

A SNAPSHOT OF SUPPORTIVE HOUSING IN NEW YORK STATE:

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE 2006 SUPPORTIVE HOUSING POPULATION SURVEY

THE SUPPORTIVE HOUSING NETWORK OF NEW YORK

April 2006

BY: KERRY WILBUR AND NICOLE BRANCA



Background

Founded in 1988, the Supportive Housing Network of New York brings together over 250 member agencies and corporate partners that have built and now operate more than 34,000 units of supportive housing for low income and formerly homeless individuals and families across the state. The Network advocates at the local, state, and federal levels; provides timely budget and policy analysis; and offers training and technical assistance to the supportive housing community. We are the only organization in the field to provide this range of advocacy, public education, and provider training, harnessing the expertise of the supportive housing community. For years, the Network has collected and continuously updated data on the State's supportive housing projects. This data has been instrumental to the advocacy work of the organization. This year, the Network has taken its data collection a step further, in order to provide a more complete view of what supportive housing in New York looks like. With the 2006 Supportive Housing Population Survey, the Network has collected data on the tenants who live in supportive housing. The following paper presents the key findings from the survey and our on-going data collection.

What is Supportive Housing?

Supportive housing is affordable housing linked to on-site services for low income and formerly homeless individuals and families. Tenants pay a portion of their income in rent and hold a lease. Often our tenants have multiple barriers to independent living such as mental or physical disabilities, HIV/AIDS, or substance abuse. It enables men, women, and children to stabilize and rebuild their lives, making it possible for those who have known

loss, trauma, uncertainty, and poverty to experience community, self-reliance, dignity, and hope.

In addition, supportive housing is widely considered the most sensible, cost-effective alternative to shelters and other forms of institutional care. Permanent housing provides a better alternative for both the tenants and the community. In most cities in the country it incurs less cost than shelter, and always costs less than medical or correctional facilities.¹ The cost effectiveness of supportive housing is well illustrated by the New York City (NYC) example. According to the NYC Department of Homeless Services' *Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter* report, the average cost for shelter in the NYC Shelter system is \$1,551 per month. In addition to using the shelters, the homeless often cycle in and out of the hospital and correctional systems. The costs incurred in these systems are even greater. For example, the cost of a hospital bed is between \$18,250 and \$48,666 per month and the cost of a city jail cell is \$3,406 per month. In contrast, a supportive housing unit, with services, costs as little as \$12,410 per year, an average of \$1,034 a month. This is over \$500 per month less than shelter and thousands less than a hospital bed or jail cell.

What Does Supportive Housing Look Like?

Supportive housing comes in many forms and is located throughout the state. In some cases, all program units are located in one building, known as congregate; in others, programs are made up of apartments that are scattered throughout an area; known as scattered-site. Statewide, about two thirds of programs are congregate and one third are scattered-site.

New York State leads the nation in supportive housing production. There are over 34,000

units in operation and over 6,000 units in development that are scheduled to open in the next three years. Although the majority of the units are in urban areas, supportive housing has become a staple in homelessness policy across the state and can be found in almost every community. Sixty-nine percent of the units that are currently open are located in NYC and the remaining 31 percent are located throughout the state.

The majority of units were created for single adults, but 13 percent of the units statewide are family and youth units. The goal of supportive housing is to end homelessness. Many supportive housing programs use an integrated model to achieve this goal and have created units for low income members of the community who do not need services. In NYC, many programs use a formula that reserves 60 percent of units for the homeless and formerly homeless and 40 percent for community members. Statewide, 30 percent of all units are set aside for the community. Currently, the majority of units are developed to serve specific populations. Over one third of all units are reserved for individuals with mental health conditions and 15 percent of all units are designated for individuals living with HIV/AIDS.

