

Snapshot: Families at HFH Trapped in Conditional Status

When families with children apply for shelter, they must go to Prevention and Temporary Housing (PATH) in the Bronx, the intake center for families with children experiencing homelessness. There, they are interviewed by Department of Homeless Services (DHS) staff who collect information and begin the process to determine if they are eligible for shelter.¹ Families are typically then assigned to a “conditional” shelter placement while DHS investigates if they have any alternative options to entering the shelter system, such as staying with a family member or friend. The DHS investigation process, during which they vet the family’s shelter application, including reaching out to previous landlords or family members, is supposed to take up to 10 days.² However, it takes far longer than 10 days for most families at HFH to be found eligible. These families who are deemed ineligible for shelter are forced to reapply if they need to remain in shelter. Often, they must reapply multiple times.

This snapshot will share the breadth of this issue at HFH shelters and highlight some of the challenges that long-term conditional status creates for families and shelter staff.

Of the 503 families residing in HFH shelters, nearly one quarter, or 110 of them, are conditional.³ Over the past year, an average of 23% of families were conditional at any time.

Proportion of Clients in Conditional Status

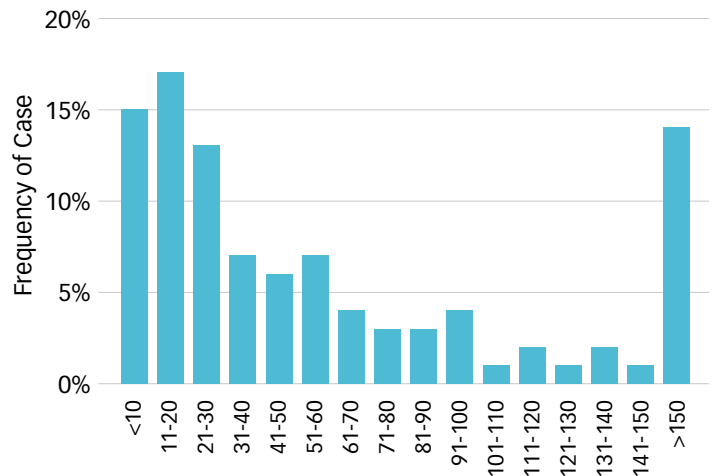
Site	# of Families	Conditional	Eligible
Allie's Place	97	18%	82%
Prospect	83	27%	73%
Saratoga	242	21%	79%
Williamsbridge	81	23%	77%
All HFH	503	22%	78%

Time Spent in Conditional Status

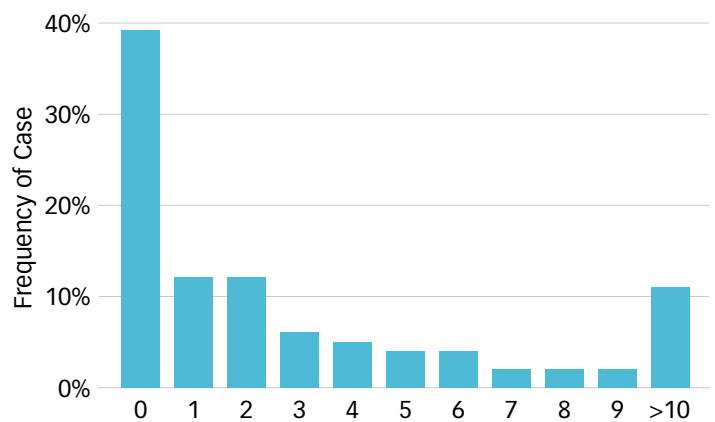
85% of families wait longer than 10 days to become eligible. Often, families will wait weeks before finding out whether they are eligible for shelter or not. This, in combination with having to reapply for shelter eligibility repeatedly, leads to many families being in conditional status for far longer than the 10-

day period. Almost the same number of families are conditional for over 150 days (61 families) as the amount that are found eligible in fewer than 10 days (64 families). **The median length of conditionality for HFH clients is nearly 40 days.**

