%), their achievement and stability rates both exceeded the citywide averages, although their attendance rate was slightly lower. However, this same school was reported to have a principal as well as teachers who ridiculed and were physically aggressive with the children. This same school placed children at risk through inappropriate class placement. Mothers generally felt unwelcome there. The mothers who could see the academic benefits of the school, did not even want their children to stay there.

The findings presented in this chapter provide additional support to the existence of a pattern of neglect of children having the greatest needs. It is remarkable that children who were the lowest achievers received less academic assistance than their higher achieving peers. Part of the problem could be that the academic deficiencies of these students are beyond the teachers' or schools' resources. Special education, since it provides a great deal of individualized instruction and attention, seems to be the only

available source of assistance for these children. The lowest achieving children seem to be falling through the cracks, because they are not doing badly enough to warrant special educational services. At the same, expanding special education programs is not the answer, particularly given the program's poor track record nationwide (Gartner & Lipsky, 1993).

Homelessness can affect a child's school experience in different ways. While blatantly discriminatory incidents seem to be less common than what has been portrayed in the literature, perceived stigmatization can also damage families' relationships to school. Parents who anticipate discrimination may respond to teachers more defensively and negatively than they normally would. Also, since parents know the child will not remain in the school, they may be more willing to sever their ties with it. I also suspect that most of the children who see "school as a battlefield" are acting out the frustration and lack of control engendered by homelessness in the school setting. While only one child reported an incident where classmates rejected and teased her for being homeless, all the children in this group complained of being singled out and treated unfairly by their teachers and had problems with the other students.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN THE COMMUNITY CONTEXT AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT**

People's lives are enhanced by living in communities that provide opportunities for positive social interaction and mutual support, connections to social, educational, recreational, governmental, and religious institutions, and access to commercial establishments that support daily life. However, where there are high concentrations of poverty, violence and crime, and a lack of public or private investment, the amount of community support that is available to families becomes more limited. Homeless families, as well as those who are at risk of becoming homeless, or who have been homeless in the past, are likely to live in communities where fewer resources are available to them.

Homelessness changes the nature of community life in at least two ways. First, when families become homeless they are often forced to sever local ties and lose their established sources of support. Living in a situation where they have little say over where they will be living next, how long they will stay there, or where their "permanent" housing placement will be, developing new connections and relationships can be quite difficult. In some communities, hostility and resentment toward homeless and formerly homeless families can intensify feelings of isolation.

Second, when families enter the shelter system, whether they are living in an emergency facility, hotel or Tier II residence, they become part of a self-contained, often highly insular, "institutional" community. The facilities require families to live according to principles that are often at odds with those of larger American society (i.e. communal

living and limited individual freedoms). This institutional quality of homeless families' lives is the single characteristic that distinguishes them from poor families in general.

This chapter will examine the nature of community life for homeless families. Since much of their lives were centered around the Tier II facility, it will include a discussion of their attitudes toward the facilities, and the neighborhoods in which the facilities were located. In the present study, homelessness has been depicted as a process. Therefore, this discussion will also address families' feelings about places they have lived in the past. In doing so it will consider the potential sources of support and stress contained in these settings. Finally, it will look at how these settings, past and present, impact upon the lives of the children.

#### Community Satisfaction Past and Present

It was difficult to get a sense of the women's relationship to the communities in which the Tier II facilities were located. When asked about how they felt about their neighborhoods, safety was the women's primary concern and, related to this, the type of people who lived in the neighborhood. Only two women mentioned any of the neighborhood institutions or its amenities (i.e. church, hospital, laundromat).

#### Sense of Safety

The women's responses showed a great deal of consistency with regard to community satisfaction. All five women who lived in Residence A were happy with their current neighborhood. In fact, for most of these women, it was the only redeeming quality of living in that facility. They described the neighborhood as quiet and safe, and that "nice" people lived there, including the neighborhood children with whom their children

had made friends. The women living in the other facilities located in the South Bronx (Residences B, C, and D) did not like the neighborhoods in which they were living. They considered them to be dangerous due to drug activity and violence. Several commented that they frequently heard gunshots. The women were wary of their neighbors and some described the neighborhood children as "rough" or "wild."

The women living in Residence E in Manhattan gave mixed responses. While some felt that the site was conveniently located and relatively safe, others complained about their daily encounters with "drunks" and "bums" and in some cases, felt that the traffic was hazardous to their children. The neighborhood around Residence E changed dramatically between day and night. Primarily a commercial area, it bustled with people of different backgrounds and walks of life during the day. At night, the area became relatively deserted, and the single men who congregated around the Port Authority became more visible. However, since Residence E had a curfew of 9:30pm, many of the women had limited exposure to the neighborhood at night, which probably explains why more were not bothered by it.

The mothers' perceptions of the neighborhood as a safe place affected their children's independence. Mothers who lived in Residence A allowed their children the most independence. They traveled to and from school by themselves and played outside with each other as well as with the other children in the neighborhood.

Clara stays outside until nine pm. She has a friend who lives nearby in the projects. [Frances from Residence A]

Mothers who felt the neighborhood was not safe, accompanied their children if they ventured out of doors, or only let them travel as far as the bus stop to go to school.

There are shootings here in the summertime. The kids don't go out by themselves for more than five minutes and then I'm out there with them. [Marta from Residence B]

### Neighborhoods of the Past

It might be expected that the lack of familiarity with a neighborhood would engender a sense of threat, but this was not the case for the women in this study. Many of the women living in Residence A, had never lived in the Bronx before entering the shelter system; while all the women from Residences B, C, and D had previously lived in the Bronx. Instead, the women appeared to measure the safety conditions of their current neighborhood against those of their past. Community violence and crime were described as a part of many of the families' lives. Not surprisingly, therefore, the women rarely indicated that they missed their old neighborhoods or expressed a desire to return there. In fact, some planned to obtain housing in communities they were not at all familiar with, such as Queens or Staten Island, but where they perceived they and their children would be safe.

### Children's Perspectives of Their "Old Block"

Compared to their mothers, the children gave a more detailed account of what life in their old neighborhoods was like for them. What was most important to them was having places for play and recreation, opportunities for socializing with friends, and having a measure of freedom and independence over their activities.

I used to hang out with my crew, play tag or go to the park, play tag there. I like the park. I don't like this park over there. [Now] I can't go to [my old] park. Sometimes when we [used to] go to the big park, we go on the big swings and we do back flips off of them. They don't got swings over here that much. The parks over here, they not close. Me and all the kids here want to go somewhere that's close, so we don't have to walk far and come back. I want to go where I used to go... When we get our own apartment I'll be like -- yes, yes... I go down there around my old block sometimes. Most of my friends, they like to rap... And then, we would have somebody like put it on a tape. Like somebody would record it for us... Well, I would like to be on my old block again. That's what would make me feel good. [Martin from Residence A]

[We used to] play tag, run around, go far, walking all the day, We used to go to parties. We used to go to the jam. They used to have a jam up the block in the old school. There we used to go. After that we'll go around up this hill and play some games. [Troy from Residence C]

During the hot and humid summers, characteristic of New York City, bathing in fire hydrants, park sprinklers, pools, and lakes were a particularly popular activity for the children.

Where I lived at [before] was kind of fun. The pump was open a lot. We got wet in the pump -- me and my three cousins... Fridays we go outside together, right if it's real hot. We play outside. And then we go to the park and stuff. Sometimes we go to Indian Lake. Sometimes we throw rocks in the water or we just look at the fish and we play at the part where the slides are at. Sometimes we have picnics there and my aunt and my cousins. Most of the time we don't go to that park, we go to another park... Every time we go fishing, my stepfather, we used to have to dig for worms. Cuz we went fishing. That was kind of fun but then it gets us gooey. I caught a catfish with a stick and a string [Isabel from Residence E].

I used to do different things [before living here]. My mom will let me go outside and play and [now] my mom won't... My grandma used to help me bake, cook. She helped me cook... [I used to] play in the playground. We get on the barrel. We jump on those square things. We climb on the monkey bars, we swing around. [Before] sometimes I go outside by myself, and sometimes I go outside with my grandma... In summer time, I go to the movies, and I go to the pool, then I go get wet, and around my grandmother way, they used to throw water on you with a big bucket. I used to go outside and buy me ice cream. [Kwadra from Residence E]

[I used to live] in the Bronx. [I did] different things... You get to play outside. I had more fun where I used to live. Get to play outside, always go to parks and get wet. Then I always get wet. They got a little thing SSSSSS, for little boys, like a little thing... [I played with] my sister, my brother, my friends. [Danny from Residence E]

Ordinary activities, that are taken for granted by many children -- inviting friends over or doing household chores -- become more significant to children when they were no longer possible to do.

[Before] I'll make myself a sandwich, and then I'll do my homework, and then I'll play outside. Because before we had a home. And I would invite my friends over, or instead I had a bike. [I would] throw out the garbage, and sometimes I would like rake the leaves on the grass. [Manny from Residence E]

Not all the children, however, recounted pleasant memories of their old neighborhoods. Others described incidents when they felt threatened. After encountering two drug users, Brianna describes how she and her cousin Malik became more wary of their neighborhood and decided to avoid certain areas of it.

The only reason I worry about getting AIDS is by stepping on a needle. [Because] my cousins, and me and Malik.. we saw these people shooting up things and we saw blood on the steps and we ran. We all took hands and we ran together. They was shooting needles together... [My mother] said next time don't go over there. I saw a man and a lady. We stayed away from them. And then when we went to the park to play they was gone. But we don't went back in the spot, we saw them walking up the hill.

Children like Keith and Danielle had more difficult avoiding drug dealers since they operated in the hallways of their building.

My father lives... in Brooklyn. But I hate it over there. Because in front of my father's house they sell drugs, and they go in the building and they do drugs; and there's crack bottles in my father's buildings. My grandma sweeps [the crack bottles] and then when I see her sweeping, I take the broom and I'll sweep it myself. Because she had to go to the hospital last time. [Keith]

Once they left Brooklyn and moved to the Tier II facility in the Bronx, Keith and Danielle continued to experience incidents of community violence. The worst incident was a shooting that occurred outside of their new school. Danielle, who while discussing these incidents matter of factly, seemed to perceive her environment as a dangerous place. She attributed the violence to fictional beings in the form of devils, movie characters, and pop musicians.

The only thing I stay away from is the parks. Cuz there a big man in there that drinks. They raped a lady before. They raped a little kid... And now other kids be going in there. I just leave them... There's a lot of crack bottles, a hundred [at my father's house]. [I] just get away from them [drug dealers]... Do you know there's a devil flying around Brooklyn. He killed, he went into church and he killed somebody. In Brooklyn. I saw it last time, he was on my father's block. He was like a light... [I'm scared of] the devil. And I'm scared of Freddy Cougar... Oh, I know who's killing people in Manhattan -- Ice, ice baby [Vanilla Ice] -- he's a .. music player... [When I'm scared I] just go to sleep with my mother. I slept with my sister last night, because somebody was in back of there, in that place, where we play at... I just ranned. I ran to the man who works here.

Tamika recounted how her family became homeless in trying to escape the violence in their old neighborhood. She has no desire to return there and would rather move to a place where she believe she will be safe, like Staten Island.

We was having a great time. We had an apartment. But they was selling drugs and we had to get off that block. And they was shooting. Cuz my mother thought that block was nice when she first went there to see the apartment. The block was quiet, no drugs, no nothing, no shooting. It was nice and quiet. It was in the morning, nice and quiet. She went upstairs to her apartment, she said: "Hmmm, I must take you." Then she went back, and then she got us out of school, she took us over there. The next day, I heard all these BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM. I said, "Mommy, mommy, look out the window!" And then there be guns shooting... They don't be outside in the afternoon or in the morning. But in the nighttime, all them be out there... That's why we came here. First we went to a Hotel, and then they moved us [here]... I really want to move to Staten Island... It's nice and quiet over there. At night we be going over there and no drugs. We take a ferry, we see the water, we see everything that happening. And birds be in

the water. Birds be drinking the water and flying up. They be soaked, water dripping down.

In looking at adults' attitudes toward their communities, safety was the most critical issue for them. For children, having places to play was important. This also was related to safety, since community violence restricted the range of places where children could safely be. Most families had to deal with community violence and lack of personal safety before entering the shelter system, as well as while they were living in the Tier II facilities.

#### Life in the Tier II Facilities

Coping with severe life crises, such as homelessness, is especially difficult for young children because they are not always able to understand and make sense of what is happening to them. At the same time, the adults in their lives may withdraw their attention and affection (due to their own grief or stress) during this time when the children need it the most. Providing homeless families with a supportive environment, one which promotes a sense of security, privacy and control, and gives families' assistance in meeting their needs to locate housing, employment, education, recreation, physical and mental health services, can help to reduce the stress of homelessness on children.

As was discussed in Chapter Three, entering the Tier II facility did not represent the same point of homelessness for all families. For some, it was their first experience of homelessness of any kind. Others had experienced many years of living in situations that were less stable than the Tier II environment. Therefore, in examining the women's

perceptions of the Tier II as a source of support, it is important to consider their past residential experiences.

### Prior Experiences in the Shelter System

All but four of the families had spent some time in either an emergency shelter, hotel, or some other type of transitional facility before they were placed in their current residence. Most felt that their current placement was better -- cleaner, safer, more private, or more stable. Several women also mentioned that the Tier II offered more services -- cooking facilities, activities for children, and better staff. For some families, staying in the emergency shelters had been a frightening and traumatizing experience.

The EAU [Emergency Assistance Unit] was the worst experience. We had to sleep on the floor. A guy was jerking off in the corner. A dope fiend was throwing my kids off the chair. Nobody would do anything. There was all these kids sleeping on the floor. When my kids slept, I stayed awake the whole time. [Janika, whose family spent two weeks between the EAU and short-stay hotels before entering the Tier II]

The other shelter had 40 or 50 people in the same room. The kids couldn't go to the bathroom alone, I was afraid something might happen to them. A two year old boy was sexually abused while we were there. They had crack heads there. [Blanca, whose family spent one week in the congregate shelter before entering the Tier II]

In a few cases, the families felt that there were aspects of their prior shelter placements which were better -- less rules and restrictions, bigger rooms, private bathrooms, or better services -- than their current residence. All these families had lived in either other types of transitional housing (e.g., battered women's shelter) or small-scale hotels, rather than the emergency facilities.

### Prior Housing Experiences

When asked to compare their previous housing with the current facility the women considered their opportunities for freedom, privacy, safety, control, stability and the amount of physical space in each. Although all of the women stated that they were anxious to leave the Tier II in order to have their own place, many acknowledged that in some ways, living conditions in the Tier II was an improvement from their past housing.

Women who had lived in badly deteriorated housing or in buildings or neighborhoods plagued by community violence, often felt that the Tier II was much safer and a better environment for their children. Women who had spent a number of years doubled up with family and friends, felt that they had more freedom in the Tier II, and because it would eventually lead to permanent housing, it provided more stability and control. It also represented greater sense of responsibility for women who had never lived on their own.

When you're in the [shelter] system you know you'll eventually get a place. Living with someone else, you don't know what's going to happen. You're always waiting for the person to say, "Get out!" [Belinda, who initially became homeless when her father threw her and her two sons out of the house]

It's much better here. In my stepmother's house I had to cooperate with everything. I couldn't save money. I had to pay for everything that was needed. They put you out fast if you have children. So I had to give up everything. Here I don't have to clean other people's messes. I don't have other people disciplining my children. [Milagros, who doubled-up with various relatives for a year and a half before entering the shelter system]

The women who had lived on their own or in shared households that worked well for them, and those who had lived in housing that was relatively safe and in good

condition, particularly lamented their loss of housing and the space, comfort, privacy and independence it provided them.

**I had a whole house before in Puerto Rico. It had three bedrooms. It had everything. I left because of my husband. I would never have left except to get away from him. [Ana, a victim of domestic violence, who had lived in her prior housing for three years]**

The women's experiences within and prior to entering the shelter system varied. Despite these differences, for every one of the women the Tier II facility represented the light at the end of the tunnel -- the last step in a series of moves that would lead to a place of their own.

#### The Tier II Facility as a Source of Support

The women were asked to assess the quality of the Tier II facilities. They discussed the ways in which the facility met, or did not meet, their needs. The women were discriminating in their assessments of the facilities. No one rated all aspects of it (including staff, security, rules, neighborhood, privacy, family activities, and housing assistance) positively or negatively, and many found both pluses and minuses within a single feature (i.e. privacy). Of the 24 women, 19 felt that the Tier II facility was meeting their families' current needs, at least partially. For most women, this meant that the facility met their basic shelter needs by providing them with a safe, clean, place to stay.

**For being homeless, it's better than being in the street. [Ana from Residence C]**

**Basically, it gave me a place where I can feel safer with my kids. It took us out of the cold. It's not really meeting any great needs. They're slow in reacting to permanent housing. [Rosa from Residence E]**

The women who felt that their needs were not being met were those who defined their needs more broadly, or who had higher expectations of what the Tier II would do for them. For example, many women felt that their most important need was permanent housing, and the Tier II did not provide that.

This place doesn't help much. They don't help you here. It's the pits. This place doesn't motivate you. They have no services here. The staff don't help you. I feel like they're not listening. It's not good for the children. They don't do anything here. [Nancy from Residence A, who had previously been in a battered women's shelter]

Any place that you're at, no matter how nice, if it's not your own, it's a problem. [Belinda from Residence E]

The ability of the facility to meet family's needs beyond basic shelter, varied by the facility as well as the women's expectations. In terms of physical design, the women preferred the facilities that maximized privacy and space and minimized sharing among families, such as Residences B and D. In Residences A, C, and E, women complained about the lack of space and privacy due to sharing a single room with their children, sharing bathrooms and cooking facilities with other families, or having to meet with their visitors in public spaces.

It's bad in here. If you have to go to the bathroom [in the hallway] in the middle of the night you have to get dressed. You can't go in a robe. You can't bring visitors to your room. It's stupid. It's hard to be cooped up with three kids. I've been buying things for our new apartment, so there's lots of stuff in the room and not much space... The kitchen is a problem. People have fights over the stove -- who was there before who. I stay away from the kitchen. [Nancy from Residence A]

Privacy? Who has it here? It's a problem for everyone. There are four [families] here and only two bathrooms. People bother me. Sometimes I want to run away. People steal food from the refrigerator -- they take milk. I try to save as much money as I can. It's hard when people take your food. I'm the oldest [28] and the other young girls don't do anything. They never clean up after themselves and

don't teach their children or supervise them properly. They take advantage of me, ask me for food, to watch their kids, but they never do anything for me. [Ana from Residence C]

Everyone had a sleep schedule in our old apartment. [My kids] are disturbed here if I read or watch TV at night. What [the staff] fail to realize is that the kids need privacy, too. I can't walk around comfortable with the boys in the same room. [Belinda from Residence E]

Administratively, as long as the rules were considered reasonable and consistently enforced, but did not overly impose upon residents' personal freedoms or privacy, the women approved of, but did not necessarily like, them.

They run this place like a jail -- sign it, sign out. It's safe here, believe that! I don't have any problems with the rules. Most are for your own safety. [Belinda from Residence E]

Of course, what women considered to be reasonable varied tremendously. For example, some women felt that a 9:30pm curfew was acceptable, while others felt a 12:00am curfew was too early. Most women, however, found the rules to be a source of contention and frustration. They recognized the need for some standards of operation, but felt that some of the rules were unreasonably oppressive and suggested that they were children or prison inmates. Others complained that the rules were inadequately enforced, which created conflict and resentment among residents, or that they were too rigidly enforced and did not allow for special circumstances.

The rules are stupid. You have to do chores, [but] people don't do them. There are lots of piggy women here. It's disgusting. The women here don't give a shit. We shouldn't have to clean up after grown women. I could live by [the rules] and accept them if everybody had to follow them. They're not enforced equally. Some people are singled out. [Nancy from Residence A]

Curfew is a problem. I think we're grown women. To tell us what time to come home [is no good]. I think it's obvious that we have to come home early on a weekday. They should put people on curfews only if they don't come in on time. I went to see my father in the hospital in Yonkers. I came back late [because of the hospital's visiting hours] and got written up three times. They treat us like little kids. [Elena from Residence E]

There are a lot of rules, like prison. You can't have phone calls. Curfew is at 9:30 and you can't even come out of your room. It's really stupid. [The time for] curfew is fine, but it's just the point [of having it that's stupid]. Having no phone calls and no visitors [is more of a problem]. There are certain days for visitors. It reminds me of being in prison [Jeannie from Residence E, who was just released from prison].

The amount of assistance provided to the women also varied among the facilities.

The women spoke appreciatively of the available services (i.e., a doctor, work stipends, the linen service, educational workshops, Bingo nights, and organized recreation) and the help that they received from staff members.

It's better, cleaner, and more private [than other shelters]... The doctor has been good. The meals are good. The housing workshop was good. The family activities were good. [Luz from Residence E]

This is a nice place. I expected to find filth, but I was wrong. It's beautiful. They staff are nice. They ask you if you want things. They don't hesitate to help you. [Mabel from Residence D]

However, when the women requested help and received none, when meetings with social workers were forced upon them, or when the staff treated them in a condescending or mean-spirited way, the women became frustrated and dissatisfied.

It's like being in a jail -- reporting to your counselor every week. I have no necessity of meeting with someone about the same thing every week. I just tell them how things are going. [Janika from Residence E]

I don't use the counselor here -- I have my own therapist. The director here doesn't address your problems. [Blanca from Residence D]

Everything you need here you have to go through someone. I needed milk when I was sick. I called the night supervisor, he wouldn't give me milk. This one particular guy is a snob. [Cheryl from Residence E]

Taken together, no single characteristic of the Tier II facilities could account for the women's attitudes towards them. Instead, the women seemed to weigh the positive and negative aspects of the facilities, with regard to how it was addressing their current needs including obtaining permanent housing. For example, the following two women from Residence E, which had one of the strictest rule systems as well as the least amount of physical space, found that the benefits of the Tier II greatly outweighed those disadvantages.

They say this is one of the best shelters in the city, and I agree. If I have problems, there's an answer. I have a social worker. If I were alone I wouldn't have this many resources. The social workers here are on top of everything. The housing specialist, he's great. Even the monitors are helpful. I haven't had a problem with anyone. [Yolanda]

The daycare is a lot of help, especially when you have other kids in the PAL program. She has a lot of fun there. If you have personal problems, social workers help. They have parenting workshops -- a lot of good tips. It's great here. I'm lucky. I only been to one other hotel. I love this place. [Eva]

### The Tier II as an Environment for Children

Children living in temporary housing facilities have a set of needs that are somewhat different than their parents'. They often need (or could benefit from) some type of educational support to keep them from falling behind in school. Being separated from their friends, neighborhood, and even their playthings, the children need places and opportunities to play, preferably with other children their age. The Tier II facilities varied by the environmental and programmatic support that they provided for children. The

women were sensitive to how the Tier II facility met their children's needs as well as their own.

### Educational Support

The most common type of educational support available to homeless families was provided by the New York City School System. Each facility was assigned an attendance officer by the school district to monitor school attendance, and in some districts, to provide additional services. For example, through a program provided by Community School District 10, families in Residences B and C had access to parent education workshops, family trips and activities, as well as programs rewarding children with prizes (i.e. books and book-bags) for good attendance. Families living in Residence D (in CSD 12) did not identify any special educational services, but they did describe the attendance officer as being accessible and helpful. Residence A (in CSD 7) provided the least amount of educational support. Their attendance officer's role was pretty much limited to school enrollment issues and he was rarely present at the facility. Residence E (CSD 2) did not use their district appointed attendance officer, but instead employed their own full-time educational specialist. This was a deliberate decision made by the director, who felt that an employee of the school system could not effectively advocate for the educational needs and rights of the children.

Only two facilities provided educational services beyond what was provided by the school district. Residence E, which had the most comprehensive educational services of all the facilities, employed a full-time educational specialist who visited the schools weekly to check on children's progress. She also arranged for individual tutoring at the Tier II for

children who needed it and maintained a selection of books and other educational material that the children could borrow. In addition, each month the children having perfect attendance were publicly acknowledged by having their names posted on the bulletin board within brightly colored stars. The children also could attend a community afterschool program which offered homework assistance. Most of the children took advantage of these educational services. Residence D had a "recreation room" for children, which contained a library and was used for the volunteer tutoring program. The family I interviewed there, however, did not use these services since the children attended an afterschool latchkey program.

#### Homework Conditions

Most of the facilities did not provide any adequate space for children to do homework. In Residences A, C, and E, which housed 21 of the 24 families, there was no space that was separated from the rest of the household where children could do their homework. With few exceptions, the rooms I visited tended to be dark, stuffy and often noisy. The best homework conditions were found in Residences B and D, where the children had their own room, which was furnished with a desk.

Regardless of the physical conditions of the facility, most of the children reportedly did their homework regularly. Only one mother commented that the physical setting prevented her children from adequately completing their assignments. Another mother attempted to improve the homework conditions by rigging a desk in her room from material she had found in the street. Afterschool programs gave many of the children living in the most crowded conditions an alternative place to do homework. Overall,

parents took advantage and were appreciative of any educational assistance that was available.

Tamika gets one hour of homework every night. Sometimes she does it in PAL. Mostly she does it at home. She can't find the homework teacher at PAL. At PAL the kids do their homework if they want to do it... Lionel gets math, but he's way behind. He gets different homework than anyone else in the class... I have to help Lionel. Tamika does it by herself. I help her read quiz questions and check it. I tried to teach Lionel and Tamika how to read. [Tamika's] tutor takes some of [the work] off me. I want a tutor for Lionel, too. [Tanya from Residence E]

### Recreation

Opportunities for play and recreation also varied by facility. Residences B, C, D, and E provided families with occasional trips and outings on the weekends. Residences A, D, had an outdoor play area for children, while Residence E had an interior playground. Of all the facilities, Residence E had the most extensive recreational programming for children. It was the only facility that had a full-time recreational director. He enrolled children in PAL, and transported them there every school day. He also arranged a weekly "movie night" and trips on the weekends.

Every Monday there's arts and crafts. They have trips on Saturdays. They used to have movies. There's always something going on. There's also PAL for the kids. They have a courtyard upstairs where the kids can play. The kids are never bored. [Luz from Residence E]

Having a large number of same-age children living in the facility provided them with potential playmates. However, some parents were not comfortable with their children living, going to school, and playing with the same group of children day after day.

In Residences A and C the children also could enroll in PAL, but few families participated. There seemed to be less cooperation or coordination between the Tier II

staff and the local PAL program. In Residence A, mothers complained that the PAL workers did not show up consistently to pick up the children.