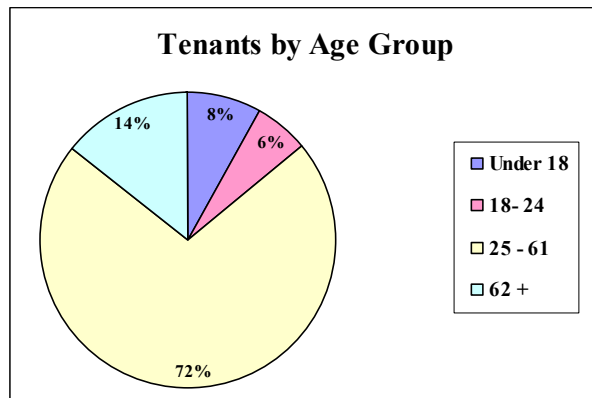
Who Lives in Supportive Housing?

Findings from the 2006 Population Survey

In an effort to develop a snapshot of who lives in supportive housing, the Network surveyed the program providers and asked them to answer questions about their tenants to the best of their knowledge. In total, the Network received 253 responses from agencies throughout the state. These responses provide data on 15,359 units — over 45 percent of all units in New York State. Sixty-three percent of the reporting units were in NYC and 37 percent were outside of NYC. This indicates

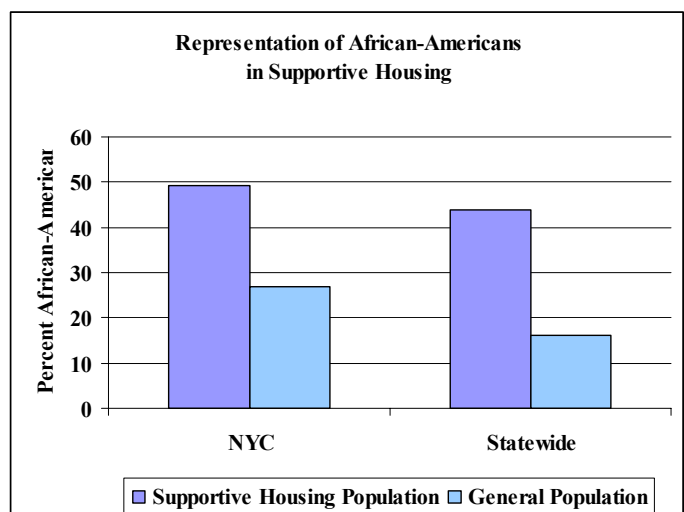
that the regional breakdown of the respondents is representative of the actual breakdown of the units.

The majority of tenants are adults. However,



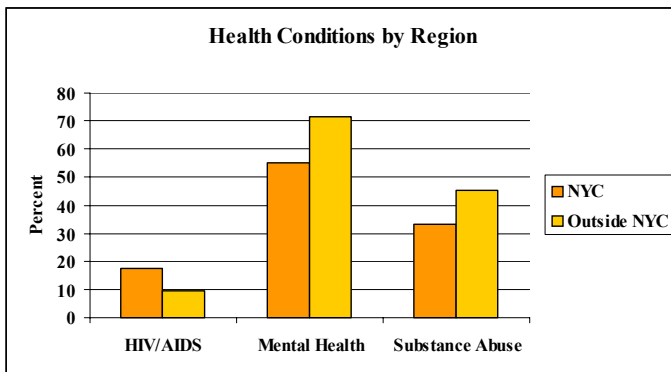
children, youth, and seniors also live in supportive housing. Homelessness among children is a growing concern. For example, the percent of children in NYC shelters has increased over the past decade.¹

African-Americans are disproportionately represented in the supportive housing. In NYC, African-Americans make up almost half of all supportive housing tenants (49 percent). However, according to the 2000 census, they make up only 27 percent of the NYC population and 15 percent of the New



York State population. Outside of NYC, whites make up 57 percent of tenants and 34 percent of tenants are African-American (still disproportionately high). Statewide, 16 percent of tenants are Hispanic. In NYC, 20 percent of the supportive housing population is Hispanic. According to the 2000 census, Hispanics make up 15 of the State population and 27 percent of the NYC population. Thus, Hispanics are underrepresented in NYC supportive housing.