Length of Time Spent in Conditional Status



Number of Times Deemed Ineligible

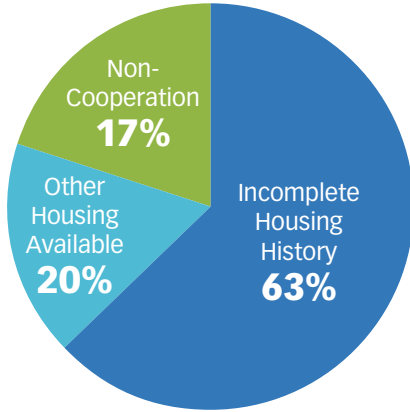


This extended period of conditional status creates challenges for families and shelter staff. Being trapped in conditional status prevents families from accessing several housing vouchers, including CityFHEPS. Families and shelter staff must redo paperwork and intake tasks when the family reapplies for shelter, and shelter staff members often assist families in reapplying, **all of which wastes time that could be spent helping families exit shelter.**

Reasons Families are Denied Eligibility

Most often, DHS determines that a family is ineligible because they have provided “incomplete housing history.”⁴ Families must provide DHS with their past two years’ of housing history. Missing even a single day in those two years or not providing what the DHS staff member determines is a valid form of proof will lead to a determination of ineligible.

Reason for Denial of Eligibility



The second most common reason for why DHS determines a family is ineligible is they are perceived to have “other housing available.” DHS will provide this notice if they feel that a family has left a residential situation that could potentially still be viable. Often, DHS will suggest a living situation that the family does not feel is tenable, such as an overcrowded apartment or shared quarters with an individual with whom they are in constant discord.

Many families are also deemed ineligible due to “non-cooperation.” This notice is given to families when they miss a meeting they are supposed to attend, or do not call PATH when they are supposed to.

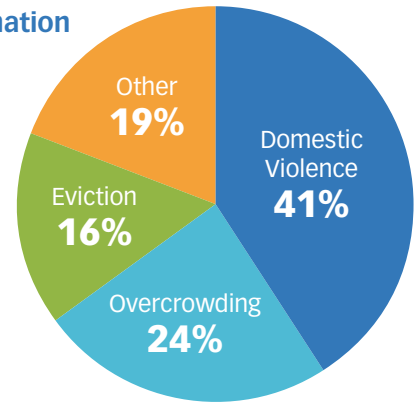
Reasons Families are Found Eligible

The most common reason among HFH clients for being found eligible for shelter is domestic violence,⁵ the second most common reason is overcrowding, and the third is eviction.

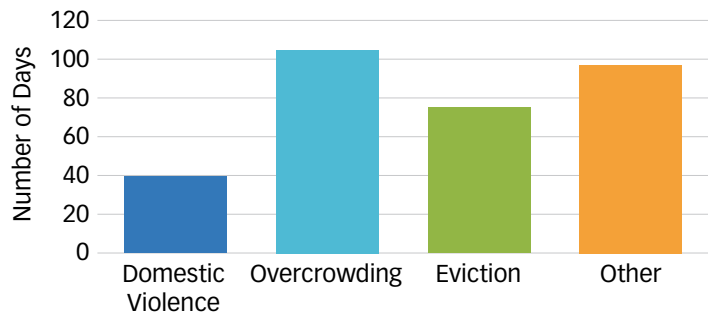
The next chart shows the average length of time that families are conditional, sorted by the reason for their eligibility. Clients who are eventually found eligible because of domestic violence tend to spend less time in conditional status than those who have other reasons for entering shelter. This difference is likely

due in part to DHS determining overcrowding situations as viable living arrangements whereas situations where families are experiencing domestic violence are not. It may also be due to clients coming to HFH from HRA domestic violence shelters.

Reason for Determination of Eligibility



Average Length of Conditional Status by Reason for Eligibility



Conclusion

Many families at HFH are trapped in conditional status for long periods of time. While families are in conditional status, it can be challenging for them to access services and secure permanent housing. Resolving this issue would reduce the length of time that families stay in shelter, allow staff to focus on providing the best services they can to families, and improve the shelter experience for families in the DHS shelter system.

1 Families with children must bring more documentation when applying for shelter than Single Adults. Families “must have proper identification for all members of their household.” For single adults those “forms of ID are very helpful during the intake process (but are not required)” (<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dhs/shelter/families/families-with-children-applying.page>; <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dhs/shelter/singleadults/single-adults-applying.page>).

2 <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/path-brochure.pdf>

3 All data in this report comes from CARES from HFH clients on 3.1.2022. The average percentage of clients who are conditional over the past year is 23%, according to CARES data from 3.1.2021, 6.1.2021, 9.1.2021, 12.1.2021, and 3.1.2022.

4 Only the most recent denial of eligibility is measured in this figure.

5 All families who apply to shelter at PATH are screened for domestic violence by the NoVA (No Violence Again) unit.