Alex used to go to PAL. The PAL worker stopped showing up so he doesn't go anymore. [Milagros from Residence A]

In Residence C only two mothers knew about the program and the one who expressed an interest in it was advised not to use it.

He went to the community center when we were living at Catherine Street [shelter]. Here I was told not to put him into PAL because the kids are too rough. [Cindy, mother of Charles]

Residences B, C, and D, which had few organized recreational activities or safe settings for informal play, were considered to be the worst environments for children.

They're bored a lot here. They want to go outside, but the kids are too bad here. They watch TV, read, mope around. They're not happy at all -- really bored. [Regina from Residence C]

Some parents said that their children did not use the play spaces provided by the facilities because conflicts among the children often escalated into heated confrontations between parents. They preferred to avoid problems by keeping their children indoors.

I don't use the backyard anymore. I had a problem with another woman and her kid. Now I keep away from others. [Blanca from Residence D]

I don't let them play outside. There's lots of children. My daughter likes to touch the babies, and the mothers have scolded her. Sometimes my son wants to play outside but he sees the problems and arguments. I don't let them play here. [Elena from Residence E]

### Other Free-time Activities

When homeless children were not involved in programmed recreational activities, they had to rely on their own ideas or their mothers for recreation opportunities and ideas.

Television watching and reading were activities the mothers mentioned often. They also reported a variety of other activities that their children were engaged in alone (e.g., listening to music, coloring or drawing, playing with toys) or with other children (e.g., running around, wrestling, playing basketball, playing home video games).

Some mothers tried their best to compensate for their children's loss of play opportunities by organizing their own activities and spending more time with their children than usual. The parents described activities that the family did all together -- going on walks or to the park, window-shopping or to museums. Visiting friends and family was also common, especially during weekends, when the families were free to leave the facility overnight.

We all watch TV together. We all play together. We have no routine. We go to the movies sometimes or walk around. [Mabel from Residence D]

Almost every day we go to the park together and stay there for hours. We wait until he finishes playing... We take walks a lot in the summer. [Milagros from Residence A]

We go to parks, the museum, roller skating, window shopping. We participate in the recreation here. We talk about things together. [Rosa from Residence E]

In addition to playing, many of the children, although young, had a number of household responsibilities. These included cleaning up, taking out the garbage, making the beds, washing dishes, and running errands. In several families the children also helped with their younger siblings.

Some mothers mentioned how living in a Tier II facility restricted the amount of household responsibility they could give their children. In one facility the regulations prohibited a teenager from taking care of her younger siblings, as she had done in the past.

Another mother explained that having no kitchen ended her daughter's lessons in meal preparation.

### Children's Attitudes Toward the Tier II

Opportunities for recreation and socializing with other children had a major impact on the children's experience of the Tier II facility. In facilities which had a comprehensive recreation program or a setting for informal play, the children reported that they made more friends, engaged in more physical play activities, watched less television, and seemed generally more content with their living situation than those children living in facilities with limited recreation.

Children who lived in Residence E, which had both a comprehensive recreational program and a playground, had virtually unlimited access to recreation. On a typical day, from the end of school until bedtime, the children were constantly engaged in one activity or another. The PAL program offered a large selection of activities including games, gym, arts and crafts, a library, trips to the local park, and outings to events (e.g., the circus). At the facility, the children spent most of their free time in the playground. The children from this facility described a high degree of physical activity in their play, and only 3 (out of 10) mentioned that they watched television or home videos.

In PAL they got pool tables and games you can play. Sometimes when people don't go to PAL no more they say: "Forget it. PAL is whack." That's what they say. They just saying that cuz they mad they don't go to PAL. They go home, stay home. They only go to school... At PAL you do your homework. There's a teacher, a homework teacher that helps you do your homework... [After PAL] I play again. We go play in the yard. There's a yard in here... We play tag, freeze tag, and sometimes we play jump. [Danny]

[After school] I go to PAL. I play games, go to library, I go to arts and crafts, I do my homework and we play, and we go home. It's fun.. If I don't finish all my homework [in PAL], I do it at home. Then, I go outside until my bedtime. Then I wash up, and then I go to sleep at 9:30... Saturday, I look at cartoons. Then, I go outside, and see how cold is it or hot it is. And then I come back in the room, eat my breakfast, then go outside. If it was cold, I would play with my dolls. If it was hot, I would go outside. [Kwadra]

After school we wait there until the PAL [van] come. [We] do homework, play gym, play game room, play pool, play hockey, play soccer, arts and crafts... I do [my homework] every day in PAL. I love PAL... And when I come back, I go upstairs, and then I put my books down in my house. I go outside and I play with my friends Shaniqua and Aisha and Corinne... and run all over the place. And then I come home, my mommy call us in the house, we get in the house, we wash up, get in the bed. [Tamika]

Manny was the only child whom I interviewed in Residence E who did not attend PAL or use the playground. His mother felt the experience of becoming homeless upon moving to New York City from Florida, considerably frightened him and his sister. She felt he needed some time to adjust before attempting to negotiate another new social situation. Manny's free time was much more centered around family activities, although he did take advantage of the events offered by the facility.

[After school] I eat something, and then I do my homework. Then after, we'll cook dinner. And then after I eat, then I'll look at a little bit of TV. And then at 7:30, we go to bed or 7:50, we'll start getting ready to go to bed... Over here [in the facility] there are trips, because Ed [the recreation director], he always has a trip for us Saturday. This Saturday coming we're gonna go to the Bronx Zoo. My mom said there's more animals than the Central Park Zoo, cuz I went over there. And the weekends, like Saturday, we go on field trips over here. And what's good about every Friday -- is that every Friday is movie night for the kids. Then they'll go downstairs, and they'll probably see "Beauty and the Beast" or "The Little Mermaid" or "101 Dalmatians" -- those kind of movies... And on Sunday, I'll spend it with my mom. We go out for walks. My mom will probably buy me an ice cream, and Maria. And, we'll probably go to the park, and I'll go roller skating, probably in any park around that's close. [Manny]

After Residence E, the children living in Residence A had the most opportunities for recreation. In contrast, to Residence E, however, Residence A had very few programmed recreational activities. The children sometimes attended the local PAL, when it was available and one boy attended a community-based program that held monthly events. But the children primarily relied on informal, neighborhood-based, activities as a form of recreation or fun. All the children played outside -- and described games and activities requiring much physical activity (skateboarding, jump rope). Many had made friends with the neighborhood children and played in local parks or playgrounds. Of the seven children only one mentioned television watching as one of their activities.

At 3:00 I go to pick up my brother [in school], and then I come here... [I] play, stay outside, or sometimes go to my friend's house... [I] play with [Naomi] and her brother, Kadeem, and Martin. We play soccer or we play tag... I like playing kickball, playing soccer, or playing freeze tag or hide-and-go-seek... if [I play] skateboard, I just sit down. I had a Nintendo, but my cousin broke it. [I have] only baby doll and one carriage. I left [my other toys] in Miami. [Gloria]

When I get home, I go outside and play in the park right across the street [with kids who] live right up the block. [I met them from] these two kids Adrian and Martin [from here]. I met Martin first, then Martin told me Adrian's name, and Adrian told me this other kid's name, and then we keep going on like that... and that's how we knew each other... I play hide-and-go-seek, play wrestling [with my sisters]. We play hide and seek in the room. My sister gotta go in the bathroom she goes down the hall, go in the bathroom and then she come out and then she come find us. [Kadeem]

The children living in Residences B, C, and D had the most limited opportunities for play. On school days, only the four children who attended a school-based afterschool program had access to programmed recreational activities. Informal, neighborhood-based play was not an option for most of these children either. The parents and children were concerned about the extent of community violence and crime, which limited the children's

unsupervised outdoor play. Residence D had an outdoor play area, but it was generally not used by the families I interviewed. In describing their free time activities the children living in these facilities mentioned fewer physical activities and seemed to spend more time watching television. They were more socially isolated and tended not to know or play with the other children living in the facility. These children also complained about having nothing to do and being bored.

Here I just get off [the bus] and go upstairs.' [I do] nothing. [I watch] cartoons... I go to sleep. After, I wake up and watch T.V. Do you watch wrestling - Wrestling Mania? I watch Bart Simpson but they broke the TV upstairs... [I don't see my friends] that much cuz sometimes I can't come out. [Troy from Residence C]

After I come from latchkey program, I come here, I go upstairs and watch some cartoons and get some rest. Who do I play with here? Nobody. I don't got no friends, no nothing in here... The only time I get to talk to [other kids], when it's [a house meeting] you got to go downstairs to the daycare room, you play a little. That's it... Can't [go outside].. too bad kids around here. You know the kids that live over there next to this building? Those are bad kids over there. They sell drugs and stuff... I don't like this place. I don't like this place a bit. I want to go back where I lived at. It's more funner there. [Malik from Residence C]

[After school I] go upstairs and play Nintendo or study. [I play with] Booby, he always come to my house... [I go] to a park, or at a friend house [room], play Nintendo... This is a rowdy block. I never come from a rowdy block, where they shooting and everything. And there's no abandoned buildings... In the projects, those tall buildings, they be shooting inside, and sometimes out the window or the roof. They be throwing a lot of rocks and bricks. One time it was an ambulance over there and they hit this old man who have a cane over his head. It went BOOM. [Charles from Residence C]

Rules and regulations requiring parental supervision of play areas affected the children's usage of these spaces. All the facilities with play areas had these rules, but they were not strictly enforced in Residence E or in Residence A. When these rules were

enforced children's usage of the areas decreased. This may also explain why only one child from Residences C and D reported using the play areas there.

After school, I come home, my mother lets me play [outside]. But now she don't let me play because we have to be with a parent outside. My sister is with somebody outside, unless she left with her friend... [Before] we didn't have to stay with no parents. We used to go outside, play. They used to not say nothing to us. And now we can't go in that yard right there... [The director] don't let us go in there. We used to play baseball. We used to play with our skateboards. [Now] we don't do nothing. We have to stay here. If you want to go outside, you need to ask if you can stay with your mother. You need to ask your mother if she can go outside with you. [Keith from Residence A]

I don't play outside because the first time I was here, I went outside, and I started playing, and then all I know is that one of the people from here said: "Where's your mother?" Then I said: "She's in [the room]." And then she went there, and then she said: "You can't leave your kids out there by themselves." And I don't know how these other kids do it, because they're always out there alone, playing, screaming. And they don't do nothing about it. Some of [the kids] just pass right by [workers] and they don't do nothing. [My mother] she just can't be there out with me. [Manny from Residence E]

[When I'm] home I play outside. Cuz every time when my mother babysit [my friend Lionel] she says: "Get your coats and go outside!" She like crazy, she don't want us in there. It's fun [outside], it's a lot of kids. [Devon from Residence E]

In addition to supervision rules, some children felt that their play was restricted by the rules around curfew or the proximity of other residents.

The thing I don't like that much about this place is that we can't like dance or nothing, because they complain and my mother get in trouble. That's all. We can't do nothing. We can't dance, only we can listen to the music. [Brianna from Residence D]

[Me and my sisters] couldn't wrestle because other people used to live next door to us [in the shelter]. But in the nighttime, if people wasn't in the room, [if they] left to go on a weekend pass, on the weekends we'd be wrestling and stuff... [I'm] tired of living here. Cuz you know what time the little kids gotta come in? Nine o'clock. That's for little kids. And mostly everybody is older than a little kid. Eleven and ten year-olds, they gotta come in at the same time as babies come in... In summertime, we be real mad, cuz every time we go to stay out and play, we got

a nice game, the [staff] person comes, he be like saying go upstairs, go to your room, and if you can't go in your room go in somebody else's room. That's how it is. And sometimes, we be having fun and want to stay there, we can't stay outside. Just like the fourth of July, we had to come in. [It makes me] real mad. [Kadeem from Residence A]

In Residence A, the children were able to join together to turn nightly curfew into an extended game of hide-and-go-seek, at the expense of the night staff.

[After school] I do my homework, and then I come out and play with Roberto and Alex and Adrian. We skateboard or we play baseball in front... In the night we sneaky. Roberto get caught [after curfew] most of the time, but last time, he didn't get caught for nothing, he was the last one. I got caught, Adrian got caught, and Alex got caught. He didn't get caught for nothing. We was running around the building. [Martin from Residence A]

Programmed activities, and having opportunities to play and socialize with other children made the experience of living in a shelter facility more tolerable for children. The experience was most difficult for children who were isolated from their peers, and sources of fun and recreation.

Sometimes I go to my friend's house [room]. She lives right in front of my door, but upstairs... We play tag, we play with the Barbies... [I will feel] bad and good [when we move]. Because over here is fun. And sometimes over there is not. [It will be] a little bit boring like when I move out. I think it's going to be a little bit boring. [What's good is] I get to have my own bed, my own room. [Wendy from Residence E]

### Conditions of the Facilities and Children's Achievement

According to my findings, the qualities of the Tier II Residence may have some effect on children's educational achievement. Five out of the seven highest achieving children lived in Residence E. At the same time, six of the eight lowest achieving children lived in Residence A. In addition, mothers who described more positive aspects about the

facilities also had children who did better in school, than those who felt unsupported by or dissatisfied with the facility.

	Residence A	Residence B	Residence C	Residence D	Residence E
Above Average (n = 7)	0	0	1	1	5
Below Average (n = 9)	1	1	3	0	4
Poor (n = 8)	6	0	0	0	2

Since the five children who lived Residence E all attended the same school as well, it is possible that school characteristics also had some effect on achievement. The six children from Residence A, however, attended three different schools. A comparison of the housing conditions of Residence A with those of Residence E can help identify the factors that may affect school performance. In terms of the physical design Residences A and E were similar. In both facilities families shared a single room, although residents of E had their own bathroom. Administratively, Residence E was somewhat more restrictive. It had an earlier curfew and more monitoring of parents. The most dramatic difference between the two facilities was around service provision. Residence E offered the most

comprehensive educational services of all the facilities, while Residence A offered the least. Also, the women living in Residence E reportedly received more help in just about everything -- public assistance, housing, health, and education. In contrast, the women in Residence A complained that nobody was helping them with public assistance benefits, housing, or with referrals to other services (i.e. family counseling). In fact, two residents of A reported that they dropped out of their educational programs due to the stress of living in the facility.

#### Summary of Community and Institutional Factors

Safety was a major issue for families both before and during their stay at the Tier II facilities. Community safety allowed children and adults to make connections in their neighborhoods. Community violence isolated families and sometimes resulted in residential instability leading to homelessness.

Safe public spaces (e.g., parks and pools) were a great resource for the families. Otherwise these same areas were perceived as threatening. Tier II facilities such as Residence E, maximized children's opportunities for recreation by utilizing community-based programs. Mothers felt secure in letting children attend the PAL program because it was well coordinated by the facility's recreational director. In contrast, in Residence C, given the level of community violence and the lack of play space in the facility, the Tier II failed to make use of a much needed community resource.

Although Tier II facilities were designed for families, most of the ones included in this study had few child-centered programmatic or design elements, including spaces and activities for education, recreation and socializing. When these were available to the

children, they utilized and appreciated them. Living in a facility where opportunities to socialize and play were possible, made the experience much more tolerable for the children.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT FAMILIES' USE OF SUPPORTIVE SERVICES**

Tier II facilities, in principle, are to go beyond emergency housing provision to help families obtain permanent housing and address the problems that contributed to their homelessness, such as a lack of a job or education. Tier II facilities, as was discussed in the previous chapter, differ in the number of on-site services they provide. All of them, however, are expected to provide information about and referrals to off-site services for families who need them. This chapter will address homeless families' use of supportive services to meet their critical needs, mainly (1) finding a home; (2) finding a job to support themselves, or an educational program that would lead to a job; (3) maintaining adequate public assistance benefits; and (4) receiving counseling to resolve family or personal problems.

### **Housing Placement Assistance**

In attempting to locate permanent housing the women sought assistance from the Tier II's housing specialists, outside service providers, or they independently applied for federal or city-funded housing assistance programs (i.e., Section 8). Of the 24 women in this study only five were satisfied with the housing assistance provided by the Tier II staff. Not surprisingly, four of them were in the process of moving out of the facility and into a new apartment.

The housing specialist... he's great. He always got a good apartment to look at.  
[Yolanda, Residence E, eight months in the shelter system]

The list that [the housing specialist] gave me was helpful. I saw three apartments.  
[Eva, Residence E, eight months in the shelter system]

The overwhelming dissatisfaction with housing placement assistance seemed to originate from the women's belief that their most pressing need -- obtaining permanent housing -- was not considered to be a priority by the Tier II staff. In every facility fewer staff resources were devoted to housing placement assistance than other social services. While Residence B and E had a full-time housing specialist, Residences A, C, and D shared a single housing specialist among them. Residence E also was the only facility to organize a series of workshops explaining the different types of housing options, and the processes involved in applying for them.

The women argued that their contact with the housing specialist was prolonged, limited, and out of their control.

You don't see [the housing specialist] until they want to see you. They wait there, throw the outcome at you, then you start from scratch. It's no good. [Keisha, Residence E, seven months in the shelter system]

[The housing specialist] tries to push you out into apartments that you don't want. She tries to make you take apartments that are not ready to be lived in, or apartments that are broken down. She's the meanest. [Marta from Residence B, three months in the shelter system].

The housing specialist doesn't want to be bothered. She only comes on Fridays. She doesn't work, she's always doing something else. She doesn't answer your questions. [Doreen, Residence A, seven months in the shelter system]

They don't tell me anything. I have been here a month. You just sit here until they ready for you. [Jeanie from Residence E, one month in shelter system]

Adding to the women's sense of having no control over the process of obtaining housing, were the multitudinous and complicated regulations governing housing placement for homeless families. For example, regulations that require families to be in the shelter system for a minimum of eight months to a year before they can be eligible for permanent

housing limited Tier II staff's ability to expedite the housing placement process. Some women responded in anger, often directed at the Tier II staff, while others resigned themselves to the reality that they had very little control over this process.

They change the rules too much about the length of stay. I've been crazy the last couple of months. She [housing specialist] doesn't want to be around me by herself anymore. I don't want to tell the kids anything about moving. We were supposed to move a month ago. The kids have gotten frustrated. They have to have their own place. [Mabel, Residence D, nine months in shelter system]

They tell you that you have to be here a year before you can apply [for housing]. I have to take EARP, Section 8, or SIP. I just have to wait. [Cheryl, Residence E, six months in shelter system]

The women recognized the complexities and difficulties involved in locating housing, but they also felt that the housing assistance staff were too complacent. Women who had been actively seeking housing on their own were particularly critical of the housing specialists' lack of effort.

My [case]worker has spoken to the housing specialist. He helped me to process applications. I don't think they're working too hard. They're just sitting back and waiting for the time [limit]. I filed two or three applications for the City Housing Authority, NYCHA, but they say they have no record of it on file. [Keisha, Residence E, seven months in shelter system]

I've been looking on my own. I almost got an apartment. Tomorrow I'm supposed to call DAMP. I sent an application before coming here. Everything I've done here, I've done on my own. I asked my caseworker if the people here would support me in DAMP. She started to enroll me in the housing workshop and helped me file an application, that's it. No one is helping me to find housing. I'm doing it on my own. [Rosa, Residence E, three months in shelter system]

I haven't seen an apartment since I've been here. I don't think it's fair. They told me it was because I haven't filled out an EARP application. I completed the housing workshop in December [four months ago] and filled out the applications. They haven't sent me nowhere. Other girls went to see apartments with no EARP applications and I haven't been nowhere. They're giving me the run around. I

don't understand it. I'm not a problem person. Everybody likes me. [Janika from Residence E, six months in the shelter system]

What becomes clear in these interviews, is that for these women who are homeless, obtaining housing is an all encompassing, urgent need. They quickly learn that their sense of urgency is not shared by the people who are responsible for helping them to find housing. Instead, they are required to meet with Tier II staff twice a week to discuss other aspects of their lives. The process of having others determine what their needs are, as well as how and when they will be addressed, is likely to engender feelings of resentment, frustration, despair and helplessness among the women.

#### Career Preparation

All the women, without exception, expressed the view that finding employment that would enable them to be self-sufficient was their ultimate goal. Because the women were not starting from the same point -- a third had both a high school diploma and employment experience, a third had some work experience but no diploma, and a third had neither -- what they needed to do to accomplish this goal varied considerably.

Among the eight women who had at least a high school diploma, two attempted to attend college while living at the Tier II, in order to move toward their career goal (i.e., becoming a social worker). Another woman completed a job training/placement program and then took the Transit Authority test. These women all said that they pursued their careers primarily on their own, without the assistance of Tier II staff. Another woman, who mentioned that she had requested help from her caseworker in finding a job, said she received no response from her.

I have been asking my worker [about jobs]. Every time we meet she says she forgot or is too busy. I think she just don't care. That's why I said that they're not too helpful. [Keisha, Residence E, high school graduate with one year of college]

The remaining four women were waiting until they obtained permanent housing before pursuing any careers plans.

Of the sixteen women who had no high school diploma or equivalent, four had enrolled in a G.E.D. program, two had applied for jobs on their own, and two had completed job training programs (i.e., BEGIN, America Works). Of these women only two indicated that the Tier II staff had provided them with any information or referrals to the jobs or educational programs. Two other women had requested assistance from service providers and were waiting for a response. The remaining six women were not involved in any job or educational activities while living in the facility.

It is striking that although preparing women for "independent" living is part of the philosophy of Tier II housing, half of the women were not participating in any career preparation activities. Also the women who were working towards obtaining jobs and/or furthering their education seldom considered the Tier II residence as a source of assistance or support in pursuing these goals.

The women felt that they faced a number of barriers in trying to obtain more education or a job, which may partially explain why many women did not attempt to work toward these goals. One barrier was the structure of the Tier II environment, with its restrictions including curfew, and frequent, obligatory appointments. Two women, both living in Residence A, dropped out of their educational programs because they said they could not cope with school requirements and the demands of being in the facility. Also,

the policy of most shelter facilities work directly against women finding employment, as one woman pointed out: " You can't work and stay here." Therefore, for the women who already obtained a high school diploma or who had completed job training programs, it did not make sense to look for a job since they could not work if they happened to find one.

Living here you can't do anything. Twice each month you have to go to welfare and spend all day there. I went to the "BEGIN" program myself. When I move they will help me get a job in the hospital. [Lourdes, no high school education, prior work experience]

I've completed the "America Works" program. I said I don't want a job until after [I get an apartment]. You start working then they have 9:30 curfews here. Being here [has prevented me from getting a job]. I don't want to find a job and then have to take days off. [Janika, no high school diploma, prior work experience]

The women also described inadequate childcare as a barrier to getting a job or enrolling in a GED program. The women who were unhappy with the childcare choices that were available to them, decided to postpone their education and employment search until they felt their children were in an environment they could trust.

I can take care of a job once I'm in Brooklyn and know that my kids will be safe and taken care of. [Sally, wants to attend GED and job training program]

Recently, two months ago, I took a test as a transit officer. I passed the test, and am waiting for my letter to arrive. I have to wait. You get a list number. The only thing is I have to find daycare or a babysitter for the children. [Luz, high school graduate]

I will wait [to get a GED] until Carlene starts going to school. Too many things happen to kids in day care. [Tanya]

Another possible reason that the women did not participate in more job preparation programs, was that they had become disillusioned with them. The ten women

who indicated that they had received job training prior to becoming homeless were not able to find jobs in those areas.

I took a computer programming course for six months. I wasn't able to find a job when I finished, like they promised. I took out loans to go to that school. After that, I didn't try any more of those programs. They [social services] wanted to put me in a program where you work for your welfare benefits. They wanted me to dump garbage in the housing project. They don't even raise the amount of your check. I refused to participate. There is a new program where you can get a stipend as a per diem employee. I prefer that. But I can't do anything until I leave here. [Mabel, high school graduate, worked for 12 years, mostly as security guard]

While job preparation is important, the quality of the program, its linkage to actual jobs, opportunities for upward mobility in the field, and supportive services, such as childcare, all need to be considered for it to be a viable option for women who are homeless. It also appears that Tier II staff need more information about jobs or career options that address a wider range of needs. Most of the available services are directed toward women having no high school diploma or work experience. There seem to be no placement or career enhancement services for the women who have higher levels of education and more work experience.

#### Assistance with Entitlements

Problems in obtaining and maintaining public assistance benefits were common among the women. Some were able to resolve these problems on their own, while others were assisted by their Tier II caseworker or one affiliated with an off-site service provider. Many women, however, described how the Tier II caseworkers provided little assistance to them in their efforts to negotiate with representatives of the Human Resources Administration (HRA) when problems arose.

I can't get an apartment without being on a public assistance budget. Only my children are on public assistance. They closed my case because I don't have my husband's social security number. My husband refused to give me his social security number because he's afraid to be taken to court for child support. The welfare worker asked me how could I sleep with someone and not know his social security number. I told him that his job ... didn't concern [who I slept with]. He closed my case for having insufficient information and for being uncooperative. A friend of mine went through [my husband's] papers and found out his social security number for me. She made me swear that I wouldn't tell him where I got it. Now I have a Fair Hearing for [next month]. Nobody here is helping me with it. I don't know what's going to happen. I want someone to help me.. I don't know if [anyone] will. I don't even know if I'm allowed to have someone there with me. [Milagros, Residence A]

They took away my restaurant allowance when I came here. I went to a Fair Hearing to try and get it back but they wouldn't let me say anything. They said that there was a kitchen here and they pay [Residence A] a lot of money. When I tried to explain to them there were 16 families here and that we couldn't use the kitchen during certain hours, they turned off the tape recorder. They wouldn't let me report the problem... Nobody [here] offered any help. For a situation like that someone here should have gone with me. [Frances, Residence A]

Problems with maintaining benefits are common among families on public assistance and have been identified as one of the causes of homelessness (Dumpson, 1987). Therefore, it is odd that so many women across different facilities reported that they had trouble obtaining help from their caseworkers in this area. As in the area of housing assistance, there seems to be a mismatch between the women's definitions of their needs and their expectations for assistance, and the type of help that was actually provided by their Tier II caseworkers.

#### Help with Family Problems

Incidences of substance abuse, domestic violence, separation, divorce, or abandonment were common among the families who were interviewed. To help deal with these and other, related problems, five women indicated that they were presently receiving

individual or family counseling. All saw therapists off-site, and it was typically the women themselves who had sought help and initiated the contact. The women felt that they and their children were benefitting a great deal from these services. When asked if some form of group or individual counseling would be beneficial to them, 10 other women indicated that they would be interested in receiving some kind counseling, or even a peer support group, but none had been offered and they had not pursued this on their own.