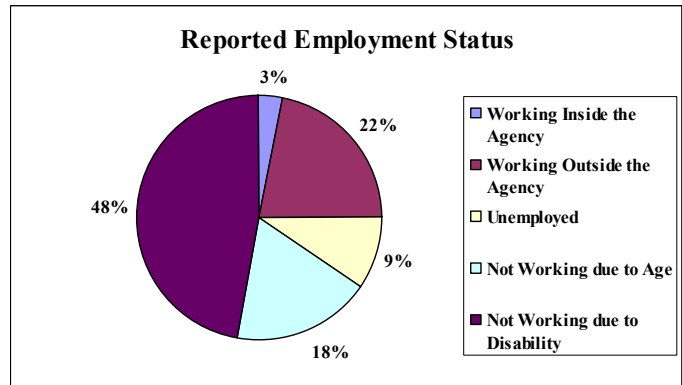
The majority of tenants suffer from health problems that interfere with their ability to work or live independently. Statewide, 80 percent of tenants were reported to suffer from HIV/AIDS (15 percent), a mental health condition (60 percent), or substance abuse (39 percent). A quarter of the population is diagnosed with two of these conditions and four percent are diagnosed with all three. Statewide, respondents reported that 48 percent of tenants were diagnosed with a serious and persistent mental illness. There were only slight variations between NYC and the rest of the State — HIV/AIDS was reported more frequently in NYC and mental health conditions and substance abuse were



reported more frequently outside of NYC.

Disabilities and age prevent the majority of tenants from working. Unsurprisingly, in view of their health issues, among those who reported employment status, 48 percent were

not working due to disability and 18 percent were not working due to age (e.g. too young or too old for the workforce). It is notable that in both NYC and the rest of the state



under 10 percent of tenants were unemployed.

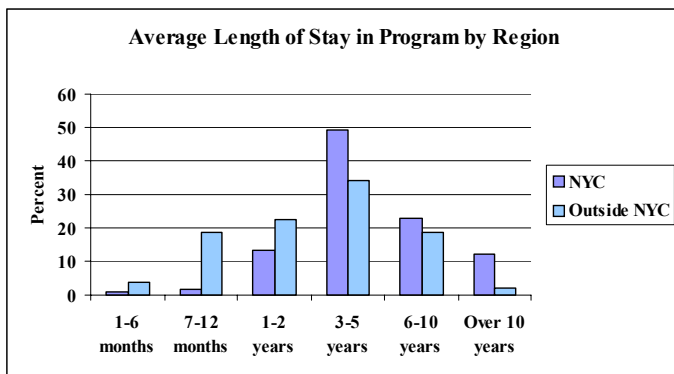
Supportive housing serves many special populations. **Ex-offenders make up 13 percent of the supportive housing population.** However, only 2 percent of tenants enter directly from jail or prison. Other special populations include: survivors of domestic violence (7 percent), youth aging out of foster care (1 percent), and veterans (5 percent).

Tenants draw on a variety of sources for financial support. Two of the most common sources of financial support are Supplemental Security Income (40 percent) and Social Security Disability Insurance (17 percent). Thus, 57 percent of the tenants are recognized by the government as having a disability. These findings reinforce the fact that the majority of supportive housing tenants are disabled. Thirty-nine percent receive food stamps and 19 percent receive general public assistance. Forty-three percent of tenants are enrolled in Medicaid and 17 percent are enrolled in Medicare.

Most tenants enter supportive housing from

temporary housing situations. Of those reporting previous housing, statewide, 30 percent entered directly from shelter — 32 percent in NYC and 25 percent outside of NYC. Many tenants entered supportive housing directly after a stay in a medical facility; 5 percent entered from a psychiatric facility and 6 percent from a substance abuse treatment facility. Seven percent came to supportive housing from living on the streets, in their cars, or in other non-housing situations. Another 7 percent entered from living with family or friends. Twenty-three percent of tenants were formerly chronically homeless (based on the local definition) – 24 percent in NYC and 21 percent outside of NYC.

For many supportive housing tenants, supportive housing is a temporary step on the path to greater independence. Among programs that have been open for at least three years, the most frequent reported average length of stay is three to five years, with over 70 percent of housing programs reporting an average length of stay of less than six years. Programs in NYC more frequently reported lengths of stay over 10 years (12 percent) when compared to those outside of NYC (2 percent). This is likely the



result of the higher housing prices in NYC.