Parenting education programs were another resource the women used to improve family functioning. Residence E was the only facility that offered any regular parenting program on-site -- a weekly play group for mothers with infants. The mothers all described it positively, but only one mother attended it regularly.

They had a workshop here about there's a lot of stress in the shelter system. They talked about how to discipline without going to extremes. I got a lot of tips. They also have a play workshop for infants, but I have never been able to go. [Yolanda]

Some of the women living in the other facilities attended parenting programs from outside service providers that they found out about on their own or from a source other than the Tier II staff. Three women said that they had requested a referral to a parenting program from the Tier II staff and were either placed on a waiting list or had received no response from them.

However, not all mothers were enthusiastic about parenting programs. Some became defensive if their caseworkers suggested they attend one, and others felt that not all the information they received was useful.

The worker downstairs told me to go. I got insulted and wouldn't go. She made an appointment, but I didn't show up. [Elena, Residence E]

I was referred by Victims' Services. You go and they say 'do this.' You go home, all psyched, you try it for a couple of days (not yelling at the kids), and the kids were going off. Some of it was helpful, some of it was totally ridiculous.  
[Samantha, Residence E]

Seeking counseling or acknowledging that you need help in caring for your children is not an easy step for anyone to take. It is especially difficult for poor or homeless women who feel that if they admit to weaknesses in these areas their children may be taken from them.

Before I started therapy I was afraid of being criticized. I was always afraid of people taking my kids away. BCW scared me a lot. [Blanca, Residence D]

Considering the potential benefits these services can have for the entire family, it is remarkable that Tier II facilities did not seem to provide more information about or referrals to these programs, particularly when they were specifically requested by the women.

#### Personal Choice and Service Utilization

The time spent living in temporary housing may be experienced as an extended waiting period where lives are put on hold, or as an opportunity to focus on getting one's life back on track. The interviews with the women revealed that individual differences among the women (i.e. level of motivation, attitudes toward assistance), the availability of the services, and the way in which they were delivered all played a role in whether and how women made use of supportive services while they were homeless.

One group of six women primarily relied upon the assistance provided by or through the Tier II facility. All of these women lived in Residence E and felt that their assigned caseworkers adequately addressed their needs, ranging from obtaining public

assistance benefits, referrals to job training programs, or listening to their personal problems.

A second group of six women sought and primarily used service providers outside the shelter system. These women were scattered across all five facilities. They felt that the help they were receiving outside the facility was superior to that which was provided by the Tier II staff, even if all of their needs or concerns could not be addressed by the outside professionals (i.e. obtaining housing).

A third group of six women, living in Residences A, C, D, and E, tended not to use service providers for assistance but primarily relied on their own efforts. These women sought housing, attempted to resolve their own public assistance problems, applied for jobs, and enrolled in job training or school on their own. Although the results of their efforts were not always successful, most of these women felt that they could not rely on others for assistance.

A fourth group of six women, also living in Residences A, C, D, and E, did not describe any efforts to seek or utilize available services or make any personal attempts to meet their needs. One woman commented that she had requested help from the facility but did not receive it. Another, however, described several occasions when she refused the Tier II's staff attempts to refer her to services (i.e. GED program, parenting program).

Overall, some women utilized services and resources that were available and accessible, others actively sought the services that were not readily accessible or tried to function the best they could without any help, and still others chose not to use any resources of services even when they were made available to them. Most of the women

were making some attempt to improve their lives in some way or another, and many attempted to do so without help from the Tier II staff.

### The Role of Tier II Service Providers

A discussion of homeless families' service utilization must address the special nature of service provision within the Tier II facility. Similar to other institutional settings (e.g., psychiatric hospitals), Tier II facilities do not give residents any choice with regard to enlisting the help of a social worker or other service provider. When seeing a caseworker is a requirement rather than a matter of personal choice, the therapeutic relationship between service provider and client can be compromised. Also, given all the restrictions and lack of personal freedom characteristic of Tier II living, it is likely that women would distance themselves from Tier II service providers in order to obtain some degree of privacy and control over their lives (Boxill & Beatty, 1990). This may explain why some women felt that their service providers outside the Tier II facility were more helpful and supportive than their on-site caseworkers.

The people who help me the most are not from here [the Tier II]. [Cindy, Residence C, presently attends an Alcoholics Anonymous Program]

It's harder [getting services now] because people don't help you here. In other places the counselors stand by you, stick with you. They go with you to help you. [Frances, Residence A, previously lived in a shelter for battered women]

Although the women were required to work with on-site caseworkers, many felt that they did not receive the help they needed from them and some felt that their caseworkers contributed to their stress of being homeless. The examples below describe

how some of the most self-motivated women found it difficult to obtain assistance through the Tier II staff.

Blanca, who lives in Residence D, enrolled herself in a GED program. After experiencing domestic violence she sought family counseling for herself and her children. She has done all of this without the assistance of Tier II staff. Blanca began having problems with her public assistance benefits; she also felt that her parenting skills could be improved. Although she requested assistance from the Tier II staff she received no response from them.

Since entering Residence A, Doreen was able to get her daughter into daycare, which allowed her to enroll in the Borough of Manhattan Community College to continue her education. She had already applied for Section 8 housing on her own. When Doreen's public assistance benefits were threatened she successfully defended her case at a Fair Hearing. When her oldest son, Martin, began having behavior problems in school and at home, Doreen sought help from her Tier II caseworker and requested a referral to a parenting education program. She was told there were no available programs. Her son's behavior continued to deteriorate and she had to drop out of school due to problems retaining a babysitter for him. The housing specialist also informed Doreen that since she could not control her son's behavior, she would not recommend her for the Mitchell Lama Housing Program to which she had applied.

Rosa recently arrived in New York City from Florida. Within months of entering the shelter system, she applied for housing, enrolled herself in a GED program, and began to look at her college options. Her assigned caseworker from Residence E, instead of

supporting Rosa, is a major source of distress for her. She feels that her caseworker is constantly criticizing her, particularly her parenting decisions. When Rosa requests assistance (i.e. obtaining an algebra book to study for her GED) she receives a lecture rather than any help. Rosa has decided that discussing her problems, particularly her personal problems, with her caseworker is too risky -- she could lose her children.

Therefore, she remains silent:

I told my worker about the noise [during the night]. I wanted to talk about it in a residents' meeting to see if anyone else has the same problem. She said, "Rosa, you should confront the women directly." My social worker is more like a therapist than a social worker. I don't know what to say -- she analyzes everything. She twists everything. She makes me feel uncomfortable, like I'm doing something wrong [to my children]. She made me real upset. When I told my son to tell his sister's teacher that I wanted to speak with her, she said that my son is always playing the father role and that's not good. One time I ran out of cereal and juice at the end of the month and asked for some. She said, "Why don't you have it? You gotta ask yourself that." It's like every move that you make you're being judged. It's a shame you can't be yourself with the social worker who works so closely with you. My only defense is to keep quiet. I can't say anything because they have the power to throw you out, to take your babies.

Rosa's comments reveal another critical issue around service provision. Although social services are typically described as either positive or benign, for homeless women they also represent a degree of threat -- "I'm scared to ask for things." Women fear that they will be criticized, judged negatively, but most of all, that by exposing their weaknesses they will lose their children. This pervasive fear that their children will be taken away from them was not totally unwarranted. Although I did not ask this question directly, one third of the women mentioned that they had been investigated by the Bureau of Child Welfare (BCW) at least once, and the children of one of these mothers were

placed in foster care as a result of those charges. A number of these cases stemmed from actions by schools, hospitals, or other city agencies, as the two examples below illustrate.

Samantha left her home to escape an abusive partner and found herself being moved from shelter to shelter. When her children missed school due to the constant moves, the school contacted the BCW and they threatened to remove them. She felt that she had no choice but to return home to her abusive partner until a more permanent placement could be found for her and her family.

Sally also was charged with neglect because she was living in a condemned building. Her children were placed in foster care for a year and a half.

BCW opened a neglect case. The housing we were living in was not good. There was a lot of drugs in the building. The building was condemned. It was a form of neglect. This guy [from BCW] asked me if I had any place to go. I told him yes [my cousins's]. In court he said he offered me shelter and I refused it. He tried to say that I was using drugs. Nothing was ever found. The kids were healthy and clean. They took the kids in March of '89, but didn't put it in their books until December of '89. The kids stayed with my brother in Brooklyn for a year and a half. Afterward, a second BCW worker came. It was worked out. I was staying with my cousin in Brooklyn. I was ordered to go into Catherine Street Shelter to get my kids back.

Based on these interviews, it appears that personal and institutional factors combined to create resistance toward social service providers. The women learned from their past relationships with service providers that the balance of power was against them, and to be cautious in their dealing with them. Once in the Tier II, they had no choice but to enter into a relationship with service providers who, more often than not, did not respond to their requests for assistance. It is likely that such responses confirmed the

women's perceptions that these individuals were not there to help them but were agents of control.

### Summary of Service Utilization

Tier II facilities are responsible for supporting families during the crisis of homelessness. However, few women felt that the facility's staff, particularly their assigned social workers, were helpful to them. In the areas of housing assistance, entitlements assistance, career preparation, or obtaining referrals to counseling programs the women's expectations and requests for assistance exceeded what was provided.

Women's past relationships with service providers or social service agencies can affect their willingness to seek or utilize such resources once they become homeless. Feelings of pride, embarrassment, low expectations, hostility or fear all prevent women from enlisting the assistance of service providers (Diver-Stamnes, 1995; Mulroy, 1995; Polakow, 1993; Quint, 1994).

The structure of the Tier II facility compounds the difficulties in establishing effective helping relationships between staff and residents. In a climate where women have little personal privacy, control, and are in danger of becoming homeless again or losing their children if they do not comply with the rules, Tier II staff may be perceived as adversaries rather than sources of assistance.

During a time of crisis such as homelessness, it is critical that families receive support and encouragement to improve their situation. Homeless parents who strive to achieve their goals convey a message of hope and confidence to their children. Those who are struggling with their own learning demonstrate that education is valuable and requires

hard work. Parents who end up feeling that the time they spend in the shelter system is "lost time", can convey an attitude of despair and hopelessness that is disadvantageous to the entire family. Perhaps, this is why parents who felt that their children were clearly not receiving an appropriate education, and, in fact, were losing ground in school, did not intervene to change their children's educational placement. Granted, their alternatives were limited. But these parents also expressed the view that the situation was endurable for the short amount of time that they would be in the facility (nine months to a year). However, one wasted year in the life of an adult is profoundly different from one wasted school year in the life of a child. The consequences can extend well beyond that year -- it can put the children in a position where they are always trying to "catch up," or they may be left back a grade. Either situation would increase the level of stress associated with school, and could change the children's motivation for learning and attitudes toward school.

The processes of delivering services through Tier II facilities need to be examined in order to improve their effectiveness in facilitating women's access to services and motivating them to reach their personal goals. Tier II staff must be clear about what they can provide, and if the women need additional help to find someone who is able to help them. Requiring women to see a social worker who is unable to address the women's needs is a waste of time for both parties. The experiences and skills that are unique to each of the women must be integrated into any "treatment" plan. Tier II staff need to obtain more information on the range and variety of services that are available in order to meet the varied needs of the residents. It is essential that they have more control over the

process. If the women feel that they can trust their social workers and receive quality care from them, it is likely that would be more willing to see them.

## **CHAPTER NINE THE SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS OF FAMILIES**

Social support refers to the belief that one is cared for and connected to others. It involves the capacity that people have for providing one another with assistance or aid, as well as emotional support -- love, comfort, validation. Social support networks include family members, friends, neighbors or other individuals to whom a person feels connected. These networks serve an important function in everyday life, but are critical during times of crisis.

Children benefit from social support through their direct relationships with adults and other children, as well as indirectly through their parents' supportive relationships. The presence of nurturing adults has been identified as an important factor in the ability for children to effectively withstand and overcome traumatic experiences (Garbarino et al., 1992). Primary caretakers are not always able to provide support when it is most needed. When parents are undergoing an extremely stressful experience, their physical and emotional resources can become depleted making it difficult for them to respond to the needs of their children. In these cases, it is important for children to have access to other adults, who can provide them with the comfort and reassurance that they need. According to Werner (1990), "resilient" children actively seek out the support of other adults when their parents are not able to provide it to them.

Garbarino et al. (1992) describe parents as mediators or buffers of traumatic experiences. They cite several studies where parents' responses to trauma had a greater impact on their children than the intensity of the events. Parents who conveyed a sense of

confidence and hope had children who fared much better than those who became overwhelmed by anxiety and distress. Therefore, social support which helps to relieve the amount of stress on parents, and helps them to feel more in control and effective, benefits their children.

Children's relationships with peers constitute a part of their social support networks. Sociability, popularity with peers, and competence at establishing friendships are among the character traits associated with resilient children (Anthony, 1987a; Garmezy, 1981). These skills are particularly important for homeless children, who often encounter a number of new social settings -- schools, neighborhoods, or residences, that they must master.

When families become homeless, parents become preoccupied with fulfilling their families' basic survival needs, and have less time and energy to provide their children with the emotional support, attention and affection that they need. At the same time, children and adults often are removed from their primary sources of social support. This chapter examines the social support networks of the families and how they function in the context of homelessness. It includes a discussion of the mothers' and children's relationships with the children's fathers, as well as their contacts with other adults. It then looks at the mothers' own social support network. Finally, children's friendships and relations with peers are examined.

### The Presence and Role of Fathers

The loss of a parent is considered to be one of the most traumatic events in a child's life (Bowlby, 1980; Jewett, 1982). It involves a period of intensive grief and

mourning, which can debilitate parents and children. Single parenthood also creates stress for children because it usually results in greater financial pressures and responsibilities for the custodial parent, usually the mother (Polakow, 1993; Mulroy, 1995). Children's ability to adapt to parental loss is influenced by their experiences of other stressful life events (Garmezy, 1986; Rutter, 1987; Wertlieb, et. al, 1987). If problems between parents precipitated a loss or separation, the effects on the children have been found to be more extensive and longer lasting (Rutter, 1987).

The women in this study were all single-parents in that they were the primary caregivers of their children. That means, that every child in this study, in addition to losing their home, have also lost or have been separated from a father. The length and degree of separation between the children and their fathers varied considerably, as did their fathers' relationships to the mothers, and the role they played in the children's lives.

#### Contact with Fathers

In discussing their children's father(s), nine women described them to be present, to varying degrees, in the families' lives. Of these, six had regular contact with their children -- they saw them at least once a week. One father continued to stay involved with his children although he no longer was involved with the mother. The others were in occasional contact with the family, dropping in and out of their lives. The women appreciated the men's efforts to be a part of their children's lives, and often described them as "good fathers." The remaining fifteen fathers were not a part of the families' lives, although some made rare attempts to contact them. Most of these absent fathers either

lived out of state or were currently in prison; the others lived in the New York City area, and one was deceased.

The women sometimes mentioned the problems that kept them apart (temporarily or permanently) from their children's fathers. These included infidelity, abandonment, physical abuse, drug use and criminal activity. For many of the children the loss of their fathers was preceded by a period of instability and turmoil within the family.

#### Financial Support Provided by Fathers

In terms of financial support, only three fathers were reported to regularly contribute to the family income. These fathers helped to pay bills, buy groceries, clothes for the children or to purchase other necessities. Only one mother reported that she was receiving legally mandated child support. Five mothers indicated that the children's fathers occasionally contributed to the family, or would do so if asked. Two of these women mentioned that while their men were willing to contribute to the household, they preferred not to accept any help from them.

Most of the mothers reported that the fathers did not support the family financially in any way. In some cases, this was due to the father being unemployed. However, in a number of cases the mothers were aware that the men were employed, but still did not support the family. In these cases, several mothers said they were considering suing their children's fathers for child support.

#### Children's Discussion of Fathers

Questions about fathers were only included in the mothers' interviews. As none of the children were currently living with their fathers, questions about them might have

created unnecessary confusion or distress. However, seven of the children mentioned their fathers at some point during the interview. Examining the children's discussions of their fathers in the context of their mothers' descriptions of their relationships, introduced another layer of complexity in identifying the families' capacity for providing social support to each other.

Involved Fathers. Four children, whose fathers were present in their lives (two children had the same father), voluntarily discussed their fathers. Keith and Danielle, spoke more about their father than any of the other children who were interviewed. According to their accounts, he was an important part of their lives and they were very attached to him.

I visit my father at the weekends... He lives in Brooklyn... I don't like [to go to] Ecuador [for the summer]. I want to go with my Poppy. I want to go to my father, to see my father. He's gonna come over tonight... If not, I will go see [him and my grandmother] next weekend, Friday. Cuz Friday my father's coming over, cuz I got a doctor note, cuz I gotta a meeting with a doctor [Danielle].

I used to stay with my father. We go fishing. Last summer, we go fishing and when I threw the thing out and the fish was eating the thing, and it was getting rough for me, and my father had to grab the stick for me because I almost fly into the water... In Brooklyn, my father used to help me to do my homework. In Brooklyn, my father used to have a car, he used to take us to school in the car, when he had his day off. We used to have a lot of fun with our father... I got little stories of dinosaurs at my father's house. We go to my father's house on the weekend to see him... My father's supposed to come today to pick us up, to take us over there. Then we can spend some time with him, and then we come back home... Tomorrow's school. So, we go over there for a little while, and then we come back, go to sleep, and then tomorrow we wake up and go to school [Keith].

At the same time, their mother, Frances, who described her estranged husband, Angel, as a good father to the children, felt that he was not a good husband to her. She considered Angel to be a positive role model since he was employed and has finished high

school. She said that he was willing to support his family financially, including Frances's oldest daughter who was not his child. Frances said that Angel initiated child support procedures, since he knew that Frances disliked having to ask him for financial help. Angel saw the family at least every weekend and usually more. The problem however, was that he was involved with another woman, with whom he had two other children. This relationship, understandably, caused Frances a great deal of distress. Frances described having a nervous breakdown and her ongoing depression as factors that led to the family becoming homeless. Since then she sought help from Victims Services and began seeing a therapist. Frances said that she still loved her husband, but did not trust him or want to depend on him for financial or emotional support.

Although Frances's husband seemed to provide a great deal of support to the children, it is likely that they were affected by the problems in their parents' lives. Frances for example, mentioned that the school-based dentist told her that her oldest daughter, Clara, was concerned about her father's extra-marital relationship. Clara had never discussed this issue with her mother, however.

Aisha provides an example of children's sensitivity to their parents' problems. Aisha's mother spoke positively and appreciatively of Aisha's father. She said that they saw him at least once a week, although he lived in Nassau County. She considered him a good role model for Aisha because he was attending school and working. He also helped to support them financially. Aisha, however, indicated that both she and her mother were disturbed by her father's behavior. In the context of describing the people who hung

around the streets near the Tier II facility, Aisha launched a tirade against her father and his friends, who she believed were a "bad influence" on him.

My father, he stole this watch from this person. So, my father got in trouble and went to jail, so it was like bad. Cuz I saw people get arrested a lot. You must not be bad. He supposed to be good. He passed his grades. He not supposed to follow his friends, follow his own self. That's what God gave him the right to do, not to follow other people. Cuz the other people do wrong and he follows the other people like a dummy. Cuz if he follow them then he be living on the street like a dummy, where he never learn. So, then that's it. And he never learned, then he just get a home, then he rags it. Then all his clothes go all over the place. Say if he was living in here with my mommy, he'd throw his clothes, they'd be over there, over there, over there, all over the place. So, now he's not living with my mother, cuz I don't blame my mother, I don't cuz he don't do nothing right. Because I don't like that he can get arrested, because I felt sorry for them, but they do that to theirself, I don't do it to them. They do it to theirself, so I don't know what to say [Aisha].

Although Aisha's testimony could not be considered an accurate assessment of her parents' relationship, one could safely assume that some serious family issues exist. As in Frances's case, one is left to wonder what cost, in terms of family stress, is associated with the social support provided by the fathers.

Absent Fathers. Three children, Danny, Michelle, and Wendy, had mothers who had left their fathers when the relationship had become intolerable. Elena, Danny's mother, left Ohio and her husband due to his criminal activity. Blanca, Michelle's mother, left Puerto Rico and her husband to escape from his violence. Yolanda, Wendy's mother, left New Jersey and her husband because his drug abuse kept the family constantly impoverished and made him violent and abusive.

These children first were exposed to and had to deal with the family stress that was associated with their fathers' behavior. Once the mothers left their partners, the children

had little to no further contact with their fathers. The children then experienced the trauma of losing their fathers. When asked about what worried them or made them sad, these children responded that it had to do with their fathers' relationships with their mothers or the fact that they were no longer with them.

Sometimes I worry about my father cuz he don't live with me, he lives in Ohio... My father used to be a security guard [Danny].

[I felt bad when] before my mother fights with my father. Last time that my mother went to the doctor... she almost died. They took her to the doctor, my mother had to have a lot of food. That was a long time [ago] [Michelle].

In Wendy's case, separation from her father also cut her off from her other sources of social support -- her grandmother and friends.

[Before] my father used to take me to the park.. Sometimes, I go to my father's house and I ask my father if I could go to my friend's house. My father lives with his mother. Here's my father's house, up the hill is my friend's house. [I see her] once a year, cuz I see my father once a year. I can't see them cuz I don't go to New Jersey anymore, and my father lives in New Jersey... [I feel bad] like, if I miss my friends, or if I miss my father, or if I miss my grandmother... [But] I can call my father. And I can call my friend, too. Sometimes I call them, and sometimes they call me... About what things make me feel good -- I just go outside, I get to see my father, I get to see my grandmother, I get to see my friend. [Wendy].

These three mothers all decided that the cost of their partners' involvement in the family exceeded the benefits. However, these decisions were not easy for the women to make. Elena, described how she was torn by her need to stay away from her partner, and her awareness that her children needed him. Despite his faults, she considered sending the children to visit with him in Ohio for the summer.

Blanca's decision to leave Michelle's violent father and move to New York City, removed the family from a dangerous situation. However, she ended up in new

relationship that placed Michelle and her brothers and sisters in a situation similar to the one that they left. After coming to New York, Blanca became involved and had a child with a man, who she described as a drug abuser. On at least one occasion his irrational behavior has threatened the children -- he put a pillow over the baby's head to keep it from crying.

Considering the association among domestic problems and homelessness, it was not surprising that so few fathers were present in the lives of the families. The fathers who were present provided a considerable amount of material and/or emotional support to the mothers and their children. In some cases, this support also was associated with increased stress. When problems between parents reach dangerous proportions, the mothers often take protective measures and leave. Although removing children from a tense and possibly dangerous family situation has its benefits, the children must then go through a period of grief and loss, which can be equally traumatic.

#### Availability of Adults to Children

Of the 24 women who were interviewed, 21 reported that their children spent time with at least two other adults in addition to themselves. The adults they most frequently mentioned were members of the women's immediate family -- their parents or siblings. Extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins) and the women's friends, including those in the role of the children's "godparents", were also frequently included among the adults in the children's lives.

As was discussed above, seven of the children spent time with their fathers, and/or their fathers' family members. Several mothers mentioned that the children stayed in

contact with paternal relatives, although they had no contact with their fathers. In two cases, children had contact exclusively with their fathers' families.

### Visiting

The children typically spent time with adults other than their mothers about once a week, usually during the weekends. The families' visits reflected the curfew regulations of the Tier II as well as the school calendar. All the facilities imposed weekday curfews, but permitted the women to obtain passes to stay away for the weekends. Many women took advantage of this opportunity.

Whether visits with friends and family involved activities -- baseball games, picnics in the park, going to the beach, church, and special family events (i.e., baptisms) -- or just spending time at home, they provided the families with a break from the restrictive routine of the shelter facility. Visiting often took place in the families' old neighborhoods, or in neighborhoods where the children had established friendships. Having these opportunities to see friends and relatives, were very important to the children.

I would like to get out of here for a whole weekend! Almost all my aunts live in Brooklyn, and one lives in Queens. [When I visit them, I] go outside, play games. My aunt got a backyard. She live in a house with a basement... I made [friends] in the projects, cuz I stayed there with my aunt. They come to see me. They be coming to my aunt house. [Kadeem]

I spend the night at my grandma house, and I see [my old friends], and I call them up and they speak to me. [I go] on the weekends, every weekend. It's fun over there. I play in the playground. Sometimes my mommy take me to the other playground. And that's where when I was in daycare, where my old school was at. And right, so when I always see [my old teacher], I always go jump on her lap... [I see my daddy] when he comes out there, and I speak to him. Every day when he comes out there, he takes me to the store... When we was at the [park] around my grandmother way, my daddy pushed me on the swing, he pushed me high. [Shaniqua]

[I see my old friends] every Friday. I would stay over one of my friends' house, Friday to Saturday, then I go to my grandma's house on Saturday, and then we stay over there until Sunday, and we come back. I get to see them enough. They drive me bananas. [Isabel]

Some women mentioned that they allowed their children to visit with other adults on their own. On several occasions during my interviews, friends and relatives came by to pick up the children. This allowed the women some time to themselves, or lessened the burden of taking care of several children at the same time in what were usually tight quarters. Younger children, who were not in school, or children who were out on school breaks, would often stay with family members for extended visits, which ranged from a week to the entire summer vacation. In some cases the summers were the only opportunity the children had to visit relatives who lived out of state or out of the country.

They see their grandmother during Christmas and summer vacations. They spend two months with her in Massachusetts. They play outside in the backyard, go in the pool. They go to parties. They have everything there. She's taking care of about eight to ten of her grandchildren during the summer [Marta]

The children enjoyed spending time outside the city and being able to spend time with their relatives who lived far away.

I like going, when my grandma take me to Ecuador. I like it over there, it's fun. She has three dogs, right, they used to jump all over me when they used to see me, right. And she's got a little chickens. The dogs always used to run, and they used to jump on me, they used to lick me. That dog likes me. [Keith]

[I think] that I'm never gonna go to my aunt's house in Boston again. Because I probably won't go this year. I went every year. But then my mother told that she's coming at Easter to the Bronx, New York. And then [my aunt] told me that I could go, but it's up to my mother, that my mother say yeah. It's fun [there]. But I don't hardly go outside, because I don't got friends, but like five or six friends. I had this friend there, but now that she has a daughter, ooh, I'm gonna have such fun [Isabel].

### Sharing the Childcare Burden

It was not uncommon for the women to share parenting responsibilities with their parents and siblings, particularly in times of crises. Two of the mothers described how they relied on other adults to attend to their children's needs when their own personal problems made it difficult for them to do so.

Keith was taken care of by his grandmother. My mother died when I was pregnant with him. I couldn't take care of him. I was never attached to him. His grandmother took him and cared for him. Keith and I never had a bond between us. [Frances]

We go to [my daughter's] godmother's house often. The kids go there by themselves. I can confide in her. Her 21 year-old son is like an older brother to Leticia. He helps her. They both help me to help the kids. [Mabel]

Aisha also described a period where she felt that her mother was not focussed on her schooling. Instead, her aunt and her grandmother took responsibility for overseeing her school progress.

My aunt helped me more [with school] than my mother... Cuz my grandmother and my aunt used to fix me up like this, cuz they didn't play that. Cuz like, if I go to school, well my aunt's gonna kick my butt, cuz I gotta learn, that's why. And my grandmother, if she see my report card I'm gonna get in trouble. Just like when my report card was bad, my aunt all she did was beat me and that's it. And this report card that I got from that school, it was good. So, then I got all "G"s and all "E"s and my mommy said she proud of me [Aisha].

### Avoidance of Family Members

Some women mentioned that their family members were involved with alcohol, drugs, crime or other activities they wanted to avoid. In these cases the women weighed the potential benefit of having contact with family members, against the possible threats it

posed to their children. Some decided to avoid them completely. Others, like Ana, attempted to create a situation where her children could safely visit with her brothers.

I have brothers here but don't see them much. They live in the Bronx. Sometimes they come and pick us up. I stay away from them because they drink and do drugs. They have guns in the house. When they're straight they're good. Only problem is when they're high or drunk -- one of them beats his wife. [Ana]

### Children's Responses to Loss

The loss of a loved one is a traumatic experience for anyone, but is particularly difficult for children (Bowlby, 1980; Jewett, 1982). Children who live in areas with high incidences of crime and community violence often have to deal with issues of death (Diver-Stammes, 1995; Garbarino et al., 1992). When the children in this study were asked to discuss the types of things that made them worried or sad, most included themes of separation and loss. Some children mentioned that someone who was close to them had died recently, or else they were worried that people who were close to them would die.

[I was sad] when one of my friends, they get hurt. Stuff like that. And when, sometimes, I was really sad, when my aunt, when my family was dead. I was crying. I was crying and my mommy say: "OK, calm down." And my mommy, she was crying. My brother was crying. Like last time, my mommy and my aunt, right, my cousin, she died. And so, my aunt was screaming, she said: "Get my baby out of there!", and she was crying. They tried to calm her down, she knocked the casket to get her baby out of there. I kissed her. Last time, when my brother dead, my step-brother. He was four years old. My mommy, and my daddy [talked to me about it]... Last time, my uncle he got shot in the leg, but he alive. He got married last Friday. [Shaniqua]

Frequent exposure to death and violence may explain why some of the children in the present study seemed exceedingly anxious about their family members. When Danielle

fell and broke her arm, her older siblings Keith and Clara became terrified that she was going to die. In their world, going to the hospital was equated with death.

Last time I got scared, I thought my sister was going to die in Lincoln Hospital, because they killed a lot of people in Lincoln Hospital. They killed like more than a hundred people in Lincoln Hospital. Cuz when they take them to the emergency room, they do something to them and then the person, they died. [Keith]

The children's relationships with adults other than their parents, provided them with additional nurturing and emotional support, expanded their opportunities for socializing, and increased their exposure to a wider range of environmental settings beyond the shelter facility. The children at an early age were aware of and troubled by the fragility of these relationships.

### Social Support Networks

Using the Norbeck Social Supports Questionnaire (NSSQ) the women were asked to list the people in their social support networks -- anyone who they considered to be important to them, including people who could provide them with help or assistance. They then indicated the extent to which each of these people provided them with emotional support (love, respect, support for actions, someone to confide in or discuss their children with) as well as aid (financial help, child care, or assistance if they were sick and confined to bed). The people included in the women's social support networks did not necessarily have any relationship with their children (e.g., therapists or caseworker). However, children are believed to benefit from the support that is provided to their parents, even if it is not directed at them (Garbarino et al, 1992).

### Characteristics of Mothers' Support Networks

The breadth of the women's support networks varied considerably, from one woman who said she could list no one to another who listed 11 people. Of the 24 women, 19 listed two or more persons. The mean network size was 4.7 members. These findings are comparable to those of Molnar et al. (1991). Using the same instrument, Molnar et al. found that in New York City, mothers of homeless families listed a mean of 4.6 members, and those of housed families receiving public assistance listed a mean of 4.8 members. Shinn, Knickman, and Weitzman (1991) also found that homeless mothers living in New York City generally had active social networks upon whom they could rely on for support.

Members of the women's social support network most commonly consisted of immediate family (parents and siblings), friends, extended family (grandparents, cousins, aunts) and partners. Four women included their children as part of their social support network.

There were striking (although not surprising) gender differences with regard to the persons identified as providing support. While 11 women listed their mothers as sources of support only two included their fathers. More than three times as many sisters were listed as there were brothers, and twice as many female friends than male friends.

Five women included service providers as part of their social support network. In only one case, however, was the service provider a staff member of the Tier II facility. The women felt validated by their experiences with these professionals and felt they were not only there to help them, but respected and cared about them. In some cases, service providers were seen as providing emotional support to the mothers that was absent in their relationships with family members.

I can confide in my therapist, but not in my husband at all. I can't confide in Angel. It's frustrating. We always end up arguing. I have known my therapist for less than six months, but he knows me better than my husband. [Frances]

My therapist makes me feel important. I can't relate to my sister or my mother. [Marta]

Despite the programmatic design of three of the Tier II facilities to build mutual support and assistance among the residents, only one woman included other Tier II residents as a source of support. However, on several occasions, the mothers and children, particularly those who lived in Residences A and E, described acts of mutual assistance, such as loans of money or food, and help with childcare.

Although children may benefit from the supportive relationships their mothers have with others, it is possible that they are also sources of stress. Troy, for example, resented his mothers' efforts to maintain her friendships and her relationship with her new boyfriend.

I used to go to [our old] house and play. I can't go around there, [my mother] around there, too. Today she was around there. She only miss her friend, her ugly boyfriend, really. That's the only thing she miss. I miss all my friends. When I say that I want to go see my friends: "No I gotta see my boyfriend (in a sarcastic voice)". He a dog, that's it [Troy].

### Maintaining Social Networks

Entering the shelter system tended to separate the women from their sources of social support. Of the 24 women, 20 reported that they saw their friends and relatives less since entering the shelter system. The distance between the shelter facility and the homes of their friends and relatives, combined with the regulations of the facility restricted women's social contacts.

The family has always had a close relationship. The kids miss their father very much. Not being able to be around him when they want to has really gotten to them. He takes them and says: "I'm not coming over there. I can't even spend a night with my kids." The kids complain that their cousins can't spend the night. [Mabel]

We see [family] less. Sometimes I don't go over there because of the traveling. The kids miss their friends from their old school. They want to see them [Luz].

[When I moved here] I lost my boyfriend, my girlfriend, my mother, my sister. I was depressed because of everything I was going through. I felt that they did not care. I was too alone. [Eva].

[Shaniqua's father and I] argue more now. We can't see each other. Brooklyn is too far to go [from Manhattan]. He has to be announced in advance here. [Janika]

Some of the most isolated mothers were those who moved from out-of-state. Their contacts with friends and relatives were further limited by not being able to phone them freely. Milagros describes her fear of being in a place where she has no close family ties.

Most of my family live far away -- in Puerto Rico or Alabama. I have family here, but they never call me. They don't care. I only have my children... Since I've been homeless I've been out of touch with my family. I'm afraid if something happens to me now, nobody knows anything, like who to contact. I showed Alex the names and numbers of relatives in my address book and told him that he should call them or show them to another adult to call. My sister [in Alabama] agreed to take care of them if anything ever happened to me. I told Alex that if anything ever happens to me here not to let them separate him from his sister [Milagros]

Some women found that being separated from family was a mixed blessing, particularly when they had lived with family members just prior to entering the shelter system. Although they appreciated the help they had received, they were also relieved at having more of a distance between them. Some women felt that they needed to be away from others in order to get their lives together or because their family members were a bad influence on their children.

Before [entering the shelter system] we used to see [my sister and her family] more. Now I'm trying to stay away more, for myself, not for the kids. [Sally]

Charles' mother said that since she began her treatment for alcoholism she has had less contact with people.

I'll get back in touch with people once I get myself together. Drinking changes your relationships with people. [Cindy]

Elena, who had little contact with her parents and siblings found that she saw them more once she became homeless. In this case, however, Elena was the one providing assistance and support rather than receiving it.

Recently I've been going [to my parents' house] every other weekend, because my father is having a heart problem. My mother and brother are always working. I used to see them less. I hadn't seen them in over a year. [Elena]

### Emotional Support vs. Aid

The women's responses revealed the importance of examining sources of aid independently from sources of emotional support. Although some individuals were capable of providing both types of support, many women had social networks which were divided among those who could provide one type of support, but not the other. For example, the women identified service providers, their children, elderly parents or grandparents as not being able to help them with money problems or childcare. The women valued the emotional support that they received, even if it was not accompanied by other types of assistance.

I have a friend. I trust him. He tells me to think positive. He makes me feel nice. [Ana]

I have two friends -- one in the Bronx and one in Manhattan. My friends dress me -- they give me clothes. They tell me never to feel bad about my situation. They say one day they may need help and they know I will help them. [Milagros]

More difficult for the women were relationships where the individuals upon whom they depended upon for aid, did not provide them with emotional support. The women described how their need for assistance conflicted with their need for independence, as well the fear that they would be negatively judged by those helping them.

My mother [helps me] but she's upset. She's disappointed. She was let down that I had to go through this. [Keisha]

I've made it out of all my brothers and sisters. My mother never had to watch my kids. They thought they'd have to watch them because my kids were born there. I avoid crying for help. My mother wound up alone with the three of us, so she said, 'You're not going to make it...' I can confide in my family, but I don't, to avoid giving them stress. They didn't know I was here until before the holidays [several months]. [Elena]

He [partner] gave me a lot of support. He helped me a lot at first, but in return I owed him the world. I would love for him to see how I'm doing now [Avril's mother].

### Children in Supportive Roles

Parents who included their children as part of their social support network, described them as providing emotional support rather than aid. According to the children's descriptions of their own activities, it became apparent that some also provided help to their mothers or other family members. Keith appeared to provide both emotional support and assistance to his family members, young and old. Keith said that he helped both his mother and grandmother with chores. When his grandmother was sick, he was the one to stay with her. He also described his sense of responsibility for his little sister,

Danielle. Despite these responsibilities, Keith's mother did not identify him as a source of support for her.

My grandmother, she came out of the hospital yesterday, so [Keith's] going to give her a flower, and that balloon, and get-well. My grandmother is sick, that's why [Keith] has to stay [with her instead of going to school]. She's real sick. She has asthma like me. Now, I might go see them tomorrow [Danielle].

My mother said, always take care of my sister. I do. Cuz last time this little boy was hitting my sister and I told him [to stop], I didn't want to hit him. [Keith]

Isabel, the oldest of four children, has been given a great deal of responsibility at home. Her mother, who moved into the Tier II when she was pregnant, relied on her for help. This meant that Isabel often missed school or arrived late. Although Isabel's mother described the help her daughter provided, she did not include her as part of her social support network.

Sometimes I can't go outside, cuz I gotta clean up the room and my sisters dirty it. Cuz when my mother was sick, I had to clean up the room. She had to stay in bed and then she let me go outside when my sisters' asleep. I help her clean up. That's one thing we're taught. [Isabel]

[Isabel] missed three weeks [of school] since September. I had appointments. I was pregnant. I needed her help. She's the only one I had. [Eva, Isabel's mother]

Bassuk (1990), Boxill and Beatty (1990), and Molnar et al. (1991) all found that homeless mothers relied a great deal on their children for emotional support and assistance. In some cases, mothers were found to rely so heavily on their children it appeared that they had reversed roles. Boxill and Beatty expressed the view that this occurs because homelessness challenges or "unravels" the mothering role of the women. In a context where mothers are denied the power to make decisions about their families' lives, they relinquish their mothering role.

### Social Support and Children's Achievement

Evidence that social support can mediate the impact of stress on children's school achievement is found in Guidubaldi and Cleminshaw's (1983) study of children of divorced parents. They found that children performed better in school when social support, in terms of relatives (including the family of the non-custodial parent), friends, as well as paid childcare were available to the children.

In the current study, more of the children who were in the highest achieving group had fathers in their lives, were in contact with more adults, and their mothers reported having larger social networks than those children in the lower achieving groups (see Table 7).

Academic Achievement Group	Number of Children with Fathers Present	Average Number of Adults in Contact with Children	Average Number of Persons in Mothers' Network
Above Average (N = 7)	6	4	7
Below Average (N = 9)	2	3	4
Poor (N = 9)	3	2	3

These findings show the complexity of social relationships within families and how they are altered by homelessness. Children did seem to benefit from having access to adults as well as having mothers who were supported by others. However, instrumental members of a family's support network can also introduce stress into the family dynamics.

Becoming homeless typically separated the families from people who could, or who in the past had, provided them with support. Although this was a difficult experience for the women, in some cases, it forced them to become more self reliant, and as a result, some began to recognize their own strengths and capabilities.

### Friendships Among Children

Children's relationships with their peers are different than family relationships in that they are voluntary. Children must develop social skills to engage and maintain friendships. Children use their relationship with their friends as a source of learning new things. Friends also help children to feel more confident and secure in situations which provoke anxiety.

Making friends and/or maintaining friendships is particularly challenging for homeless children. They are often separated from their friends when they move or change schools. Shelter restrictions around visiting, their lack of play spaces, and the children's desires to keep their homelessness a secret, are factors that can isolate homeless children from their peers.

Having the ability to establish and maintain friendships is an important component in withstanding stress, even for children. Anthony (1987a) reported that resilient children were popular with peers; and Garmezy (1981) found that resilient children had at least one close friend. In this section, children's current and past friendships, inside and outside of school are examined.

### Friends and "Best Friends"

All 25 of the children who were interviewed indicated that they had at least one friend, and most (18) said that they had at least one "best friend." The children did not approach or define friendship similarly. Some children were much more guarded or careful in their relationships with their peers. Brianna, for example, selected her friends carefully.

This girl named Patricia [is my best friend]. [She lives] across the street from my school. She in the same class... I have two friends, only have two best friends. I have friends, I can make friends, but I have two best friends, that's all... [Sometimes] when you have a friend they try to use you for your stuff... This girl named Tabatha, she likes to start trouble with people and she's an instigator and a friend user. Sometimes we have arguments. Sometimes she don't mind her business. When I talking to this boy she say "No, no, no, don't trade with her because she got food stamps". I had food stamps, I wanted to see if he wanted to trade. She just cannot mind her business. But anyway I bought the icy. People was telling me that I couldn't, so I went up to the icy man and he accepted it... She should have been minding her business. [Brianna]

Kwadra, on the other hand, was much more liberal with regard to whom she included within her circle of friends.

Hady [is my best friend. She in my class. Sharise [is my other best friend]. [She lives] around the corner... Tamika, Aisha, Shaniqua, Myra, Gloria, Colleen, Lionel, and Corinne [are my friends here]... If you count all of [my friends], it makes ten thousand. [Kwadra]

Although children who do well in school tend to be popular (Seifert & Hoffnung (1987), in the current findings there were no patterns linking educational achievement with children's reported friendships. The next section examines friendships among children in more detail.

### Friendships in the Tier II Facilities

In Chapter Seven, the characteristics of the Tier II facilities, and the neighborhoods in which they were located, were related to children's opportunities for socializing with peers. Residences A and E were the two facilities where children frequently socialized with one another. This enabled me to look at the nature of the friendships formed within these settings.

Of the 17 children living in these two facilities, all said that they had at least one friend there, or someone with whom they played. The children in Residence A named between one and four friends; and children in Residence E named between one and nine. Girls tended to include more people as friends than the boys, and more boys were named as friends than were the girls. This was basically due to gender differences in defining friends. Only one of the eight boys living in either facility named a girl as a friend, and she was a friend of his sister. However, seven of the nine girls named boys as their friends. Girls also identified more reciprocal relationships than the boys. Some of the boys also were reluctant to admit whether or not the other children were their friends.

I don't got no friends... Charles Douglas [is my best friend]. He on my floor [at school] and I hate him. He act crazy. He bugged. He act like he's a rat. He all goofy... My best friend is me. [Troy]

Nobody [is my best friend]. I don't like nobody... Oh yeah, Martin. [Alex]

According to child development research on gender difference and friendship formation (Seifert & Hoffnung, 1987) children in this age group tend to socialize with children of the same-sex. An interesting finding in this study was that the girls who included the boys who lived in the Tier II facility as their friends there, did not mention them as their school friends, even though they attended the same school.

Much of the literature on friendship formation has been conducted in classrooms, rather than neighborhood settings. These findings might suggest that the context plays a role in how children define their relationships. In some Tier II facilities, such as Residences A and E, the children live under the same roof in close proximity to one another, have meals together, and also attend the same school and recreational programs. This degree of closeness or intimacy among families may affect the way the children perceive their relationships to one another. For example, some children living in Residence E referred to each other as cousins, inferring a special closeness to that child and his or her family. This type of relationship can override traditional gender restrictions with regard to playmates.

The girls, they're always getting you in trouble. Because last time, I was playing with my cousin, right, and the teacher said: "Don't play with girls". And I was playing with a girl, right, that was my cousin. And [this other girl] told the teacher, and I got punished. The teachers don't like the girls playing with boys, and they're always playing with boys, and that's not their cousin. And the girls are always playing with the boys, that's why I play with my cousin. [Keith]

This is not to say that children or adults who live in shelter facilities have close relationships, but that the nature of these relationships may be more difficult to define, compared to "classmates."

Popular Children. In Residence E, six of the ten children included Danny and Devon (the twins), as their friends. Shaniqua, who was named by five children, and Wendy who was named by four, were the most popular among the girls. Martin, included as a friend by four of the seven children living in Residence A, was the most popular child

there. Shaniqua, Wendy, and Martin all recognized that they had made a lot of friends in the facility.

I have a whole bunch of best friends! Danny, Devon, Aisha, Wendy, Tamika, my brother and my sister -- I love them, and my cousin Gloria and my cousin Christine and Elena, Corinne, Myra, I got a lot of best friends. Sometimes when we go to school, I see them in school. Sometimes when we go outside, we play house together. We play babies. Like, if Corinne my mommy, I'm her baby. [Shaniqua, Residence E]

My best friend lives here, Shaniqua. She's in my class, too. We play tag, we play with the Barbies... I have other friends [who] lives here. I don't know how many, but I know I have a lot of friends. [Wendy, Residence E]

Here [my best friend is] Junior. Actually him and Adrian. Who's not my best friend in here? Nobody, I don't know nobody in here [who's not my best friend]. [Martin, Residence A]

Danny and Devon, however, seemed unaware of their popularity with the other children, or else did not consider them to be their friends. Perhaps as twins they always have a ready playmate, which may affect their need for and perception of friendships.

Lionel [is my best friend]. Lionel is my only friend. He's only my friend. [Devon, Residence E]

[I have] only a little bit [of friends here]. Anthony and this boy Lionel, he's my friend. And that guy, [Jose] he my friend. [Danny, Residence E]

Some of the children were adept at finding or utilizing opportunities for making friends across different settings. Tamika, for example, had attended a number of different schools, and had been in the shelter system once previously. However, this did not seem to have diminished her capacity to make friends. She mentioned that she had made friends at the Tier II facility, at her new school, and in her past schools. Looking back on her past

experiences in the shelter system, she described her social relationships as valuable and beneficial to her.

[Before] is this girl, she be teaching me steps, she be teaching me all of that... And then when I got to the other [shelter], Hamilton Hotel, is this girl, she was like 16 or 17, she was teaching us cheers. Now I know cheers. I know a lot of them cuz she teach us a lot of them. Now I'm not in it no more, now I'm mad. [Tamika]

Devon, who also had been homeless in the past, described the previous shelter facility in which he had lived as a source of friends, while emphasizing that the experience was far from optimal.

[Before] I lived in a shelter. My friends and Tyrene was in there. Tyrene, this bro in the shelter, he does the handwalk long. He likes to do the handwalk a lot. He lives in the shelter. Maybe he moved. If you would be in a shelter you would say: "Oh, man!" [Devon]

In Martin's case, there was a tremendous difference in his ability to make friends at his new school compared to other settings. Martin discussed his close circle of friends from his old school and neighborhood. He also liked and was well liked by the children of Residence A, and had even made friends with some of the neighborhood children. In describing his relationships with his new friends he communicated a sense of loyalty and sensitivity. He had taken a special interest in Roberto, a six-year old who Martin protected in school, but who he also treated with the same regard as the older boys.

Me and [Roberto] draw stuff. I like to draw men. But the only reason why I draw is because I like drawing with him. So, we have fun. I don't draw in school, I only draw with him. Cuz we buddies... Everywhere I go, he'll go; everywhere he go, I'll go. We stick together like glue. And this other boy named Adrian, all of us and Alex, we stick together like glue.

Martin's capacity for making friends was not realized in his new school. He said that he had had numerous fights, and after several months of school, still did not consider any of

his schoolmates to be real friends. Again, loyalty entered into Martin's notion of friendship. He complained that the boys in his new school "don't stick up for you... I hate them, they booty." Given Martin's capability at making new friends within the Tier II facility and surrounding community, it leads one to suspect that some aspect of the school setting is contributing to the social problems he is experiencing there.

Children Who Were Not Popular. Several children were not named as a friend by anyone. In Residence A neither Keith nor his sister Danielle were named as friends by the other children in the facility. In Residence E neither Manny, Isabel, Reynaldo, or Miranda were named by the other children as friends. It was not so much that these children were unpopular -- the other children simply did not mention them at all. In contrast, Orlando was an example of an unpopular child. Many of the children in Residence E identified him as a troublemaker and someone with whom they did not associate.

The children, who were not identified as friends by their peers, did not appear to lack social skills. They all mentioned that they knew or were friendly with the other children in the facility, even though they did not consider any of them to be their best friends. Keith and Danielle both said that they had best friends who lived outside the facility. Manny and Isabel both said that they currently had no best friend, but were confident in their ability to make friends in the future. Belonging to the popular crowd did not appear to concern them. Isabel said she was friendly with the popular girls, but was critical of their behavior.

I had [a best friend] in my old school, but I don't got her no more. She moved... [I made] a little bit of friends [here]... One is Wendy, Shaniqua, and there's Kwadra and the twins... Sometimes they get me sick. Because they act stupid...

Where I'm gonna live at, I don't know, I'll probably have friends there. Where I used to live at, I had a lot of friends. [Isabel]

Manny, for example, courageously befriended Orlando, the social outcast.

I had a lot of friends [in Florida]. [I don't] really [miss them], cuz I make new friends... [Now] my mom and my sister [are my best friends]... Orlando, I'm trying to help him out, I'm telling him: "Be good." Every day he tries to be a little bit gooder. Probably deep down [he's nice]. Because every time a kid bothers me, he'll try to beat him up. [Manny]

Opportunities for social interaction with others may also have influenced children's popularity. The children, who were not identified by their peers, seemed to spend less time with the other children. Keith and Danielle both attended a different school than most of the other children in Residence A, and also spent a lot of time at their father's house, away from the facility. Neither Manny nor Isabel appeared to play that much with the other children outside of school, particularly Manny who did not attend PAL, and who was not allowed to play in the playground. Isabel's household responsibilities limited the amount of time she spent with the other children. Popularity was not necessarily related to academic achievement. Isabel, Shaniqua, Miranda, and Reynaldo were among the highest achieving students. Danny, Devon, Keith and Danielle were all among the lowest achieving students.

#### Friends as a Source of Stress

Although friends play an important, positive, role in children's lives they also represent a source of stress. The children's depictions of their friendships were far from idyllic. Deception, rejection, betrayal, conflict, tension, and social maneuvering at the expense of others, were all part of the process of making and maintaining friendships.

My friends... they bother me, but then and again sometimes they don't and they do... They say bad things, and I don't like it. So my mommy said just to don't listen and whatever they say just say: "whatever you say, whatever you say"... I don't know what to do with [my friend Amanda]... Cuz me and her had a fight one time. Cuz, she said me and Shaquana was teasing her when we was not teasing her. So she smacked me, so I smacked her back, and I beat her up. [Aisha]

There's a lot of kids that I know, that's from here. Some of them [are my friends]. They think they can beat me, man. That's when I get mad. Then we fight. Sometimes they beat me up, sometimes I beat them up. [Isabel]

Aisha, for example, believed that Tamika was her very best friend. Not only did Tamika not return these feelings, but she also had some pretty unflattering things to say about Aisha.

[My best friend] her name is Tamika, and the girl... Shaniqua. They go to my school. Danny and Devon and Corinne, she my friend. Alan's my friend. Gloria's my friend. Elena's my friend. My best, best, best, best, best, best friend? Tamika - my best, best, best, friend out of all of my friends. Wendy my friend. I just remember [another one], Myra, next door to me. [Aisha]

[I have] a best friend, Shaniqua. Corinne, my best friend. Aisha is a friend-friend. Corinne is really, really, really my cousin, [and] Danny and Devon... All the boys is nuts, except for Danny and Devon, they the goodest ones in school... But Aisha... you should forget about her, she's too bad. She told Wendy that I was talking about her mother when I was not talking about her mother... She fresh. You know what she be doing to boys? She be in the exit kissing boys... Some of the girls is not Shaniqua's friend, is not Aisha's friend. [But] they my friend... Aisha, sometimes, you know, she be saying curses to people. That's why nobody don't like to be her friend. [Tamika]

Of course, these are ordinary aspects of children's friendships, homeless or not, and learning to deal with them are an important aspect of social development. These findings suggest that groups of homeless children, given the opportunity to interact, will quickly establish friendships with each other. Opportunities to interact with other children of the same-age, individual differences in sociability, and parental influences, all were factors in

the children's ability to establish friendships. Frequent homelessness did not necessarily inhibit children socially. However, as is discussed in the next section, it did interrupt children's established friendships.

### Separation from Friends

Losing friends was one of the most difficult experiences expressed by the children. When asked about what worried them or made them sad, being separated from friends was a common response. Even children, like Tamika and Danny, who seemed to make new friends easily, also longed for the ones they had left behind.

I miss my friends, that's what feel bad... I bug my mommy can I go see them. And then sometimes she say yeah, sometimes she say no, sometimes she say maybe... [I worry about] my friends. [Tamika]

[I had] a lot of friends [in my old school]. I wanna go see them... [I worry about] my friends. Cuz they're my best friends. Cuz they're my friends, that's what makes me worried. [Danny]

What made the children's loss particularly difficult was that, unlike adults, they had no control over their contact with their friends. Whether children could maintain contact with friends from whom they had been separated was entirely up to their mothers.