For tenants whose disabilities do not prevent them from moving on, lack of affordable housing is the greatest barrier. Survey respondents reported that 40 percent of their tenants are capable of moving on to more independent living, and of those who are capable of moving on, 60 percent want to move on to more independent living situations. Providers reported that tenants are prevented from moving by the lack of appropriate housing. Reported barriers to moving included the inability to obtain affordable housing (52 percent), limited employment opportunities (14 percent), and fear of leaving services (19 percent).

For those tenants who are capable of moving on and want to move on, what are the greatest barriers preventing them from doing so?

Barrier	Percent*
Fear of relapse or lack of access to services outside of SH	19
Unable to afford housing	52
Unwilling to leave neighborhood/community	4
Lack of skills/employment	14
Lack of Transportation	3
Parole	1
Fear of moving on/loneliness	7

*of all responses to the question, n=299.

Tenants leave when they no longer need the services. Statewide, among those who reported the reason for exiting a program, the most common response was that the tenant no longer needed support services (35 percent). Statewide, among those who reported a tenant’s destination, the most frequent destination for those who left was unsubsidized rental housing (28 percent).

Reported Destination			
Destination	NYC	Outside NYC	Statewide
	n=779 Percent	n=1,401 Percent	n=2,180 Percent
Unsubsidized			
Housing	12	37	28
Public Housing	5	4	5
Section 8 Housing	12	9	10
Homeownership	1	1	1
Housing of			
Family/Friends	11	11	11
Transitional Housing	6	3	4
Psychiatric Facility	4	2	3
Inpatient SA Facility	4	5	5
Jail	6	5	5
Emergency Shelter	4	3	3
Other Supportive			
Housing	19	10	13
Non-Housing	0	0	0
Other Destination	16	11	13

Conclusion

Tens of thousands of New Yorkers live in supportive housing. These individuals and families are among the State's most vulnerable, but hopeful residents. They face barriers to independent living that range from mental illness to substance abuse; from HIV/AIDS to domestic violence, from aging out of foster care to struggling to reenter the community after a stay in prison or jail, but they are now in a setting where they can stabilize and grow. Through this research, the Network has developed a richer portrait of who supportive housing tenants are. The research confirmed what many providers, government agencies and advocates already know, but it gives the field the data to more precisely serve and advocate for the needs of supportive housing tenants. Among the most striking findings are:

- ***African-Americans are disproportionately represented in the supportive housing.***

While this finding was not surprising the

numbers have drawn attention to just how unrepresentative the racial makeup of the tenant population is.

- ***Ex-offenders make up 13 percent of the supportive housing population.***

Organizations statewide have been organizing around the issue of re-entry housing. This finding illustrates how critical these efforts are.

- ***Disability and age prevent the majority of tenants from working.***

The survey findings provided more complete information on the barriers that many tenants face. In light of the fact that 60 percent of tenants are out of the workforce, the finding that 25 percent of tenants were working either inside or outside of the agency illustrates that supportive housing enables tenants to fulfill their potential.

- ***For many supportive housing tenants, supportive housing is a temporary step on the path to greater independence.***

The finding that most tenants stay for less than 6 years confirms what many already felt, for many supportive housing provides the stability that they need to rebuild their lives.

Notes:

¹Lewin Group. "Costs of Serving Homeless Individuals in Nine Cities." 2004. Corporation for Supportive Housing. 27 Apr. 2006 <<http://csh.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=document.filterdocumentlist&nodeID=81>>.

²Coalition for the Homeless. "State of Homelessness 2006." 2006. 27 Apr. 2006 <<http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/advocacy/research.html>>.

Nicole Branca is the Network's Policy Analyst. She holds an MPA from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs and has been working in the field of low-income housing and social justice for the past six years.

Kerry Wilbur is a Policy Intern at the Network. She will be graduating this spring with an MPA from New York University's Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service.

For more information about the "2006 Supportive Housing Population Survey" or the Network, please contact Nicole Branca at: (212) 870-3303 ext. 6 or nbranca@shnny.org