I left a lot of friends over there... My mother won't let me see [them]. [I saw him] like two times or three. My mother's friend, she lives over there, she cut my hair for me. So I go over there and play with my friend for awhile. [Malik]

I have old friends over there [in Brooklyn]... Not a lot, but old friends. Millie [is my best friend]... I go to her house sometimes in Greenpoint... My mother take me [to see my friends]. Sometimes on the bus, and sometimes on the train. [Naomi]

Jeannette [my best friend, lives] up the block from Longfellow and across the street. She's in my class... My mother said she'll be able to spend a weekend [after we move]. [Didi]

I'm gonna ask my mother to take me [to Manhattan] one day so I could see [my friend from school]. One day we were in Manhattan right next to the school but my mother wouldn't take me over there. He live right off the bridge, you gotta walk right down the block and you're there. I could go see two of [my friends] but my mother won't let me. She'll probably let me [when we move]. [Kadeem]

Children's ability to maintain old friendships were related to the distance between their old neighborhood and the shelter facility, and whether or not their parents maintained contact with relatives or friends living in the prior neighborhoods.

The homeless families in this study suffered tremendous social losses. The children, in particular, often have lost a parent, friends, and other sources of family and friends. In such a context, the availability of social support to both mothers and their children becomes that much more important.

## CHAPTER TEN CUMULATIVE LIFE STRESS AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

The previous chapters have provided a detailed account of the considerable life stress experienced by homeless children and their families across a variety of contexts -- family, school, and community. They have also described the strategies and resources these families use to help them meet the challenges placed before them. In this chapter I examine the relationships among these life stresses and protective factors over the children's lifetime and how they affect their present functioning and responses to homelessness. This is addressed through comparative case studies of a selected group of families. Each case includes a description of the circumstances creating life stress, its duration, the social and institutional resources that were available to the family, and the responses of mothers and children to the stressful events. The children's school experiences will be examined in light of these factors.

Case records were developed for each family by integrating all data sources (i.e., mother and child interviews, school records, and, when available, teacher interviews), and organizing them into the following categories: (a) housing; (b) social network; (c) health (including physical and mental health); (d) social services; (e) school; (f) economic conditions (including mother's education and employment history and fathers' financial contribution); and (g) personal characteristics (e.g., reports of being depressed, proud, etc.). The data making up each of these categories were then organized into sources of support and sources of stress. For example within the housing category, living in the same place for five years would be listed under sources of support. However, if the quality of

that housing was reported to be poor, that would be listed under sources of stress. The case records for each of the families are included in the Appendix. Organizing the data in this way made it possible to look at family stress and support in a cumulative, comprehensive way.

The case records were examined for patterns and seven cases were selected. These cases were selected to include children who had different orientations toward school (i.e. connectedness vs. dis-connectedness) and school achievement (i.e., above or below average). One case was included based on the severity of the child's response to stress, rather than her educational outcomes.

#### Maintaining Connections to School

The first set of cases present children who, through their interviews, expressed a connectedness or what I have previously described as "a school as learning" attitude toward school. Two of these children are doing well in school (based on test performance). The other two children appear to be poised on the threshold of school success or failure.

#### Stories of Successful Students

Isabel. Isabel is 8 years old and in the third grade. She is the second oldest of five children. Her older, teenage brother is in prison, as is her father. Her youngest brother, who is 3 1/2 months, has been in the hospital since his birth. At the present time, Isabel lives with her mother and her two sisters, one is 2 1/2, and another is 1 1/2 years old.

Isabel's mother, Eva, became a parent for the first time when she was a teenager. When she had Isabel, she was still living in her mother's apartment in the Bronx. Eva

made several attempts to move out of her mother's place and live with her "boyfriend." This situation usually lasted for only two or three months before Eva returned to her mother's apartment. In an effort to secure a place of her own, Eva squatted in an abandoned apartment for about one and a half years, but eventually gave it up. During this time Eva repeatedly applied for Section 8, but was denied, she said, because she could not provide any information about her daughter's father, with whom she no longer had contact. Finally, Eva's mother moved to a smaller apartment and she no longer had room for her daughter and her daughter's growing family. Eva and her family entered the shelter system.

Although she was pregnant and had three young children, Eva was initially refused a Tier II placement and the family spent their first two months in three different hotels. Because the family was moved to Queens, it was necessary to transfer Isabel from the school she had attended since kindergarten to a local school. Eva and her family were finally sent to Residence E in Manhattan. Isabel again transferred to a new school, which was nearby.

Homeless, pregnant, with two young children, and cut off from her sources of social support, Eva depended heavily on Isabel's assistance. In the first three months of school, Isabel missed 27 days; and when she attended school, was often late. Sometimes she was not able to finish all of her homework, because she had to help her mother in the evenings.

Isabel was not happy at her new school. She says that her teacher screams at the class, that she is bullied by the children, and she is afraid to tell the principal, because he is

rough with kids and does not want any trouble. Although Eva is aware of her daughter's dissatisfaction, and says that Isabel used to cry when she dropped her off in the morning, she has not been able to look into her complaints. In fact, Eva has had no contact with Isabel's teacher since she started school six months ago. She does, however, keep tabs on her daughter's school progress through the educational liaison who is employed by Residence E.

Despite all of this, Isabel is as successful in school this year as she has been in all her past years. Although she tested in the normal range on the Brigance screening test, she was placed in a gifted class in first grade. In second grade Isabel scored at the 92nd percentile in mathematics, and the 61st percentile in reading. In third grade, the year she was homeless and missed so much school, she retained the same standing in mathematics, while her reading score reached the 89th percentile. On these measures of school achievement, Isabel is doing well above her peers, homeless or housed.

Isabel's early, positive school experience seems to have carried her through a difficult year. Although Eva dropped out of school in the 10th grade, she communicates to her daughter the value of education and her expectations for her to complete college. She also recognized her daughter's academic abilities from an early age and made sure that she was enrolled in an appropriate educational environment. Isabel seems to have internalized these messages from her mother.

The first school I went to that was for kindergarten. But, my mother took me out of that school because they didn't teach me as much as I needed to learn. They didn't teach me right there. They just made us play. So, I went to [a different] kindergarten. They taught me a lot of things, all my alphabets. And then they taught us how to read a little bit. Sometimes we played if we were good.

Eva describes Isabel as a child who likes a challenge and who does not give up easily. These characteristics are evident as Isabel persistently tries to keep up with her schoolwork, seeking assistance from her mother or a tutor provided by Residence E. When her efforts are not acknowledged by her teacher, Isabel is able to overcome her frustration and return to her work.

Some of the math sometimes I don't know it in school. Sometimes I miss some math problems, but I usually run to upstairs to my class, and run out of breath. If we take long to find a pencil in our book-bag, the teacher screams at us. She goes: "Hurry up!" if we late... Sometimes I'm late and I don't know so, she goes over it... when we have play time, when we draw, stuff like that.. Almost two days I didn't know how to do the homework. They had a word to do, you know, like encyclope-anthologist. And we had to find the words and I didn't know what to do, so I couldn't do it. I asked my mother and she said she didn't have no idea that what we could do with that. Cuz I got late that day. Cuz, my sister went to day care and she's two and a half years old, and it opens at 8:30, then we go back upstairs, dress up my other little sister and then we pick up a little girl and go to school... So, I went to school the next day, and [my teacher] got mad. She said: "You better pay attention so you can learn this time!" So that made me mad so I asked to go to the bathroom and I stood out for 20 minutes. Well, she got mad when I came back and she told me to sit down. And then the rest of the day got good for me.

Another positive factor in Isabel's life is that she is surrounded by a number of loving adults, who act as substitute caregivers. Isabel's grandmother seems to play a stabilizing role in her life. During periods when Eva was moving around, Isabel apparently stayed with her grandmother. Because Eva usually moved within the same neighborhood, Isabel also had the benefit of daily contact with her mother. Every summer Isabel stays with her aunt who lives in Boston. Isabel also spends time with her "stepfather," the father of her youngest brother. At the same time, she maintains a close relationship with the father of her mother's former partner, who acts as a surrogate grandfather to her.

Like her daughter, Eva has been able to make use of the supportive resources around her. Working closely with her caseworker in whom she has confidence, she takes advantage of many of the services offered through Residence E -- the on-site daycare, the after-school program, parenting workshops, the housing placement services. These services were able to replace, to some extent, the loss of support from her family and friends. In fact, Eva feels that through the assistance she has received in Residence E, she has become more self reliant and self confident.

For Isabel her history of positive school experiences and success in school, her ability to draw support from the adults in her life, her ability to manage frustration in ways that are not self-defeating, the way her mother has communicated the importance of education and modeled coping behaviors, all seem to have helped protect from the stressful life events she has experienced.

Didi. In contrast to Isabel, Didi is a child who, in light of her initial educational experiences, would be considered at risk of school failure. Didi also has managed to maintain a connectedness to school and demonstrate continued progress.

Didi is 10 years old and in the third grade. She has a 12 year-old sister, Leticia, who attends the same elementary school, and a 16 year-old sister, Karen, who is a junior in high school. For the six years prior to entering the shelter system, they and their mother, Mabel, shared a single room in a friend's apartment, in a deteriorated building, located in a drug-infested, South Bronx, neighborhood. Didi's mother has tried unsuccessfully to locate decent, affordable housing for her family.

Our last place was not fit for children. We tried to get out of there for years... The conditions was so bad I called the BCW [Bureau of Child Welfare] office pretending I was someone else, and told them to come to our building. They dropped the case. I couldn't believe it.

The stress of living in crowded, dangerous conditions was compounded by the death of Mabel's mother and her own serious health problems. She became severely depressed, which had a tremendous impact on her ability to attend to her children's needs.

Everything went downhill after my mother died five years ago. It had gotten to the point where I contemplated suicide for all of us... In our last apartment I couldn't keep money to send them to school. I had health problems -- a heart attack and a stroke. It had a hell of an effect on me. I gave up hope. It affected the children, too. I was always sick and stopped caring.

Not knowing what else to do, Mabel decided to discuss her housing problems with the support staff of Didi's school, who referred her to Residence D, a Tier II facility located nearby. Unlike many families who become homeless, Mabel and her daughters did not have to endure the instability of living in short-stay hotels or the trauma of the congregate emergency facilities. Because the children's school was accessible by bus, her daughters did not have to change schools when they moved to Residence D. Instead of being an additional trauma, moving to the Tier II facility acted as a lifeline for Mabel and her family. With a secure roof over their heads, Mabel has space and time to work through her problems and plan for the future. Most importantly, in less than a year's time, Mabel has been able to secure an adequate apartment for her family.

The school helped us get out of our apartment into [Residence D]. I spoke to the counselor about the bad conditions, then Leticia spoke to them about. It's 100 percent better here, safer here... I've improved here... I was a wreck when I first came here. I feel like one hundred dollars now. The kids are themselves again. Teresa [the Director of the Tier II] helped me think about things I hadn't thought about in a long time. It helped a lot... I have privacy here. I can take care of

things... I expect to sign a lease soon. It's a beautiful apartment in a new place, a secure building. It's just what I wanted.

Entering the shelter system has not been without its costs for Mabel and her daughters. First, due to the age restrictions of the facility, Karen was forced to live with her father, Mabel's ex-partner. Mabel disapproves of his parenting style and does not communicate with him, although she sees her daughter about once a week. At the same time, due to the various rules around curfew and visitation, Mabel's contact with Didi and Leticia's father, who is a major source of support to the entire family, has been limited. Mabel also struggles to keep intact her sense of self in an institution which she feels infantilizes people or treats them like inmates. Part of her coping strategy is to limit her use of the services that the Residence provides.

I don't like to be labelled. You don't label human beings. But once you're in here, you're already labelled. It's like being a child again. I feel like I'm in prison here. I'm a hard person. I don't participate. They have a lot of services here, but I haven't used them. I don't like to ask... I don't participate in the family activities here. When you go out people look at you and say: "Look at all the little shelter children." But, I don't stop my kids from participating if they want to.

Mabel is anxious to get off public assistance, and has already applied for a job as a security guard. She has a high school diploma and has 12 years experience working, mostly in security. Her past attempts to find a better position where she could advance herself and increase her income, were not very successful.

I took out loans to go to school. I took a computer programming course for six months. But I wasn't able to find a job, like they promised. After that, I didn't try any more of those programs.

Mabel's need to be self-reliant and her reluctance to seek help is also apparent in her personal life. She has a network of supportive friends and family, upon whom she and

her daughters can rely on for emotional support and assistance. The central person in her support network is her partner, with whom she has had a long relationship. Despite his many positive qualities, Mabel has decided to live her life economically and spatially independent from him.

Their father is very good with them. He has a good job. He wanted to help me pay my rent. He helps to support the children if I ask, but I don't like to ask. He has a big apartment. But I don't want to move in with him. I don't know what will happen, even though we've been together for 15 years. I am very independent and don't like to ask for help.

Because of the ease at which the family was able to move to Residence D, and the improved living conditions there, Mabel feels that entering the shelter system has not hurt her daughters' educational progress. Mabel is much more concerned about the poor quality of the elementary school her daughters attend. She complains that in recent years the classrooms have become overcrowded, that basic supplies such as textbooks and workbooks are lacking, that safety is a major problem, and escalating racial tensions between Latinos and African Americans contribute to a hostile climate. Although both her daughters have attended the same school for the last five years, she is thankful that they will be attending a new school once they move.

There's not enough books, so the kids can't bring their books home to do homework, so they can't do their homework. In Didi's class the kids repeat the same work over and over again, because the next book is not available. They can't go ahead. I don't know where all the school funds go. They're always asking the parents for money for different things... The security is lousy. There was a rapist there, kidnapping children. There's only one security guard... The kids complain about prejudice. There's a lot of prejudice from the [Latino] principal toward the Black kids. The school started changing two years ago with the new principal. The old principal was better. The Black kids aren't allowed to participate. The Parent Association is all Puerto Rican. There is a lot of resentment.

Mabel is most concerned about her daughter Leticia. At home Leticia demonstrates an interest in learning, an aptitude in reading and math, and artistic creativity. At school, however, she becomes restless and does not work up to her potential. She is scoring well below grade level on both her reading and math tests.

I want Leticia to finish high school. But I'm not sure she will... She can do better. She can do the work, but she needs to be pushed. She helped her father do his taxes this year. She's good when she wants to be. Sometimes in school she needs to run the halls. She'll take the test, then she needs to get out the door... Leticia's very creative. She goes to an after-school program for ceramics. She makes beautiful things. She doesn't really need more activities. She occupies herself. She reads by herself... She likes to read, things like Tom Sawyer.

In contrast, Karen is doing very well in high school and plans to attend Howard University when she graduates. Didi, who is now completing the third grade, also has managed to overcome a precarious educational beginning and make continued progress each year. When she was 4 years old Didi was permanently dismissed from her pre-school program due to behavior problems. Her behavior continued to be a problem in elementary school. In second grade she was held back because her teacher felt she "wasn't ready" for the next grade. Mabel explained that her daughter would throw chairs at her teacher or threaten the other children when she became angry. Despite these initial setbacks, Didi improved academically and seemed to learn how to control her temper. Over the next two years Didi's mathematics achievement scores climbed from the 14th percentile to the 84th percentile. Although Didi is reading below her grade level, her reading skills also improved. She does not like her school, and is still occasionally involved in fighting incidents, but for the most part she is a serious student who is focussed on her education.

Mabel and her daughters appear to have weathered the worst of the storm before they entered the shelter system. They endured the chronic stress of living in overcrowded and unsafe conditions, the grief and loss of support associated with the death of Mabel's mother, and most devastating, Mabel's own life-threatening illness. Leticia explains how her concerns with being homeless are insignificant compared to her past fear that her mother was going to die.

I don't worry about nothing no more. Cuz my mother used to get sick a lot, and that's about it. I used to think she was gonna die, then I'd have to take care of my little sister. It would be me and my little sister, my big sister, and that's it.

As Mabel and her daughters talk about their struggles we see a theme of stability emerge. Despite her housing problems, Mabel stayed in the same community for many years, which contributed to her children's school stability, as well as her use of the school as a resource to obtain information on housing. Mabel has also been able to establish long-lasting personal relationships, particularly with her partner, which offer her and her family a measure of security.

However, being stuck in dangerous and inadequate housing and an inferior school weigh against the benefits of the stability. In Mabel's case it is doubtful that she could have improved her housing situation without assistance. Only by entering the shelter system was she able to resolve her most pressing need of finding adequate housing, which gave her a renewed sense of confidence and hope, and which opened new options for her children's schooling.

### Stories of Struggling Students

The next two cases present children, who are struggling to stay connected to school. Both of these children attend the same school and express a "school as learning" attitude in a school climate that is hostile to them.

**Anthony.** Anthony is 8 years old. He has two younger brothers, Shakeel, 6, who is in kindergarten, and Kareem, who is 1 1/2 years old. Samantha, Anthony's mother, became pregnant with him when she was still in high school. She and Anthony's father did not stay together long and Samantha tried to raise him alone. Although she had been an "A student," she dropped out of school and began working. Through Project Life, a program which provided teen mothers with on-site day care while they attended school and parenting courses, Samantha was able to obtain her G.E.D.. She continued to attend school and found work through a temporary employment agency, which she felt would help her to decide what kind of career to pursue. These plans were interrupted when Samantha again became pregnant, and quit school and her job to stay home with her son, Shakeel. Shakeel's father was subsequently incarcerated.

Samantha and her children lived at home with her father until Shakeel was two. Then Samantha's father re-married and his new wife pressured Samantha to move out of the apartment. They then entered the shelter system, lived in a hotel in Queens for about a year, and ended up obtaining an apartment in Brooklyn where they lived for the next two years.

Samantha became pregnant again and had Kareem. Her partner became physically abusive forcing her to leave her Brooklyn apartment and enter the shelter system for the

second time. For the first three weeks the family was moved to different short-stay hotels, which made it difficult for Anthony and Shakeel to attend school. The children's school reported the boys' frequent absences to the Bureau of Child Welfare. Fearing that she would lose her children, Samantha moved back to her apartment with her abusive partner for a month, until Victim's Services placed her in a shelter for battered women in the Bronx. After spending five months there, the family was placed in Residence E in Manhattan. With this recent move, Anthony had changed residences nine times and had attended four different schools, each in a different borough of New York City.

Although Samantha feels that Residence E has a lot of rules and provides little privacy (she has to share her room with her three boys), she is satisfied with the assistance she has received there. She thinks she is close to obtaining an apartment, hopefully in Queens, and her caseworker is helping her to resolve problems she has been having with her public assistance benefits. Anthony and Shakeel participate in the educational and recreational services provided by the facility.

The Tier II has been Samantha's main source of support. Since entering the shelter system Samantha has had little contact with her family. Although she has not seen her friends and family for months, she says she has two close friends whom she could ask for support if she needed it. Samantha's isolation appears to be self-imposed. She seems to be using her time in the shelter system and away from her family to reflect upon her life, and decide what to do in the future. Although she wants to get off public assistance, based on her past experiences, she believes that working is not compatible with being a good mother.

I would like to go back to work and school. At first, Kareem was too young. I want him to get to a certain age. I think Anthony is having problems now because I put him in daycare early. Kids at this age need a lot of attention and mothering.

One of Samantha's major concerns is Anthony's school situation. She explains that Anthony has always had behavior problems in school, and in this school it is no different. Now, however, his teacher is saying that he is having trouble reading, which had never been a problem before. What is also different about Anthony's experiences in this school, is that after spending four months there, Samantha is convinced that he has little chance of success: "It's like he gave them so many problems, they gave up on him."

Based upon her interactions with teachers and the principal, Samantha says that the school staff act as if all the children's academic and behavior problems are caused by their homelessness and because they are being raised by single mothers. Samantha has learned that in such a climate trying to communicate with the school is futile. For example, Samantha says that the school has frequently called her at home or has asked her to come in for a meeting when they wanted to complain about Anthony's or his brother's bad behavior. At the same time, without any notification or explanation, Anthony was removed from his second-grade class and placed into a third-grade class. Later, when Samantha was concerned about her son's lack of schoolwork and homework, she wrote to his teacher requesting to set up a meeting. Although his teacher acknowledged that this was a problem, she was not willing to meet with her and discuss how to resolve it.

Samantha believes that the crux of Anthony's school behavior problems is that his school work is not challenging enough. She says that Anthony likes school, but is easily bored and then begins to create disturbances in the class. She believes he is, in fact, gifted.

She says she intended to have him tested in his prior school, but they moved away before she could initiate the testing procedures. She says that, at home, Anthony reads well, and if he is interested in something will stay engaged in it for hours.

Samantha's alienation from her son's school is shared by Anthony. He admits that he fights a lot in school but says the other children are always "messing with him." He repeatedly comments that when he complains about the other students "nobody listens" to him. He also complains that he's not called upon to answer questions in class. And when asked if he feels he belongs at his school he says:

The principal thinks it's his school. He says, "This is my house." He don't want none of these creeps in his house. He called me a big creep.

Instead of internalizing this message that his teachers and principal do not seem to want him there or care about whether he learns, he tries to retain an interest in school. He looks forward to his reading classes every day, which he thinks "is funner out of anything, even going outside." He appreciates difficult work, and takes pride in his progress. One of the first things Anthony told me was that he received a "good" on his spelling test that day. Although he feels his teacher's and principal's attitude toward him is unfair and unwarranted, it is important to him that they think well of him. Anthony feels that he is beginning to make them change their mind about him.

The teacher tell the principal that I been doing good and stuff. He's nice now. Now that the teacher told him that I been doing well, he listens to me now. He used to think I was bad.

Anthony's placement in a third-grade class seems to contribute to his behavioral problems as well as his sense of not belonging. Isabel, who is a classmate of Anthony's,

mentions that Anthony, like the other second-graders in her class, create disturbances in the classroom and are constantly being yelled at by the teacher. She also mentions that their work consists of worksheets, while the rest of the class get different work.

There's two [kids], Danny and Anthony. Sometimes they good, sometimes they bad, but they never do their homework. Cuz they get white papers, they do, cuz they really in the second grade, but they put them in our class. They don't do their homework... I don't know [why they're in my class]. Cuz probably they didn't learn enough there.

Based upon his achievement tests, Anthony's work is slightly below grade level. He scored at the 37th and 38th percentiles in reading and math, respectively. Considering his history of frequently interrupted schooling, he could be doing much worse.

It is doubtful that, looking at these scores, a teacher would think that Anthony is "gifted." As a homeless, African-American, boy, who gets into fights at school, it seems unlikely that it would even enter the teacher's mind. Earlier evidence suggests, as his mother suspected, that Anthony may have been entitled to a gifted educational program. While Anthony was in kindergarten, he tested above average on the SOI screening battery. According to school policy he was supposed to have been tested further to determine if he should be placed in a gifted class. This never occurred. His mother gave no indication that she knew Anthony had been tested at all. Since this occurred during the first year Anthony was homeless, the lack of follow-up might have been due to his moving before further testing could be arranged. Putting this information together, we see Anthony, as an intelligent child, who likes school, but who is easily distracted when he is not actively engaged in an activity. Shortly after transferring to his fourth school, he was moved to a new classroom, with several other second-graders, who also had behavior problems. He

was expected to stay engaged while completing worksheets, although the rest of the class were apparently taught a different lesson. If he was provoked by the other boys, he is expected neither to react to them nor to complain about them to the teacher. There seems to be little room for Anthony to succeed under these conditions.

In his favor Anthony has his love for reading, and that he cares about how he does in school. There is also Samantha, who has reflected upon her own school experiences, and tries to use them to guide Anthony through his.

If Anthony wants to live in my house, he'll have to at least finish high school. College is his option... One of the reasons I don't set such high standards for Anthony is I had too much pressure on me in school. I was looked at as the "A" student. It was too much pressure. I was tired of all that pressure and would act up. Then the whole family hated me when I dropped out.

A stable school setting and a challenging classroom could help Anthony to be successful. If he continues to change schools or is placed in classes where little is expected of him he risks falling further and further behind and losing his interest in school altogether.

Manny. Similar to Anthony, Manny is also struggling to stay connected to school. Manny and his 6 year-old sister Maria moved to New York City from Miami. His mother, Rosa, had grown up in Manhattan, got married and moved in with her husband's family in New Jersey. Several years later they moved to Miami, lived in two different apartments and then rented a house as their family grew. Although Rosa had dropped out of high school, she found a job working at a convention center.

Rosa describes the children's father as a supportive husband and a good father. She found, however, that her feelings toward him had changed over the marriage and she thought it best they separate. Over the next six months she stayed with a series of friends.

She finally decided to move back to New York after a friend offered her a place to stay there. By the time Rosa left Miami, the family had lived in seven different places and Edward had attended two different schools. Maria had missed kindergarten altogether, and attended school for the first time in New York as a first-grader.

Upon arriving to New York City, Rosa's friend withdrew the offer to lodge the family and they found themselves with nowhere to go. Having very little money and no public assistance benefits, Rosa and her children stayed in a shelter run by a church in Harlem, and then moved to a congregate shelter in lower Manhattan for another three weeks. Rosa managed to enroll Manny and Maria in the local schools. When the children were not in school, the family spent their days trying to keep warm by going in stores or the local hospital because the facilities only provided shelter from 5:00pm to 7:00am. Rosa eventually obtained a placement in Residence E and her children transferred to a third school.

Living in New York City, Manny had one bad school experience after another. During his first week in school, he was assigned to make a boat as part of a science project. Manny attempted to complete the assignment using the only materials he had available to him -- some cups and rubber bands. Instead of praising his efforts, Rosa said that his teacher and classmates laughed at him.

The teacher told him that it was the worst thing she'd ever seen. I've never seen my son so hurt. He said everyone laughed at him.

Manny's next school in New York was in an immense building in lower Manhattan. Used to smaller-scale schools, he found the building so frightening, that he refused to

leave his mother. Luckily, the school located next to Residence E was small and Manny felt more secure there. However, both children were placed in the same bilingual bridge class of first- and second-graders. Rosa complained, saying that neither she nor her children spoke Spanish, but was told she had no other options because there was no space in the regular classes. Manny's records indicate that his LAB score was in the 70th percentile, which confirmed that he was proficient in English. Placing him in a bilingual class was a violation of New York City school policy.

According to Rosa, the class failed to meet the needs of either of her children. Manny received schoolwork well below his grade level, and Maria, having no experience of school, needed some individualized instruction, which the teacher did not provide. Rosa was very concerned that the low level of instruction would put him at least a year behind in developing his academic skills. Based on Manny's description, his schoolwork seems more appropriate for children in kindergarten than in second grade.

Ms. Lopez says, "Take out your math book and your letters". Like, she goes from A to Z. Like now I have to do my Ws. But I already know them (frustrated voice). I don't know why she keeps on giving us all of these letters. Then tomorrow I'm going to have to do X, then Y and Z. I have to write them down all the way down the notebook. You have to put it in four rows... I like it. It's just that I know how to do it... She should do that for the first-graders, not the second-graders... [She teaches] not too many things. She'll go over the Math then we'll go to lunch, then after we come from lunch we have to take a little nap -- like put our heads down on our desk. We take a nap at 1:00 and then when 2:00 hits, the bell rings... Well, I put my head down, but my eyes are open. Really everybody does that inside the class... She's looking at the magazines, mall magazines -- like J.C Penny's...

At the end of the school year Manny did not take the citywide reading and mathematics tests. His school records indicate that he received a Limited English

Proficient (LEP) exemption. The school effectively denied him the opportunity to demonstrate his mastery of his reading and mathematics skills. They also have labelled him as having language deficiencies, although there is no evidence to support this designation. These actions can have implications beyond the present school year. Manny is likely to be placed in another lower level class when he goes to his next school, where he will continue to fall behind.

Not only was Manny not satisfied with his schoolwork, but his teacher, Ms. Lopez, made him feel "very uncomfortable." He said that she constantly screamed at the children, physically intimidated them, and if the homeless students misbehave, she tells the class it is because they live in a shelter. As Manny tells me how his teacher humiliates him in class, I expect to hear that he hates her. Instead, he describes his efforts to establish a positive relationship with her. He also shows compassion for her when her students treat her badly.

But [the teacher and I] get along. Cuz sometimes she'll give me a book or something if I sweep the class, or something, or if I wash the board, and then she'll say: "Bring it back tomorrow"... Sometimes, she can be nice... The teacher left her pair of glasses, and [the kids] stole it from her. Now she has to pay, like I think it was like a thousand dollars for a new pair, cuz they're expensive glasses. [They did it] to be mean. And one of them took her pocketbook. She had everything in it -- her money, her I.D., all of that.

Manny's ability to create for himself some positive experiences in school may be linked to his early educational experiences. Manny retains an image of his school in Florida as a supportive learning environment. He also retains an image of himself as a successful student, and credits his mother for his success.

When I was in Florida, I went to one school. I went for about three grades. And kindergarten is where I learned how to read. Cuz my mom already taught me like: cat, hat, bat, in, out -- all of that. And then when I seen the same words, I started reading. I likeded it. Over there, it's a small school, and there's a lot of nice teachers. I was always doing the math, more. My kindergarten teacher, she was really nice. The kids, they were good.

Rosa also seems to influence Manny through her model of optimism and hope.

She is painfully aware that the loss of their father and their home, living in a strange place, going to a strange school, and having no permanent home has been traumatic for her children. To help them cope she openly discusses the situation with them. She also gives them a lot of attention, which she feels they need right now.

Manny's not the way he was [before we moved here]. He don't feel so safe without his father. He's afraid when he sees the men on the street. That's why it's hard to get them in P.A.L. He's afraid to go... I'm very proud of them. They have heart. The way they handled this situation -- like troopers. I talk about being here with them. Sometimes we end up laughing about how crazy everything is... I try to find fun things to do. We go to parks, museums, roller skating, window shopping. We talk about things together. We're like three musketeers. I love to be with my kids.

Rosa also communicates her motivation and strength to her children through her efforts to get back on her feet. Rosa had only been in New York City for a few months when I interviewed her. By that time she had nearly completed a GED course and was preparing for the exam, and was planning to enroll in college. Before moving to Residence E she had also applied to the DAMP program in order to obtain housing.

Once moving to Residence E Rosa felt that beyond "getting us out of the cold" the facility did not provide very much help. In fact, her assigned caseworker was a constant source of distress. Each time Rosa discussed a problem with her caseworker -- her inability to sleep because of the noise at night, running out of orange juice before her

welfare check arrived, or the problems of her children's schooling -- she was made to feel that she was to blame: "It's like every move that you make your are being judged." This left her upset, demoralized, and in self-doubt. Being completely alone and isolated in New York City with "no personal support" she longed to confide in her caseworker, but decided that silence was her only option. When I suggested she might request a different caseworker she responded: "You can't say anything because they have the power to throw you out, to take your babies."

The strong family bond that exists among Rosa and the children seems to be a source of their strength. When I asked Manny if he missed his friends in Miami he commented that he would make new ones, and added that his mother and his sister were his "best friends." Some professionals, like Rosa's caseworker, may judge this relationship to be maladaptive and detrimental to the children's well-being. It seems however, to have helped Manny and Rosa to endure the trauma of homelessness so far.

### Broken Connections

The next two case describe children whose experiences of and in school has pushed them to the fringes of the educational process.

Danny and Devon. Danny and Devon are 8-year old twins who live with their 6 year-old sister Corinne and mother Elena in Residence E. Elena initially moved out of her parents' apartment in Yonkers when she gave birth to the twins, and went to live with the twin's father in the Bronx. A year later the family moved to Ohio for two years. Then Elena decided to leave her partner because of his illegal activities. Upon moving back to New York City the family ended up in the shelter system and lived in the Prince George

welfare hotel for a little over a year. From there Elena was able to get an apartment in the Bronx where she lived for the next two years.

The family lived in a neighborhood that was full of drug activity, violence, and crime. The "shoot-outs" occurred so frequently that Elena was afraid to leave her building after dark. She worked long hours as a hairdresser, but still had trouble paying the rent every month. It also left her physically exhausted and made it difficult for her to get the children off to school in the morning. According to Devon's attendance records, he missed 61 days of school between September and January in the first grade. To cut down on her expenses, Elena left the apartment and rented a room, but two months later entered the shelter system for the second time.

The family was initially placed in a congregate emergency shelter in the Bronx for a month and then were placed in Residence E. The children were enrolled in the local school, the fourth school they attended in a four-year period. Elena was extremely unhappy with the local school. All of the children were placed in grades or classes where she felt they did not belong. Danny was moved from his second-grade class to a third-grade class (the same class as Isabel and Anthony), Devon was placed in a bilingual bridge class for first- and second- graders (the same class as Manny), and Corinne was placed in a transitional kindergarten to first-grade class.

The twins' educational records show a history of unresolved, academic problems. Although the twins attended preschool while living at the Prince George Hotel, they entered school demonstrating severe educational deficits. Their English LAB scores from kindergarten placed them in the 2nd and 5th percentiles. They scored even lower on the

Spanish version of the LAB. The implications of these test scores is that the children lacked the most basic language skills (i.e. speaking and listening). Danny also scored below the cutoff point on the SOI Battery that is used to assess the need for special educational services. However, Elena gave no indication that he received the mandated, follow-up assessment. The next year, both twins were held back and had to repeat the first grade. Entering grade two they still showed the same pattern of language deficiencies they had in kindergarten. After three years of school, their LAB scores only placed them in the 5th and 9th percentiles. At the end of grade two, Danny scored in the first quartile on his math and reading achievement tests. Devon did not take the tests. Because he was enrolled in a bilingual classroom, they exempted him from testing based on his inability to understand English.

In their interviews neither Danny nor Devon describe school as place where they learn effectively. Of the two, Danny describes a more positive attitude toward school, but his accounts of his learning experiences lack coherence and are often contradictory. Although he is in a third-grade class and is way behind in basic academic skills, he seems to get little individualized attention. Instead, when he is having problems, he says, "I just skip stuff" or "make a little bit mistakes." He says he likes the third grade because of the work, but that he does not know how to do it. He says the teacher gives him second-grade work to do, but it is too easy and sometimes boring. Danny makes a distinction between "doing the work," which is what he does in school, versus "learning," which is seen as something separate.

[I do] times and I don't know times. I gotta do it... I just gotta do my work, so I could learn.

Unlike his brother, Devon says that he hates school. He says his teacher ignores him and his attempts to participate in class and the principal calls him a "disgusting creep." He says that his work is too easy and it is boring. Devon hates getting homework and is often "punished" in school for not turning in his homework assignments. He also admits that he does not always know how to do his homework, especially the math. To amuse himself Devon leaves his classroom to wander the hallways.

I'm bad in school... I sneak out to the bathroom. Cuz it's fun. It's fun sneaking out and play in the hallways. That's what I do.

Like his brother Devon is struggling with the contradictions he faces in school. He knows that he is supposed to learn in school and that his teacher is supposed to teach him. But based on his accounts of school, those experiences are constantly denied to him.

When you grow up you gotta know [spelling, math, and reading]... Teachers are smarter than little kids. Everybody knows that, because they're teachers. They're ready for the school, teachers are ready for the school... Everybody bad, but I be good to that teacher, act like I do like the teacher [even though he hates her]. Cuz, teachers teach kids, and I act nice to the teachers... I do sneak out, but when I'm in the classroom I'm nice.

Although the twins are not very successful in their academic endeavors, they are popular among the other children who live in Residence E and attend the same elementary school. All the boys and almost all the girls who I interviewed considered the twins to be their friends. Some of the girls also mentioned that the twins were the only boys in their school who they thought were nice. Unfortunately, the twins' social competencies only seems to contribute to their school problems. The twins complained that the older boys in

school pick on them and beat them. Therefore, they have become friends with a group of "bad" boys, who help to protect them in school. To maintain these friendship the twins must also act "bad." Devon says that when he is "good" in school these friends will not talk to him.

Elena also experiences the school as a hostile and inhospitable environment. She admits that from the very beginning she did not like the school and believed it was "a bunch of volunteers... for us homeless people." She reasons that because parents are not allowed in school without an appointment, that the school personnel "must not be doing what they supposed to be doing." Her interactions with school staff serve to confirm and intensify her negative expectations. She is constantly called into school because of "problems" -- the boys' fighting, not completing their school or homework assignments, and Devon wanders around the classroom. When she suggests to the teacher or principals that these problems might be related to the children's placement in classes where they do not belong, she says the school personnel ignore her or "make faces" at her. When she has gone to school to complain that her daughter came home hurt from being punched by a boy, or that she saw the gym teacher "banging kids' heads against the wall," she says the teachers deny these things happen and the principal tries to "cover up" for them.

Elena's sense of distrust is not limited to her children's school. She also resents the intrusiveness of her caseworker at Residence E. As a result, she refuses to attend a GED class, although she says she wants to get her GED. She also refused to attend a parenting program to which she was referred and felt "insulted" that her caseworker even suggested it. Elena is more comfortable when the helping roles are reversed. She mentions that

some staff members "sneak up to her room," to get their hair done, since it is against the rules for them to "fraternize" with the residents.

Elena's sense of pride and need for independence keep the family socially isolated. The only people she and her children are in contact with are her parents and her brother. Her father has a heart condition and Elena goes to Yonkers frequently now to help take care of him. Before that, she had not seen her family in over a year. Again, Elena is more comfortable with giving rather than receiving assistance. She says that she would never ask her family for help or burden them with her problems, because they have enough of their own. There is no one else in her life who she considers a source of support. Within Residence E, Elena complains that the other residents bother her day and night. However, she has established a friendly relationship with another woman with whom she shares childcare responsibilities.

The boys' cumulative academic deficiencies and their tendencies to become disruptive when they are not engaged in an activity puts them at tremendous risk for failure. A stable educational environment that provides the children with language enrichment, opportunities to work and interact with classmates in a positive way, and a structured, orderly classroom, might help to reverse this process. If they continue to be placed in low-level classes, where they are expected to "do work" rather than learn, it is likely that their academic and behavioral problems will continue to worsen.

Troy. Like the twins, Troy is having both academic and behavioral problems in school, but they are much more intense. Of all the children in this study, Troy demonstrates the most profound school-related problems.

Troy is 8 years old and lives with his 10 year-old brother Calvin and his mother Brenda, who is 5 months pregnant. Brenda and her sons first became homeless shortly after the birth of Troy. For the next five years the family lived in a series of welfare hotels. Their longest stay was at the infamous Martinique (Kozol, 1989) which lasted two years. At the end of this period the family was placed in a one bedroom apartment in the Bronx, which barely could accommodate Brenda, her two sons, and the boys' father. In the year and a half they lived there the conditions of the apartment rapidly deteriorated. During the winter, the family often went without heat or hot water. The apartment was also located in a dangerous neighborhood which exposed the children to drug activity. Finally, the landlord raised the rent, and Brenda was forced to leave. Brenda and her sons spent a week in a congregate shelter in the Bronx, and then were placed in Residence C. So far, Calvin and Troy have lived in homeless facilities for more than half their entire lifetime; Calvin has changed schools four times and Troy has changed twice.

After moving to Residence C, Calvin continued to attend school in his old neighborhood, which was accessible by public transportation. Brenda decided to transfer Troy to the local school, however, because he was having problems in his old school and she thought a change would help. This would make the third school Troy has attended by third grade. In his new school Troy's behavior immediately went from bad to worse. His constant fights with the other children and physical attacks on his teacher caused him to be continuously suspended, or punished and removed from the classroom. Within several months, the school had him referred for a psychological evaluation and counseling and decided to place him in special education class.

Troy's teacher, Ms. Arturo, described his combination of academic deficiencies and behavioral problems as one of the worst "cases" she has ever encountered in her eight years of teaching. She was shocked by the intensity of his anger and aggression, his inability to make friends, and his self-imposed isolation and withdrawal from other children and adults. Although she was unaware of his long history of homelessness, she believed that his problems stem from a troubled home environment.

Troy is a severe case. He's barely at first grade level. I have many kids like that -- barely literate. Most of the school is barely literate. He fabricates stories -- bragging about stealing, about being tough. He masturbates in class... He doesn't want friends. He could only relate through fighting. He would gravitate toward provoking the toughest kids. He took on two who were twice his size. It's like he wants to get hit -- to get punished, as if it were the only type of stimulation he knew... He's very angry. I think he's angry at his mother. He takes it out on women. He's more afraid of Black women. White people, authority figures, women are all scapegoats. His mother is complacent. I feel like I'm talking into a vacuum... I think there is something going on besides homelessness. I believe his mother used drugs when she was pregnant with him. He may be brain damaged... Troy can isolate himself easily. He might be used to many chaotic environments. He puts up a mental wall, won't open up. He seems to isolate himself as a type of mental defense mechanism. He must have learned to do this earlier. You talk to him, his eyes glaze, he puts up a mental wall.

Troy's teacher, who described this school year as being "one of the worst in her life" was overwhelmed by her class of 30 students, many of whom, if not homeless, have histories of residential and family instability. She has found that she is unable to spend the time she needs teaching children effectively, because more and more of her energy is being diverted to dealing with her students' and their families' problems. In this context, is it surprising that Ms. Arturo has given up on Troy? Not only does she feel that she cannot help him, she feels that the school system is no place for a child like him.

I have been able to reach a lot of children. I can't reach them all. I couldn't even make a dent in this case. I gave him new things, gifts. He showed no appreciation. He trashed things in my desk. He wants to destroy things. He came up behind me once and started swinging at me. He tried to fight me... He needs more than special education. He's totally unreachable. He needs medication, something to calm him down in order to get through to him. He needs to be isolated and re-socialized, totally retrained. He probably needs to be put in a children's hospital.

When a child like Troy is manifesting such intense behavioral problems in school, is it even possible to assess what his educational level is or what he is capable of achieving? Troy's records show that he attended school 53% of the time that school year. If we then subtract those days he was suspended or removed from the classroom, it is even less. Troy has no test scores for the year because he was absent on all the testing days. It is interesting that the prior year, when Troy was in second grade, he scored at the 34th percentile in reading, and the 19th in math. Although these scores are both below grade level, they are higher than many of the other students in this study. They also show that the prior year Troy was present in school during test time and in enough control of himself to actually sit down and take the tests. In our interview, Troy's mother often mentioned that her son Calvin had more of an interest in school, and did better academically than Troy. However, Troy actually did better than his brother on his achievement tests during that year. It appears that Troy's teacher and his mother both are underestimating his learning potential and both have low expectations that he will ever succeed in school.

Although Troy's teacher was unable to identify a single, positive characteristic about him, there is evidence that he does have another side to him. Troy's mother describes him as being mature, self-sufficient, and resourceful.

Both Troy and Calvin are smart. They can do things on their own. They know how to travel, would never get lost. They go lots of places by themselves. I can send them on errands and they'll come back with the right thing. They are mature, not babyish. Troy knows how to make money. He knows the value of a dollar and how to save money. He finds ways of making money. Sometimes he packs groceries in the supermarket or helps on the ice-cream truck.

The director of Residence C mentioned that Troy was very attached to his brother Calvin. She also told me that Troy possessed a strong interest in wrestling and a phenomenal knowledge of the history of the Wrestling Federation. In fact, when he was being interviewed, Troy assessed my interest in and knowledge of wrestling, among other things. He also expressed that he liked music and frequently asked if he could "rap" in the tape recorder. When the time for his solo arrived, he carefully considered his choice of songs, and selected one without curses, so as not to offend me. These accounts bring into question Ms. Arturo's conclusion that Troy is completely socially maladjusted and brain-damaged. Troy's teacher appears to be accurate in her observation that he is enraged, and that much of his anger is directed at his mother. However, it is not unusual for homeless children to be angry at their parents for what they perceive to be their failure to take care of them (Bassuk & Gallagher, 1990).

Furthermore, Troy's intelligence and reflective capacity seem to be the source of his anger. Throughout the interview, Troy expresses his sense of outrage at his life situation. In examining his complaints, who is to say his anger is not justified?

First of all, Troy is angry that he has been uprooted from the only home he has ever known, and explicitly blames his mother for this.

She moved me somewhere else. It's her fault. She had a fight and then they threw us out. (To his mother) you had a fight and you hit the lady with a bottle. And they said they threw you out for the fight.

Second, he is angry that he was removed from his last school. By changing his school his mother effectively separated him from his brother, a person to whom he is closely attached.

[My mother] put me in this dumb school and I hate it... I was in there for three years. I'm mad cuz I left. I wanna be in there for four years.

Third, Troy is convinced that he has been rejected and ignored by the school system. This is apparent when he tells me he has never been held back in school despite his poor grades and bad behavior.

I know why they promote me. They want me out the school quick, cuz I'm so bad.

Fourth, Troy is angry that his parents are no longer together. Although, he continues to see his father about once a week, he resents his mother's new boyfriend:

She only miss her ugly boyfriend, really. That's the only thing she miss. He a dog, that's it.

This is a child who is very troubled and experiencing considerable psychological pain. Although, his school provides the students with some supportive counseling services they are not equipped to address his needs. Special education seems the only option for children like Troy. Perhaps in a special education classroom Troy would receive more individualized attention, and would be given opportunities to develop his skills and talents.

Or perhaps less will be expected from him than is now, and Troy's suspicions that the goal of school is to get rid of him would be confirmed.

### Experiences Beyond a Child's Coping Ability

#### Yvette

The case of Yvette is included to show that children do not have an unlimited capacity to cope with stress. Yvette is a shy, soft-spoken, 8 year-old who is in the third grade. She and her 6-year old brother, Luis, both attend the same elementary school in the Bronx. Yvette and Luis were born and raised in Puerto Rico and speak very little English. Both are in bilingual classrooms.

Yvette's mother, Ana, who is 28 years old, grew up in New York City, but then moved to Puerto Rico where she got married and had her children. Ana describes her husband as an "alright guy when he's straight," but his drug and alcohol abuse, made him dangerously violent. Ana lived with her husband until Yvette was four years old. Unable to tolerate his constant abuse, Ana moved to another house with her children. Moving out of the house was not enough to protect Ana and her family from her husband's violent behavior. Over the next three years, Ana and her children were increasingly drawn into a circle of violence. Ana believed that either her husband would one day kill her, he already had stabbed her once, or she would kill him in defense of herself or her family and end up in jail. Ana had already stabbed her husband once to protect her daughter and knew she would do it again in a similar situation. Ana liked her home in Puerto Rico, her job as a bartender, where she had worked for the last five years, and did not want to leave. But

her fear that her children would end up motherless, forced her to leave everything behind (except her children) and move back to the Bronx, where she had grown up.

Ana moved into a friend's apartment in the Bronx with her two children, and enrolled them in the local school. With the money she had saved from working at the bar, Ana planned to rent a furnished room. She soon discovered that there was nothing she could afford to rent. When her money ran out, Ana went on public assistance and applied for a Section 8 housing voucher. After six months, she realized that she could no longer live with her friend because "she was giving her kids a hard time" and entered the shelter system. For the next month she and her children lived in a congregate emergency shelter, where 40 to 50 people shared the same room. Ana said that during their entire stay, she could not leave her children alone, not even to go to the bathroom. The shelter was full of "crack heads" and a two year-old child had been sexually abused while she was there.

At the end of the month Ana was found a placement in Residence C. As it was December, Ana decided to keep her children in the same school until the end of the year. In January, after returning from vacation, they transferred to the local school. Preparing to attend Hostos College in the fall, Ana also took some courses to brush up on her academic skills. Ana's feelings that things were beginning to settle down were destroyed when Yvette tried to commit suicide that same month. Shocked and devastated, Ana located a therapist for Yvette and a family counselor for herself. After five months of therapy, Ana believes that Yvette is doing much better. She feels that her family's most urgent need is having a place of their own, because it would enable her children to have a sense of confidence in themselves.

Throughout her short life, Yvette has experienced a constant flow of violence, loss, instability and insecurity. Somehow her mother, either overwhelmed by the tasks of trying to provide a safe, stable home for her children, or not able to acknowledge the pain the children must be enduring, or for some other reason, might have missed the signs of Yvette's distress. When asked if her children had changed in any way since becoming homeless, Ana was one of the few mothers who responded that they had not. How is this possible if her child had tried to kill herself?

During this difficult time, Yvette had no adults in her life, other than her mother, who might have provided her with extra attention. Ana mentioned that she and her children sometimes saw her two brothers who live in the Bronx. And she described her relationship with her brother's wife as very close. But since her brothers use drugs, have guns, and become violent and physically abusive to their wives, she avoided visiting them. Ana said that she had two other friends upon whom she can rely on for support. Also, despite their separation, her ex-husband still contacted the family and sent them money and clothing from time to time.

For a child like Yvette, who says she enjoys learning (especially math), school might have provided her with a supportive environment where she could gain self confidence through her achievements. According to her school records, Yvette obtained a high score on the Spanish version of the LAB. Although she does not yet speak English, her scores indicate that she does not have any language deficiencies. Unfortunately, Yvette's school is just another setting filled with chaos and violence. She described most

of the children as "diablos" who fight with each other, hit the teacher and run around the classroom.

Although Yvette's school has psychologists and counselors to deal with the children's problems, Yvette's were not identified. Eva mentions that Yvette has always been "quiet" in school. In a climate where many of the children are disruptive, a quiet girl, who is not a behavioral problem, might be overlooked by the teacher. In a different context, a classroom teacher might be able to recognize signs of depression in one of his or her students. Since Yvette had only been in the school for a month, her teacher may not have known Yvette enough to detect changes in her behavior.

Despite the difficulties her family is experiencing, Ana comes across as a strong, capable and independent woman. She mentioned that the other, younger residents look to her for assistance and support, so much so that she finds it overwhelming at times. Ana used her time in the Tier II facility effectively. She was capable of obtaining the social services that her family needed (i.e., public assistance, medical care) without assistance from the Tier II staff. They are helping her with locating housing, and that is because her own efforts were futile. Ana recognized that in order for her to be self-sufficient she needed more education and has applied to college and has already begun to prepare herself for it. Unfortunately, Ana's model of strength and capability, in this particular case, was not in itself sufficient to protect her daughter from despair.

### Summary of Protective Factors

Looking at all the cases described above, patterns of protection and risk emerge. Although all the children experienced considerable life stress, those who had more experiences of stability and security seemed to fare the best.

#### Residential Stability

Living in the same apartment or neighborhood over the children's school-years seemed to benefit the children and their families. One reason was because residential stability also contributed to school stability (see below). Children who were precariously housed but continued to attend the same school fared better than those whose residential instability also resulted in school changes. One reason was that families who stayed in the same neighborhood were able to draw upon community institutions and their established social support networks.

#### School Stability

Attending the same school over several years seems to improve children's chances for educational success. Multiple school changes, if they were limited to a single school year and followed a relatively stable school history, did not necessarily hurt children's educational outcomes, as in Isabel's case. Therefore, school stability must be looked at in terms of the number of years a child is in the same school, as well as the total number of times a child changes school. Most studies of homeless students focus only on the latter. Changing schools to improve a child's academic opportunities, as in Isabel's case, or to provide a child with a setting in which he or she is more comfortable, as in Manny's case, can also benefit the child.

Frequent school changes over a child's educational history seemed to contribute to academic problems and weakened children's connections to the educational process. It is more difficult for schools to identify and respond to children's academic needs if they are not there for very long, as in the cases of Anthony, Danny, and Devon. The same is true for children having personal or emotional problems like Yvette and Troy, who might have received some supportive services if they had been in a context where the teacher was familiar with them. In Didi's case, it is likely that staying in the same school helped her to overcome her initial academic and behavioral problems.

For some homeless children, changing schools may intensify their feelings of personal loss, insecurity, and the loss of control over their lives. This was most evident in the cases of Troy and Yvette. For both these children, who experienced nearly a lifetime of uncontrollable, unrelenting, severe, stress, changing schools seemed to be the "last straw." Troy's response took the form of severe aggression, which was acted out in the school context. Yvette's response was as extreme, but directed against herself, rather than others.

### Positive School Experiences

Maintaining a belief that education is important and an image of oneself as a successful student was able to keep children connected to school and help them to weather negative school experiences. Neither Isabel, Didi, Anthony, nor Manny had a positive attitude toward their present schools, but all felt positive about learning. In contrast Troy,

Devon, and Danny had neither a positive attitude toward their school or a sense of themselves as "learners." The more positive experiences that children have in school, the greater their chances will be to withstand school-related stress. At the same time, however, consistently negative school experiences can undo the effects of a dedicated and caring teacher (Coles, 1967/1971; Kohl, 1967; Polakow, 1993).

### Mothers' Messages About School

Having a mother who communicates the importance of education appears to promote a positive learning attitude in their children. By teaching their children at home, expressing to their children their expectations that they will finish high school or college, selecting a better school for them, and continuing their own education, the mothers conveyed this message to their children. In Isabel and Manny's cases, incidents that had occurred when they were in kindergarten continued to stand out in their memories. In contrast, Troy's mother conveyed an attitude that he would not succeed in school.

The parents' communication and interaction with their children's school seemed to be less important, however. At the time of the interview, both Didi and Isabel's mothers had little contact with their children's school. Both mothers, however, continued to keep track of their daughters' progress, through support provided by the Tier II facility. In contrast, Troy and the twins' mothers were constantly at the school, but their involvement did not seem to improve their children's educational experience.

### Social Support

All of the children suffered extensive social losses in the process of becoming homeless. Children like Didi and Isabel benefitted from their mothers' extensive social

support network including contact with their father or "step-father." The rest of the families were more socially isolated. Some mothers, such as Samantha and Rosa, were able to partially compensate for their family's lack of social support by obtaining help from service providers to address their own needs and being extra attentive to their children. Brenda and Elena were the most isolated in terms of social and institutional support. Neither woman felt that she had friends and family in her life to whom she could turn for assistance. Both women distanced themselves from the Tier II facilities and their service providers, at the same time, they did not or were not able to obtain any services on their own. This may have conveyed an image of helplessness to their children as well.

#### Institutional Support

The Tier II facility provided the women with their primary source of institutional support, although the range of services that were available varied across residences. The Tier II facility was also a source of stress for the women. The restrictive and intrusive nature of these facilities threatened the women's self image. The women whose children had better outcomes either took advantage of the Tier II services, or regulated their use of services. That is, they were selective about the services they used or the service providers with whom they interacted. This allowed them to retain some control over the process. In contrast, the other women had more difficulty balancing their needs for assistance with their need for control and dignity. They rejected services and had more of a confrontative relationship with the Tier II staff. The children lose out in these situations because their mothers end up with less support, but also because they lack an effective model of how to obtain assistance from others.

The families who have been described above, as well as the other families who were not included as cases, all have experienced severe life stress. The intensity of this stress and their available resources to deal with it varied, however. As we discuss all the things that can possibly go wrong in children's lives, it is important to keep in mind all the things that can help children. Creating a socio-economic context that promotes residential and school stability, improving children's educational environments, eliminating the barriers to services that are needed to sustain families, supporting mothers in their own educational, career, or personal goals -- these all will help families, and the children in them to succeed.

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN OVERALL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

Families who are homeless contend with a constant stream of struggles and stress - crowded, deteriorated housing, unsafe and alienating neighborhoods, inhospitable schools where their children do not seem to learn effectively, precarious social relationships, difficulties obtaining supportive services, and the degradation of public welfare -- all of which have an impact on children's educational experiences. These struggles are not unique to families who are homeless, however, but are part of the life experiences of families who live in poverty (Fine, 1993; Garbarino, et al., 1992; Molnar et al., 1991; Mulroy, 1995; Polakow, 1994; Quint, 1994). In this final chapter, therefore, I will discuss how homelessness is related to the larger issues of poverty and schooling.

### **Residential Stability - The Deferred Dream**

The distinction between residential stability and residential instability becomes blurred when it is examined within the context of the limited housing options of poor, single mothers. Of the ten most "stable" families in this study (i.e., those who had lived in one place for five years or more), six mothers had lived in their parents' apartments, one had lived in another shared household, and one had lived in a building that was condemned. These women stayed in the same place although they were not satisfied with their housing situation and some even felt that they risked their families' personal safety in doing so. Only two women had been able to obtain relatively stable, adequate housing, independent from her parents' household, at some time before becoming homeless.

As residential stability was a result of limited housing options so was residential instability. When the women attempted to improve their families' living conditions by moving to a less expensive apartment, a different neighborhood, or by establishing a household independent of their parents or partners, it typically resulted in a series of moves, putting the families into more precarious living arrangements (i.e., doubling up) and finally entry into the shelter system.

When the lives of these families are examined over time, the precariousness of their housing conditions becomes increasingly apparent. What we typically envision in our society, as an expected and, until recently, taken for granted event in the life cycle -- starting a family and moving out on one's own -- was often the beginning of a life crises. This point is obscured in the literature on homelessness (Milburn & D'Ercole, 1991), which considers families' precarious housing arrangements to be a characteristic peculiar to homeless families. In contrast, in recent work on poverty and gender, Mulroy (1995) and Polakow (1993) argue that single mothers over a broad economic spectrum are at risk of homelessness. The fewer economic and social resources single mothers have, the greater their risk.

Establishing residential stability is particularly difficult for single mothers because it is linked to a number of other needs (i.e., personal safety, sufficient income, health care, and child care), all of which must be met at the same time in the face of considerable systemic barriers (i.e., public welfare policies, gender biases in the legal system, racial discrimination) (Mulroy, 1995; Polakow, 1993).

A jumbled set of issues teeter like irregularly shaped building blocks that rarely seem to come together in a coordinated fashion and yet are interdependent elements (Mulroy, pp. 6).

If the delicate balance between women's needs and resources is disturbed -- if any one of the "building blocks" is removed (e.g., affordable child care) the rest of the structure often falls apart (e.g. job, housing, health care) and leaves the family in a downward spiral toward homelessness. Because of the families' interrelated needs and the tremendous amount of energy that is required to meet them, a single life event, such as a mother's or a child's physical illness, can trigger a series of crises, which in turn, can have severe educational consequences for the children (Fine, 1993; Reynolds et al., 1993).

#### Parental Responsibility and Mothering

One theme that resounded throughout the women's interviews was the contradictory expectations placed upon them in their role as mothers. Boxill and Beaty (1990) asserted that the context of homelessness creates an "unraveling of the mother role." They observed that the lack of privacy in congregate shelters exposed women's mothering behaviors to a judgmental audience of professionals as well as other mothers. At the same time, the rules, regulations and supervision of staff in these shelters, usurped the mother's role as decision-maker in her household.

Despite the greater physical privacy provided by the Tier II facilities in relation to the congregate shelters, this experience of "public mothering" was also expressed by women living in Tier II facilities (Molnar et al., 1991; Rivlin, 1989), including the women I interviewed. The lack of cooking facilities and curfew regulations challenged two of the most basic tasks of mothering -- providing nourishment and regulating bedtimes. The

women's daily activities were exposed to numerous staff members (e.g., caseworkers, monitors) who had some say over their lives. Not surprisingly, a reaction that is heard frequently from these women is "they treat us like children."

Before women entered the Tier II, their limited housing options, which forced them to "double-up" with friends and family, also placed their mothering behaviors in a more public context where it was exposed to the critique of others, often their own mothers. Although this arrangement can greatly benefit single mothers it can also be a source of tremendous difficulties (Mulroy, 1995; Polakow, 1993). Several women, who appreciated their mothers' support, described how it prevented them from being a mother to their own children.

Single mothers who are in the labor force also face difficulties in the context of mothering. Mulroy (1995) reported that two-thirds of single mothers earned less than \$20,000 a year; and 40% earned less than \$10,000 a year. Due to the high cost of childcare, single mothers often have to work long hours, which may make it necessary to leave their children unsupervised, or in a childcare arrangement which they consider unsatisfactory (Fine, 1993, Mulroy, 1995; Polakow, 1993). Even women with adequate childcare arrangements may find that they have very little time to be with their children. Due to these "high costs of working" single mothers often "transition back and forth between low-wage employment and public welfare" depending on their circumstances (Mulroy, 1995).

The social and economic structure does not allow single women to be effective mothers. That is, mothers are forced to make choices which they know are not necessarily

good for their children. As women go from being poor wage-earners, to poor public welfare recipients, to poor, homeless, public welfare recipients, their range of choices diminishes. At the same time, their actions receive greater scrutiny by those who have power over their lives and who have greater expectations for them to be "bad mothers". In this context, if a mother should fall short, the consequences are more severe -- having her public assistance benefits withheld, eviction from housing or temporary facility, and, ultimately, losing custody of her children.

#### The Social Construction of Bad Mothers

Being investigated by the Child Welfare Administration (formerly the Bureau of Child Welfare or BCW) seemed to be a "natural hazard" in the lives of the women I interviewed, although very few women had charges brought against them. Poor women, who rely on public services, come into contact with a large number of mandated reporters of child abuse (i.e., caseworkers, doctors, school personnel), who may employ a stricter standard than those in the private sector (Diver-Stamnes, 1995). For example, one woman explained that the Tier II daycare staff called BCW because she picked up her child late. In a private preschool, like the one my child attends, parents who arrive late may be charged a penalty fee. Another woman was reported by her son's school, due to his poor attendance, without first contacting the mother to ask for an explanation.

One indication of the constant presence of BCW in the lives of poor women is that neighbors and family members use it to strike out against mothers during times of conflict (Polakow, 1993). In this study, as well as with other experiences I have had with low-

income women, it was not uncommon for the women to have received a complaint of neglect or abuse after some altercation with an ex-partner or neighbor.

During this research one incident revealed that poor women may learn to judge each other using the same stringent standards that is used against them. When I was interviewing a woman in Residence E, we were interrupted by a commotion in the hall -- the sounds of a woman wailing, screaming staff, and sobbing children. What I was witnessing, another resident explained to me, was the Bureau of Child Welfare removing a women's children. A child had been burned by upsetting the dinner cooking on a hot plate, which was a violation of the facility's regulations. The women around me expressed sadness and concern for the children, but basically felt the woman was responsible and the response by the facility to call BCW was an appropriate one. One woman commented to me, "You know, we all cook in our rooms, but you have to watch the children. I always cook in the bathroom with the door shut." In the absence of kitchen facilities, these women take a tremendous risk to cook for their families. If an unsupervised child is burned in someone's private home, the event would probably be considered a "preventable accident" rather than "negligence" (Garbarino, 1988).

### The Two Faces of Social Services

The findings of the present study are consistent with the research that shows supportive services greatly enhance families' resiliency and ability to withstand life crises (Mulroy, 1995; Polakow, 1993; Quint, 1994; Shorr, 1988). At the same time, however, it suggests that social services are not benign nor are they a panacea for homeless families. In the same studies cited above, women describe the process of obtaining social services

as degrading, time consuming, confusing, and frustrating. At the end of the process, they often discover that what they need is not what is available. Also, as mentioned above, women found that by seeking out services, even those they felt they needed, they increased their visibility as "suspect" mothers as well as their risk of losing their children.

A second issue that seldom comes up in the discussion of social service provision is the power relationship between the providers and the women they serve. Boxill and Beaty (1990) described mothers' attempts to take control over their lives by saying "no" to others, including helpers in the facility. The women in this study were required to meet with their assigned caseworkers at least once a week, in some facilities twice a week. The element of control or even coercion in this service delivery structure is counter-productive, since some women described their refusal of services in terms of exerting control over their lives.

#### Long-term Effectiveness of Social Services

Even if families' receive comprehensive services in a facilitative Tier II environment, what are the chances that these families will be able to remain housed in a stable, adequate setting? DaCosta Nunez (1994) argued that the comprehensive services provided by the Residential Educational Training (RET) model implemented by Homes for the Homeless (HFH) have a long-term impact on families. He reported that 94% of the families served in HFH facilities remain housed after one year, compared to the 50% of families served in other emergency facilities. Part of the RET plan includes one-year of follow-up, case management services after the family obtains housing. Caseworkers help families to access social and educational services in their new neighborhoods.

As single mothers leave such a service-rich Tier II facility they may find that they have fewer services, particularly if they try to give up public assistance. In the Tier II facility families receive public assistance benefits and health benefits. Their housing costs are covered (\$100 per day per family). They often have access to childcare for preschool children (although not always for infants or young toddlers). There may be afterschool and recreational programs for children until 6:00 in the evening. Once they leave this facility this comprehensive service package will be largely unavailable to them.

Mulroy (1995) and Polakow (1993) documented how single mothers often cannot afford to work due to the high costs and limited availability of health and childcare in relation to their wages. They often found that publicly funded or supplemented childcare typically did not provide full-day care and forced the women to use multiple service providers. Childcare issues also prevented women from obtaining additional education or training that would allow them to increase their wages. Low wages contributed to precarious housing conditions that could then lead to homelessness. The types of comprehensive services that enhance homeless families' ability to obtain housing are needed on a much wider scale to ensure economic and residential stability.

#### The Role of School in the Lives of Homeless Children

The many barriers to homeless students' educational success has been documented extensively (see Rafferty, 1995). Researchers have focused on how educational policies (or lack thereof) prevent homeless children from attending school (Alker, 1992; First, 1992; Helm, 1992; Rafferty, 1995; Stronge, 1992), and how the conditions associated with homelessness (residential and school instability, poor nutrition, lack of sleep,

crowded or unsafe shelter conditions) adversely affect children's intellectual, social, emotional and psychological development (Crosson Tower, 1992; Van Ry, 1992). With a few exceptions (Gonzalez, 1992; Quint, 1994) there is a marked absence of an analysis of the school context itself and how it affects the educational experiences of homeless children. The findings of the present study support the position that it is critical to include a discussion of the role of the school in the current discourse on homeless students' educational barriers.

As it was excluded minority, handicapped, and at-risk children who desperately sought legal rights to free, appropriate public education in the 1970s and 1980s, so it is homeless children who seek ground-breaking precedents upon schoolhouse steps in the 1990s. Unfortunately, lessons of the past resound in the present: Overcoming barriers to school enrollment and gaining access to an educative institution do not necessarily translate into a fruitful learning experience. For even after facilitating decisions are issued by the judiciary, and even after enabling legislation is passed by Congress and state legislatures, the reality of effecting "meaningful change" rests with school districts, principals, teachers, parents, and students. In the final analysis, social problems that were originally acknowledged as issues under the schoolhouse roof must be resolved at this same site. (Quint, 1994, pp. 7)

### Identity and Belongingness

Identity formation or establishing a sense of self is one of the developmental challenges of school-aged children (Seifert & Hoffnung, 1987). Children develop a sense of self through their social interactions, particularly within the family context. "Place identity" (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983) is also a component of self-identity, that refers to the process by which individuals use their experiences with the physical environment in defining who they are.

The identity formation of homeless children is threatened by the instability of their lives, which makes it difficult for them to develop an attachment to the critical settings of home, community, and school, as well as by the negative qualities or stigma associated with shelter facilities (Rivlin, 1990). The present study found that school stability helped children to develop a coherent image of school as a place for learning. Positive school experiences and parental messages affirming the value of school also promoted a sense of connection with school among the children, as well as a positive image of themselves as learners.

The present study identified many aspects of the school environment itself which discouraged attachment to school and worked to marginalize or alienate the children. These included the Labelling and tracking of students, low-level, uninspiring instruction, disciplinary practices based on exclusion and intimidation, school disorder and violence, and the exclusion of parents from the educational process. The result of this process of disconnection and disaffiliation with school was most profoundly expressed by one mother who made the comment about her son: "Keith doesn't know school." These educational experiences are not unique to homeless children but are often associated with the schooling of low-income children of color (Cummins, 1993; Diver-Stamnes, 1995; Kozol, 1991; Polakow, 1994; Quint, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 1992).

The classrooms become at-risk landscapes that impair young children's self-esteem, increase the stress already present in their vulnerable lives, and offer remediation services that impede development. (Polakow, 1993, pp 150)

In Quint's conversation with a 17 year-old, Native American, high school dropout he expresses how American schools perpetuate the sense of placelessness and alienation experienced by people of color.

Native Americans, African-Americans, Asian-Americans lost their homes and their sense of place over the course of the last two centuries. Homelessness is not new to them. It is only new to those people who are waking up from a collective amnesia.

As long as the schools continue to teach social inequity by the very way they treat kids every single moment of the day, acting as if kids' personal and social problems are invisible, this country will continue to sleepwalk.

You say you want to bring about some change in the schools. Start by putting a sign over the entrance of every school building that reads: "School May Be Harmful to Your Emotional and Social Well-Being. Enter at Your Own Risk. This School Does Not Assume Responsibility for Your Sense of Belonging or Your Sense of Place." (Quint, 1994, pp. 10)

### Labelling and Tracking of Students

Despite their questionable validity, student assessment procedures dominate educational placement decisions, which have negative consequences for poor, nonwhite, or language minority children (Cummins, 1993; Gartner & Lipsky, 1993). Rather than identify characteristics that indicate "risk," there is a growing awareness that these procedures create risk factors that put the children on a course leading to school failure (Cummins, 1993; Gartner & Lipsky, 1993; Polakow, 1993).

The educational practices that lead to increased risk of school failure include the grouping of low-achieving children or "tracking," the placement of children in special education or compensatory education programs, particularly "pull-out" programs which fragment their school day, and grade retention. These practices marginalize students by consigning them to a low level of education which exacerbates their educational problems

rather than alleviate them (Cummins, 1993; Gartner & Lipsky, 1993; Grissom & Shepard, 1989; U.S. Department of Education, 1992). These practices also threaten students sense of identity and self-esteem. The children eventually see themselves as failures or as not fitting into the classroom.

In the present study, 19 of the 31 children had either been held back, placed in special education, or were in an "inappropriate" bilingual class or grade. Every one of the eight lowest achieving children had been subjected to one of these placement decisions, and several experienced more than one. Parental resistance to the tracking, Labelling, and grade retention of their children was minimal. First, many of the mothers had bought into the idea that children who are having problems in school need to learn at a slower pace. The lengthy and formal processes of educational and psychological evaluation typically convinced mothers that their children needed special education. Mothers who supported grade retention believed that it enabled their children to catch up on academic skills or get over socialization problems (e.g., being shy or aggressive). Second, when the mothers attempted to resist these placement decisions, they were largely ineffective. Almost every mother resisted the more informal or arbitrary placement of their children in the wrong grade or a bilingual class. In only one case, however, did the school change its placement decision after a mother's complaint.

Placement decisions must be examined within the school context. In the present study the teachers reported very few alternatives aside from special education or remedial instruction to deal with the academic and behavioral problems of their students. Although some teachers may use special education to rid their classroom of "difficult" students

(Gartner & Lipsky, 1993; Polakow, 1993), teachers who believe that special education is not necessarily the answer to their students' problems may not feel that they have any other options. In Among Schoolchildren, Kidder (1989) described a teacher's anguish when she finally agreed to place one of her students in a special education class.

To send him away was to tell him the same old news: he was a problem; he had failed. And to help Clarence by placing him in a special class among a number of notoriously unruly children -- might as well say his behavior would improve if he was made to join a street gang. She couldn't argue for doing that to him... And yet at the same time, removing Clarence from the class seemed like a just solution... Was it fair to let one child's problems interfere with the education of nineteen other children, many of them just as needy as Clarence?.. She had one sinking fear. Had she wanted, deep down, to get rid of Clarence? (pp. 166-167)

Educational reforms, including bilingual education, compensatory preschool education, special education, and remediation have not improved the educational outcomes for poor children, because they are based on the premise that student failure is related to student characteristics rather than the context of schooling. In doing so, they have failed to address the power relations within the structure of schooling -- the relationship between teachers and students and the schools and the communities they serve (Cummins, 1993; Fine, 1993; Polakow, 1994).

### Curriculum

There is increasing evidence that children who live in poverty are placed "at risk" by the low level of instruction they receive in school (Cummins, 1993; Polakow, 1993; U.S. Department of Education, 1992). In what Polakow refers to as "pedagogy of the poor," the instructional strategies used in school settings serving children of poverty emphasize basic skills instruction, with a heavy usage of workbook exercises, drill, and

rote learning in classrooms that are tightly controlled and dominated by the teacher (U.S. Department of Education, 1992). By disassociating meaning from instruction, these strategies are believed to alienate children from the process of learning. When children tune out and fall behind, compensatory services which fragment their school day, often put them farther behind, and increase their sense of not fitting in the classroom (Cummins, 1993; Kozol, 1991; Polakow, 1993; U.S. Department of Education, 1992).

Since I did not observe classrooms, I cannot describe the instructional strategies used by the children's teachers. However, the descriptions of schoolwork that came from even the most articulate and grounded students (many of the other children could not provide any coherent description of their schoolwork) resounded with "pedagogy of the poor" elements. Overall, the children's description of their schoolwork emphasized the mechanics of language arts and mathematics instruction (i.e. spelling, cloze, reading aloud, timetables memorization, copying letters), rather than comprehension or composition. Only two students mentioned writing as part of their schoolwork. None mentioned any discussion of reading content or group projects. Even subjects such as art and music seemed to be taught in a manner which reinforced passivity rather than imagination and creativity. In these classes the children mentioned that they watched films, listened to music, sang songs, colored, or drew. None described the more engaging activities of playing instruments, composing music, dancing or building things.

Alternative approaches to instruction that focus on the development of higher order cognitive skills, a collaborative rather than a teacher-dominated learning context, a recognition and integration of students' background both in instructional content and style

have been found to promote learning among disenfranchised students (Cummins, 1993; Quint, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 1992). In New York City, instructional practices emphasizing acceleration rather than remediation have been incorporated at the Brownstone School, an afterschool program for homeless students, to help them overcome educational deficits (DaCosta Nunez, 1994). Nunez reported that children who demonstrated learning deficiencies made extraordinary gains and even excelled in some areas, as a result of their program.

#### Sensitivity to Students' Backgrounds

In the present study, the teachers recognized that their students faced a number of problems that could negatively affect their education; homelessness was not necessarily the worst. However, awareness of students' backgrounds does not necessarily translate into more meaningful learning experiences for children. Teachers who have negative stereotypes and low expectations of poor, homeless, nonwhite, or language minority children increase students' risk for failure (Cummins, 1993; Diver-Stamnes, 1995; Polakow, 1993; U.S. Department of Education; 1992).

Teachers who are ignorant of their students' backgrounds can also place them at risk by implementing lessons that are irrelevant to their lives, and misinterpreting their behavior as well as their needs (Cummins, 1993; Quint, 1994; U.S. Department of Education). Effective, "empowering" teachers demonstrate respect for their students' backgrounds and draw upon their strengths. They alter both the content of the curriculum as well as their instructional approaches in response to students' social and cultural characteristics (Cummins, 1993; Quint, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 1995).

In the present study, very few of the teachers described ways they integrated their background knowledge of students into their instructional strategies. One teacher, however, who said she was motivated by our interview, decided to discuss the issue of homelessness with her second grade class. She later told me that in the course of the class discussion one boy, who she suspected had a history of homelessness, described his experiences of living in a homeless shelter with the class. The children responded to him in a supportive and interested way. The teacher felt that by providing a context for him to discuss his experiences that he became more open and more integrated within the class. In Coles' (1967/1971) study of migrant children, a boy described his most positive school experience as being the day when his teacher gave him the opportunity to discuss his experiences as a migrant farmer in a non-threatening, validating way. In both cases, the teachers' awareness translated into a positive classroom experience for the homeless children and their classmates.

Given the range and seriousness of the problems children living in poverty face, even teachers who are aware of their students' problems sometimes feel at a loss when it comes to dealing with them (Diver-Stamnes, 1995; Garbarino et al., 1992; Kidder, 1989; Quint, 1994). Garbarino et al. found that teachers, administration, and support staff in "urban war zones" did not know how to respond to the frequency and types of problems that they knew the children faced in their daily lives, such as preschool children they discovered who were pretending to shoot-up drugs or playing funeral in their classrooms. Teacher-training as well as a supportive school environment are both important factors in

enabling teachers to address their students' problems in an effective and appropriate way (Garbarino et al., 1992; Gonzalez, 1992; Quint, 1994).

The abilities of schools to address the multi-dimensional needs of homeless students are also threatened by the present political and economic climate. The teachers in the present study mentioned several educational services for students in need (e.g., counseling, after-school programs) that had been eliminated due to budget cuts. They did not even consider the possibility of having teacher aides in the classroom. With the exception of special education, more than one classroom teacher is apparently a thing of the past. As poverty levels among children continue to increase (Strawn, 1992) the schools find themselves in the position of having to educate more children deprived of basic needs (i.e., food, housing, clothing), but have less resources to do so. One of the most current threats is the efforts to reduce the federally funded school meal programs.

#### Parent Involvement

Overall, the mothers in the present study expressed a great deal of interest in and concern for their children's education. Most of them felt that both they and the school were ultimately responsible for their children's educational success. However, the mothers, even those who felt positively about their children's school, expressed a considerable amount of alienation from it. Most did not know, for example, whether the schools had a library or computers for the children. The schools were described as places where parents had limited access and where many felt like outsiders. These themes of alienation are fairly common, particularly among low-income parents (Fine, 1993). Teachers, in their descriptions of homeless students who were successful in school, often

credited the parents' efforts, in addition to their own. In cases where homeless students were not successful, however, teachers focussed exclusively on family background to account for it.

Quint's (1994) description of a successful school for homeless children placed a great deal of emphasis on meeting family needs. The school took an extensive, user-friendly, case management approach with its families. Based on the premise that children could not learn if they were hungry or worried about other basic needs, the school housed a transition room stocked with food, clothing and staffed with a nurturing adult to whom children could come whenever the need arose. The school also helped families find and furnish housing in the neighborhood, obtain social service benefits and jobs. The school also provided numerous opportunities for parents to enhance their education as well as help other parents and students do the same. Quint felt that establishing this "collaboration" between the parents and schools made the school a welcome place for parents to be, and ultimately benefitted the children.

### Classroom Management

An ongoing theme throughout the children's interviews was how student disturbances within the classroom as well as teachers' ineffective efforts to manage them, created disruptions in children's learning. The following quote is a typical example of how homelessness, and the distractions and crowding accompanying it, are thought to affect children's educational experiences.

Shelter life, punctuated by chaos, full of stimuli, and lacking in privacy, provides little or no opportunity for children to concentrate. Robbed of this opportunity, children often lose the ability to concentrate (Crosson Tower, 1992, pp. 46)

If I were to replace the word "shelter" with the word "school," this quote would adequately reflect the educational experiences for a number of children in the present study.

In examining the relationship between classroom management practices and instructional strategies, the U.S. Department of Education (1992) found that the teachers' ineffectiveness in maintaining order resulted in little instruction taking place -- most of the teacher-student interactions were around management issues. They also found differences in "orderly" learning environments, where most students were engaged in academic work. In the "orderly, restrictive learning environments" students completed their assignments, but the learning process lacked spontaneity or a sense of joy in learning. In contrast, in "orderly, enabling environments" students not only completed their assignments but clearly enjoyed the learning process. Almost every teacher who created an orderly, enabling environment also used alternative instructional strategies. In the less orderly and more restrictive learning environments more conventional approaches were used. In comparing student characteristics with the type of learning environment, they also found that while all classrooms served similar numbers of low-income students that:

The poorest and lowest-achieving classrooms and those with the highest transiency rates or pupil-staff ratios are less likely, on average, to experience an academic learning environment that is both orderly and academically challenging. (pp. 299)

In a "pedagogy of the poor" making children compliant and quiet takes precedence over instruction (Polakow, 1993). Polakow observed that as early as preschool poor children were exposed to rigid learning environments which squelched their sense of imagination, playfulness, and took the joy out of learning.

These findings are extremely important in understanding the differences among homeless children's school experiences. Beyond homelessness, individual student characteristics may be related to the quality of educational services the children receive. Kozol (1992), who documented the inequities in educational services between schools serving poor, nonwhite and affluent, white students, argued that because our society considers nonwhite children living in poverty to be "poor investments" they provide them with fewer resources, which results in a less than adequate education.

It is likely that in schools which serve more homogenous, low-income, student populations, there are similar processes to identify who are "poor investments". In the present study, I suspect that PS 118 in Manhattan placed students who were considered to have "promise" in the better classrooms with better teachers, (such as Ms. Ramirez), while those who were considered to be problems were stuck wherever there was room, regardless of its appropriateness for the child.

#### Beyond the Realm of Discipline

When a classroom or school is organized around the principles of compliance rather than active learning, it is not difficult to imagine how efforts to control students can become increasingly more punitive. Many of the disciplinary tactics described by the students in the present study could be considered a threat to students' development of academic skills as well as self-esteem. Excluding children by sending them to the principal's office or the hallway denies them opportunities for learning. Screaming at one or two children disrupts learning for the entire classroom and creates a stressful

environment. Conversely, effective disciplinary strategies show respect for students and emphasize ownership and responsibility for their own behavior (Quint, 1994).

In the present study, many of the children and their parents described incidents that went well beyond the realm of discipline and approached abuse. The number of reports of teachers cursing at children, calling them disparaging names (i.e., punks, creeps, shelter children) threatening to hurt them, or actually using physical force or aggression, was both incomprehensible and appalling. One might question whether the children were exaggerating these incidents, however, children's responses within the same classroom were very consistent. Polakow (1993) described similar treatment of poor and homeless students in preschool and elementary school classrooms. In one of the worst cases, she described a preschool teacher who used food deprivation, "a clearly unethical practice" to discipline a hungry, homeless child. In discussing teachers' treatment of students attending a high school in Watts, Los Angeles, Diver-Stamnes (1995) also reported that:

The incidence of racist remarks, sarcastic and caustic comments, and harassment was distressingly high... Students learned painful messages about adults' perceptions of their worth from such occurrences. (pp. 113)

She attributed these behaviors to the lack of parental involvement in school, which left teachers believing that they did not have to be accountable for their actions.

### School Violence

School violence as well as threats from the neighborhood surrounding the school, were themes which dominated the children's accounts of school, as well as their parents'. The children typically perceived the adults at school (i.e., teachers and administration) as being unable or unwilling to protect them from the threat of other children, and insensitive

to the pain it caused them. Incidents of school violence were distressing for children whether they were the perpetrator, victim, or a witness.

Exposure to violence has an impact on children's social, emotional, psychological, and intellectual development (Garbarino et al., 1992). Garbarino et al. found that children who were exposed to community violence displayed aggression and inhibition, developed somatic complaints, as well as cognitive disorders and learning difficulties. Grannis et al. (1988) also found that school stress, of which violence was a part, had aversive consequences for students attending intermediate school. The present findings suggest that residential instability, resulting in frequent school changes, can result in increased incidences of violence against homeless students, who may be singled out due to their "new kid" status.

It is difficult to imagine how children can learn in an environment where they do not feel safe. School-based conflict resolution programs are beginning to proliferate in the schools. Although helping children to resolve disputes and learn alternative ways of dealing with their problems might be helpful, I would expect the effects to be limited within a school culture which either promoted violence (i.e., through abusive treatment of the students) or did little to prevent its occurrence (i.e. through lack of adult supervision). Teachers, particularly those of older students, are often targets of student violence. These incidents are usually attributed to the students' individual pathologies, or those of their homes and communities. How much of it, I wonder, is related to the violence that seems inherent in the culture of schools, as well as the way the children have been treated, or have seen others treated in school over time.

Quint (1994) described how increased adult supervision and enforcing high behavioral standards in a non-punitive way can effectively reduce incidents of school violence. To provide more adult supervision this school implemented an innovative program to hire and train parents of homeless students as schoolyard and school bus monitors. At the same time, through an extensive training process, teachers became more aware of the family and community factors that contributed to the children's school behaviors, as well as how their responses to the children could exacerbate school behavioral problems. They also learned new ways to make the children accountable for their behavior without the use of "put downs."

Schools have much less control over their students' exposure to community violence, but can help to offset the individual impact it has (Diver-Stamnes, 1995; Garbarino et al., 1992). Diver-Stamnes described how peer-counseling and stress management helped high school students alleviate their stress reactions. Although these approaches do not reduce exposure it may help to protect children from the aversive, physical outcomes of long-term stress (i.e., high blood pressure). Garbarino et al. recommend that teachers of younger children address issues around violence as they arise, while older children may benefit from a more structured approach (i.e. integrated into the curricula). However, they stress that it is essential that these initiatives, in order to be effective, are implemented within a supportive, nurturing, developmentally appropriate, and facilitative school environment.

### Deconstructing the School as Haven

Schools may provide homeless children with a sense of coherence and stability due to the uniformity of educational institutions, as well as the regular, routinized character of the school day. The act of going to school every day can be a normalizing experience for a homeless child whose life is utterly disrupted. Studies finding that homeless students have positive attitudes toward school support the idea of the school as haven (Horowitz et al., 1988; Konik, 1987).

The children's descriptions of their schools in this study, as well as the numerous descriptions of schools that serve similar children across the United States (Kozol, 1991; U.S. Department of Education, 1992; Polakow, 1993) seriously challenge the conception of the school as a haven for homeless children, or for any of the children who are living in poverty.

The findings of the present study suggest that children's feelings about school are very complicated and filled with contradictions. Although, the children did not describe their schools as very pleasant places in which to be, many of them enjoyed the opportunities for learning and socializing with peers that school provided them. The degree to which children struggled to stay connected to school in spite of the disabling aspects of the school environment was remarkable to me. Classroom observations of "dysfunctional learning environments" serving low-income students (U.S. Department of Education, 1992) revealed similar themes.

Although there were nasty incidents, including a few serious fights, there were occasional moments of laughter and warmth. In fact, study team field staff were surprised to notice that the students often seemed immune to what seemed to be a

tense, highly unpleasant situation. The students had developed coping mechanisms, and in many cases managed to enjoy themselves. This energy, however, was not channeled into academic tasks. (pp. 293)

Children's responses to their educational environments can be best understood as an interaction of individual characteristics and school characteristics. Four of the children in the present study lived in the same residence, attended the same school, and were in the same classroom, but responded to school differently (two struggled to stay connected, one child tuned out, and one child acted out).

The children's ability to cope with the negative aspects of their educational environments and optimize their educational experiences, seems to be related to several factors. One is that children enter their school years with a strong desire to learn and to demonstrate their competencies to others. The children in this study who were among the most disconnected from school expressed that they wanted to learn, even when they could not articulate what it was they were supposed to be learning. A second factor is that children seem to get a great deal out of the aspects of school that they enjoy. For some children this may be solely the social aspects of school. Third is that the children may be resigned to their fate. They are aware that they have little choice but to go to school, so they try to make the best of it. As children become older and more independent it is likely that negative school experiences will result in the decision not to attend school, as in the cases of Troy and Martin.

Children's tenacity to stay connected to school is not unlimited, as the elevated high school dropout figures, particularly among African-American and Latino students, indicate. Children who are continuously uprooted from their schools, or when they go to

school, find that their academic, social and psychological needs are ignored, will eventually internalize the message that they do not belong there.

The public outcry demanding that homeless students obtain access to schooling continues, as it should. Chances are, however, that the students who attend school, due to their marginal status in our society, will probably receive a second or third-rate education. But there is no public denouncement of the practices perpetuating these inequities (Kozol, 1992).

### Implications for Social Policy

Extensive, far-reaching policy changes are needed in order to improve the chances of homeless children, or potentially homeless children, to succeed in school. First, it is essential to support families to ensure family stability. Mulroy (1995) offers five levels of nested, basic needs that affect the stability of single-mother families:

1. The need for residential stability -- safe, affordable, habitable permanent housing;
2. The need for personal safety -- freedom from violence within and outside the home;
3. The need for belonging, family, and love relationships -- opportunities to overcome separation and loss from loved ones, enhance parent-child relationships and make new connections to others;
4. The need for self-esteem -- confidence in one's skills and abilities enable women to reenter the workplace, pursue education, and make important decisions affecting the family.
5. The need for self-discovery, and vision -- control over one's life choices (pp. 6-8).

Housing and economic development is at the root of these changes. Efforts to rebuild low-income communities, particularly those which include community residents in this process, can improve the physical and social quality of life for low-income families and

help to prevent homelessness. Given the changing nature of the family structure, and increasing numbers of single-parent household, there needs to be an awareness of and support for different housing alternatives. For example, cohousing is a form of housing, organized around principles of enhancing social connections, where land and buildings are cooperatively owned, managed, and/or developed (McCamant & Durrett, 1994). Residents also share in the development and implementation of services (e.g., meals, maintenance, and childcare). This form of housing arrangement can benefit single mothers having limited incomes, but due to the way it is financed in the United States, it has been an option primarily for middle to upper-income families.

Reliance on public assistance also puts single-mothers and their families at risk and keeps them impoverished. In order for more families to become financially stable, health and childcare services need to be more accessible for low-income mothers. Welfare reforms that permit women to become economically stable are also essential, replacing those which penalize mothers who try to work.

Educational reform is also critical to improve homeless children's chances for school success. Eliminating practices which perpetuate a "pedagogy of the poor" is a critical first step. School level changes that promote supportive, nurturing, developmentally appropriate, academically challenging, and self-enhancing, educational environments will improve the outcomes of all students, including those who are undergoing severe life crises such as homelessness. Both Quint (1994) and Crosson Tower (1992) described how school changes made possible through McKinney funding were able to benefit housed as well as homeless students.

Services to homeless families also need to be improved. Shelter policies which enhance stability and support connections to communities where families want and intend to live, must replace those which continue to destabilize families. Facilities housing homeless families need to be more sensitive to the developmental needs of children. Spaces and programs which promote free play, physical activity, and socialization are essential. Academic enrichment through activities like tutoring, story time, libraries, reading rooms, drama and art, or computer education could occur with a minimum of cost and space.

Better linkages among schools, businesses, community organizations, social service agencies, and shelter facilities are also needed. Large, city-wide agencies as well as smaller, community-based organizations have not been able to effectively respond to the needs of poor families. However, community partnership approaches which promote a sharing of resources and perspectives can increase the effectiveness of agencies that are attempting to address the consequences of poverty and homelessness singularly.

## APPENDIX

### Child Interview

Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Boro/Dist/School and Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

I am a student from City University and I'm doing a study on what second and third-graders think about school. Since you're in second (or third) grade, you know a lot about school and you can help me to learn more about it. So, I am going to ask you some questions about school. There are no right or wrong answers. Everything you tell me is private. Nobody is going to know your answers. If you come to a question that you don't want to answer, you don't have to answer it. It's important that you answer the questions honestly and tell me what you really think about school.

1. Can you tell me what a typical school day is like. From the time you get up in the morning what do you do? For example, today what did you do? When does school start? When does it end?

Note: Get list of events: how does the child get to school, who does she/he go with, the general school routine, and then coming home. For each activity named, probe for details and typicality of event (Does this happen every day?)

2. Not all kids feel the same way about school, so I'd like to know what you think about school.
  - a. First, what, if anything, do you like about it? (Probe: What do like about \_\_\_\_\_?)
  - b. What, if anything, do you not like about it? (Probe: What do you not like about \_\_\_\_\_?)
3. You told me a lot of different things about school, teachers, your schoolwork (mention some things the child named in question #1). I want to know more about the different parts of school.
  - a. What is your teacher like? (Probe: nice, helpful, hard, mean, understanding?) Follow with: What does she or he do that makes him or her \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. What about your schoolwork? (Probe: hard, easy, exciting, boring, fun) Follow with: What is \_\_\_\_\_ about your schoolwork?

- c. What about the other students? (Probe: friendly, kind, mean, tough)  
Follow with: What do they do that makes them \_\_\_\_\_?
  - d. Do you know the principal (assistant principal)? What is his or her name?  
What is he or she like?
  - e. What about the rules in school, do you know what they are? (Probe: do you think that they're fair?)
  - f. Do they have activities outside of the classroom at your school, like trips, clubs, or sports? (If yes) Do you go (or do them)? (If yes) Which activities? (If no) Did you ever go to them here or in any other school you went to? Would you like to? What keeps you from going (or doing) them?
  - g. Does anyone bother you at school or on your way to school? (If yes) What kinds of things do they do to bother you? What do you do about it?
  - h. Do you stay away from any places at school because you're afraid someone might hurt or bother you?
  - i. Do you feel like you belong at this school? Like you're a part of the school?
4. Do you remember the other schools you went to before this one?
- a. Were you in this school for all of 2nd (or 3rd) grade? What about 1st grade? What about kindergarten?
  - b. Which school do you like best, this school, your old schools, or are they all about the same?
  - c. So you like \_\_\_\_\_ the best? Why is that your favorite school?
  - d. Which school do you like the least? Why do you not like that school?
5. (If not answered in question #1) What do you do after school? For example, what did you do when you got home from school yesterday? (Probe: do you play with friends, do homework, watch T.V., visit, do other things). Get events from when child leaves school). Probe for details and typicality (Do you do this every day?)
- a. Did you do the same kinds of things before you lived here? What kinds of things did you used to do that you don't do here? What new things do you do here?

7. Do you ever get homework? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_
- If you have homework when do you do it?
  - Where do you do your homework?
  - If you need help with your homework does anyone help you to do it? Who is that?
  - Are you able to finish your homework once you start it? If you don't finish it, what do you do? Do you still give it to your teacher, do you talk to your teacher about it, do you leave it at home?
8. Can you tell me about your friends?
- Who is your best friend? Who is your next best friend?
  - Where does \_\_\_\_\_ live? Where does \_\_\_\_\_ live?
  - Do you see them a lot (every day, few times a week)? (If no) Why not?
  - Have you made any friends at the school you go to now?
  - Did you make any friends at your old school? Do you still see them?
  - Do you have any friends who live here? Do they go to your school?
9. Everybody feels bad sometimes and all people have problems that worry or scare them at different times of their lives. Do you ever have problems or worries (Probe: that make it difficult for you to go to school, do your schoolwork, play with friends, or sleep at night)?
10. I'd like to find out more about what helped when these hard things happened. Different kids get help or help themselves in different ways. (Go over things child named in question 9) What do you do when \_\_\_\_\_ happens. (If no response probe: you may try not to think about it, or think about something else, you might do something or change something, you might ask someone else for help). When you did \_\_\_\_\_ did it help you (how did it help you)?
11. Can you tell me about something in your life that makes you feel good? (Probe: Is there something you like to do, or something you're really good at?)

Teacher Interview

Boro/Dist./School \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_  
 Years taught in this school \_\_\_\_\_  
 Years taught altogether? \_\_\_\_\_

1. Have you, at any time, had students in your classes that you knew were homeless?  
 yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_  
 a. If yes: How did you know? Informed by (check all that apply):  
     Principal or Assistant Principal \_\_\_\_\_  
     School support staff \_\_\_\_\_  
     Other school staff (please name) \_\_\_\_\_  
     Parent \_\_\_\_\_  
     Student \_\_\_\_\_  
     Student's Siblings or Relatives \_\_\_\_\_  
     Other (please name) \_\_\_\_\_
2. Have you had students in your class that became homeless during the school year?  
 yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_  
 a. If yes: What happened to them?
3. Have you had any students in your class that you suspected were homeless but were not sure? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_  
 a. If yes: What made you suspect they were homeless?
4. How many students are generally in your class. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Over the past month, how many of these students were homeless?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
5. How long does a homeless student generally remain in your classroom?
6. Where do the homeless students in your class reside? (Check all that apply)  
 a. don't know \_\_\_\_\_  
 b. in local shelters or transitional housing \_\_\_\_\_  
 c. in shelters or transitional housing outside the school district/borough \_\_\_\_\_  
 d. with relatives in the district \_\_\_\_\_  
 e. Other \_\_\_\_\_ (Please describe)
7. Other than lack of housing, do homeless students face other problems?  
 yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

- a. If yes: What are they?
8. Do you think that homelessness impacts upon students' academic progress?  
(Please describe)
  9. Do you think that homelessness impacts upon students' social and psychological development? (Please describe)
  10. Can you think of one particular homeless child who revealed these or other problems. Please describe what that child was like.
  11. Do you have any background information on this particular child that would help explain how these problems developed?
  12. Can you identify any strengths or abilities shown by the homeless students in your classroom? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_  
Please describe them.
  13. Can you think of one particular homeless child who revealed these or other strengths and abilities? Please describe what that child was like.
  14. Do you have any background information on this particular child that would help explain how these strengths and abilities developed?
  15. During the school year, about how often do you speak or meet with parents?
    - a. Could you describe the nature of these contacts? (i.e. calls to home, parent meetings, casual meetings, etc.)
  16. Does your contact with the parents of homeless children differ in terms of frequency or reasons for contact?  
yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_ If yes: In what way?
  17. Has the presence of homeless children in your classroom had any impact upon your daily teaching practices?  
yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_ If yes: Please describe:
  18. Please describe the impact, if any, that homelessness has had upon your school.
  19. What types of services are provided to students/families in your school? (i.e. guidance, health, remedial classes, parent programs, after-school programs).  
Please list:

20. **Of these services, in which do homeless students/families participate? What, if anything, prevents homeless students from participating**
21. **What types of extracurricular activities are available at your school (i.e. trips, sports, clubs).**
22. **Of these activities, in which do homeless students participate. What, if anything, prevents homeless students from participating**
23. **Are you aware of any services or activities that specifically are available for homeless students?**  
yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_ If yes: Please list:
24. **Are there any services needed by homeless students that are insufficient or are not currently available in your school? Please describe.**

### Parent Interview

Parent ID#: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

#### A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Child's Name & School I.D. (if known) \_\_\_\_\_

2. Child's Birthdate: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Child's Present School: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Primary language spoken at home \_\_\_\_\_

5. Who is living here with you?

<u>AGE</u>	<u>SEX</u>	<u>RELATIONSHIP</u>
_____	_____	_____

6. Do you have other children? yes\_\_ no\_\_ If yes:

<u>Age</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Where Do They Live</u>	<u>How Long</u>	<u>Do You See Child</u>
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

7. Does the child's father live in the NYC area? yes \_\_ no \_\_ don't know \_\_

b. Do you have contact with him/her? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

If yes: How often? \_\_\_\_\_

c. Does he/she have contact with your child? yes \_\_ no \_\_

If yes: How often? \_\_\_\_\_

d. Is he/she employed? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_ don't know \_\_\_\_\_

e. Does he/she support you or your child? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

If yes: In what way? \_\_\_\_\_

#### B. Housing History: The next questions are about the different places you've lived.

8. How long have you been living here? \_\_\_\_\_

9. When did you enter the shelter system? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Using Housing History Chart, map where family has lived since the child was born.

a. Where did you live just before entering the shelter system? (Probe: Was that own place? Which borough?)

b. Since your child was born you moved \_\_\_\_\_ times.

- c. Experienced \_\_\_\_ periods of homelessness.
  - d. Lived in \_\_\_\_\_ shelters.
  - e. Lived doubled up at least once. yes \_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_  
If yes, with whom? (Probe: relatives, friends)
11. Has your child ever lived with anyone other than yourself (friend, relatives) or has he or she ever been in foster care? yes \_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_  
If yes: Where: \_\_\_\_\_  
With Whom: \_\_\_\_\_  
For how long: \_\_\_\_\_
12. What happened to get you into the shelter system?
13. How much longer do you think you will be living here?
14. Is anyone trying to help you find a place to live?  
(Probe: self, caseworker, van program, Housing Authority, family and friends, other service provider)
15. Do you know where will you be moving once you leave here?
16. I am interested in how you feel this place meets your needs and the needs of your children. What about your needs? (record response) What about your children's needs?  
  
(Probe for the following:
- a. Security: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Rules: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Neighborhood: \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Activities for Children: \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. Place for child to do homework: \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. Privacy: \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
17. How does this place compare with other shelters you've stayed in?
18. How does this place compare with the previous housing you've lived in? (What's better, what's worse. What are your particular concerns here?)

**C. Child's Education** The next questions are about your child's education.

19. At what age did your child start school? \_\_\_\_\_  
Was this kindergarten \_\_\_ or 1st grade \_\_\_?
20. Did your child go to nursery school, daycare or Headstart? yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_  
Location \_\_\_\_\_  
When \_\_\_\_\_  
How Often \_\_\_\_\_
21. Could you please name the schools your child has attended? \*\* Use housing history chart to map out the schools child has attended.
- Altogether your child has changed schools \_\_\_\_\_ times and \_\_\_\_\_ times since you've entered the shelter system.
22. \*\*\* Go to Educational Services Chart.  
I am interested in the kinds of educational services that are provided in school. For each service I mention, please tell me if your child is currently using or has used this service since you have been homeless.
23. Do you think that your child will continue going to the same school that he or she is now going to once you find an apartment? yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_ Would you like him/her to?
24. Did you have any problems with your child's school(s) since you lost your housing? (Probe: enrollment, placement, transportation, etc.)
25. I am going to name some different things about school. I want to know what you know about them and think about them in the school your child is now attending.
- a. Do you know your child's teacher(s)? yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_ Are you able to talk with him/her? yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_ How often have you talked to him/her this school year? \_\_\_\_\_ In general, how satisfied are you with your child's teacher?
  - b. Do you know what your child is being taught in school? How satisfied are you with what your child is learning?
  - c. Do you know of any student activities that are offered by the school, i.e. sports, clubs, trips, music and art programs. How satisfied are you with these activities? Does your child go to them? (describe)
  - d. How do you feel about the condition of the school building and grounds?

- e. How do you feel about the safety of the school?
- f. Are you aware of the supplies or equipment available in your child's school (i.e., computers, library). How satisfied are you with what is available for students?
- g. How do you feel about the way school disciplines students. (e.g., absenteeism, school violence, vandalism)
- h. Have you had any contact with the principal or A.P?  
yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_ If yes: Please describe:
- I. Do you get any information regarding the problems and needs of your child and how he or she is doing in school?
26. Do you think your child's school is doing a good job?  
If no: What else should the school be doing? Are there services that you think the school should provide that they do not? (Please describe)
27. Do you think your child is treated differently in school than children who are not homeless? yes \_\_\_ no \_\_\_ If yes:  
a. In what way? \_\_\_\_\_  
b. By whom? \_\_\_\_\_
28. Who decided where your child would go to school? Probe: self, BOE, service provider, awareness of right to choose school)
29. Are you aware of any changes in your child's grades or behavior or any problems s/he is having in school since you lost your housing? Y \_\_\_ N \_\_\_
30. Has your child ever repeated a grade? If yes:
- | <u>Grade Repeated</u> | <u># of Times</u> | <u>Reason Given</u> |
|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| _____                 | _____             | _____               |
31. About how many days has your child been absent in the past week? \_\_\_\_\_  
month? \_\_\_\_\_ year? \_\_\_\_\_
- a. What is the main reason for your child missing school (illness, problems with enrollment, transportation, other)

b. On the average, how many days does your child miss school when you move from one shelter to another? \_\_\_\_\_

c. Did your child miss school more when you were living in one particular place than another? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_

If yes: Please explain:

32. How far do you expect your child to go in school? (H.S. grad., college grad., beyond college).
33. What would help your child to achieve a H.S. diploma? (if mentioned in #34, college degree?)
34. How does your child spend time when not in school? (Probe: playing, reading, T.V., visiting, chores, babysits, listens to music, hangs out outside)
35. Does your child have homework? Does s/he do it? (When, where, with whom)
36. What are your child's particular strengths and abilities? (not only in school but others). (Probe: What is s/he really good at? Is there anything that your child does that makes you proud?) Has this always been true? (If no: When did things change?)
37. Does your child have any problems or difficulties? Has this always been true? (If no: When did things change?)
38. In addition to your family members presently living with you here, who else does your child see or spend time with?

AGE SEX RELATIONSHIP      WHERE DO THEY LIVE      HOW OFTEN

\_\_\_\_\_

- a. What do they do together?
- b. Has this changed since you lost your housing?

**D. Parent Education and Employment:** These questions are about your education and any jobs you had.

39. What is the highest grade you completed? \_\_\_\_\_
40. Do you have a H.S. or G.E.D. diploma? \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes: Have you received any other types of education or training?

If no: a. Are you planning to get one? \_\_\_\_\_

41. Have you ever been employed? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_  
 If yes: a. What is the longest period you worked in the same job?  
 b. What did you do? \_\_\_\_\_
42. Would you like to have a job or go back to school?  
 yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_ If yes: Is there anything preventing you from doing this? Is there anyone trying to help you do this?

### **E. Finances**

43. How do you support your family financially? (AFDC, Social Security, unemployment, food stamps, other)
44. Are these benefits enough? yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_  
 a. How long does your public assistance check usually last?  
 b. What happens when it runs out? (Does anybody help you out? What do you do without?)

**F. Social Supports:** This is called a social support questionnaire, it will give me a sense of the people in your life that are important to you and the type of support they can provide.

**G. Services:** The next questions are about services that are available to families. I'm interested in learning about the kinds of services people know about and use, how useful they are, and about services people would like to use.

### **H. Debriefing:**

45. What were your thoughts about this interview and the questions that were asked?
46. Were there any issues that you feel are important that were not covered by the interview?
47. Do you have any questions?

### Consent Form

**Jody Imbimbo, from the City University of New York, is speaking with families living in transitional housing about their children's educational experiences. The information gathered from the interviews will be used to inform policymakers about children's educational needs and the types of services that are most useful to families.**

**If you agree to participate, everything that you say will be private. Your names will not be used in anything that is written and will not be told to anyone except as part of a general group story. If at any time you or your child do not feel comfortable with something, we will stop the interview. Your participation in this project will not slow down your getting housing, nor will it insure that you will get housing sooner.**

**The interview should take one to two hours. When it is finished, you will receive a sum of 15 dollars. If you have any questions, you can call me at (718) 875-7546.**

-----  
**I have been told about the research and agree to be interviewed.**

**yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_**

**I agree to allow my child to be interviewed (tape recorded) and also agree to the release of my child's test scores, attendance, and educational placement information)**

**yes \_\_\_\_\_ no \_\_\_\_\_**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Parent's Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Child's Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Parent's Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**PLEASE NOTE**

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