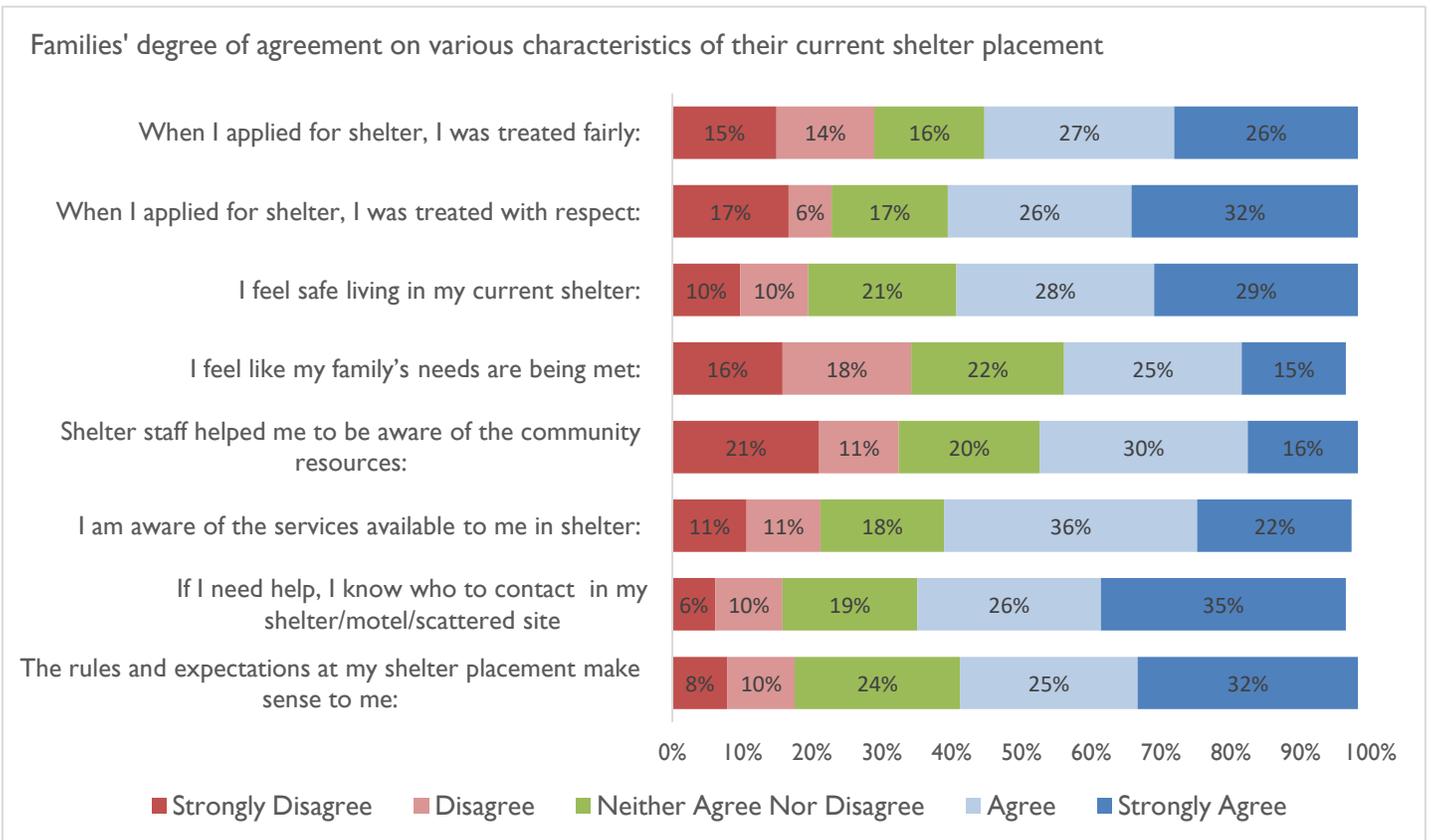


Families' Experiences of Homelessness

Homes for Families is dedicated to learning from the experiences and perspectives of families overcoming homelessness. As a part of that work, we embarked on a project to survey families in the Emergency Assistance (EA) program. The survey was developed with the guidance of the Consumer Advocacy Team (CAT), a group of parents that have experienced homelessness and severe housing instability that are full partners in our work. A total of 117 parents were surveyed in the Springfield and Boston areas in motels, congregate scattered sites, and co-shelters. The survey project took place from 2014 to 2017, a period which saw an overall decline in caseload by approximately 20% and reduction of families being sheltered in motels from 2,400 to less than 50. As a part of the efforts to decrease motel use, there were increases to the level of services in motels and expansion of contracted shelter beds, including the co-shelter model.

As the chart below indicates, participants reported a range of satisfaction levels with the EA program: in most categories, over half of the participants responded positively about their experiences:



In addition to questions about satisfaction, the survey asked participants questions about service utilization; demographics, education, employment and income, family history, supports, health and wellness, and civic engagement. The questions were not specific to the EA program and reflect families' experiences across a multitude of systems. The survey yielded useful data to inform ways in which the shelter system, other government and non-government programs, advocates and communities can evolve our collective response to homelessness and housing instability. Approximately 70% of the individual family members surveyed indicated some interest in sharing their stories and ideas to inform policy makers and system improvements. The second page of this document includes key data points from the surveys to help foster conversation and increase our understanding of the impact of the experiences of parents and children facing homelessness in the Commonwealth.

Key Data Points

Services

- Transportation, Housing Search, English for Speakers of Other Languages, Case Management, and Job Search Assistance were identified as the most useful services

Employment and Income

- 82% of respondents had previous work experience (65%) or were currently working (17%); 44% were paid at \$11/hour or less, and less than 4% had benefits such as paid sick days and medical insurance
- 16% of respondents had income from employment; other income sources included: 20% Supplemental Security Income (SSI); 6% Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI); 48% Transitional Aid for Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC); 5% Unemployment; 6% Child Support
- 85% of respondents received SNAP; 38% WIC; and 70% MassHealth

Parents' Health and Wellness

- 42% of parents reported a decline in health since entering shelter; 14% reported an improvement to their health; 39% reported their health stayed the same; and 5% did not answer
- 62% of parents reported an increase to their stress level; 15% reported their stress level improved; 16% reported their stress level stayed the same; and 5% did not answer
- 80% of the respondents who were pregnant reported satisfaction with their level of pre-natal care, however, only 20% reported having access to information about child birth and post-partum that they want
- 40% of parents of infants reported that they were bothered by depression; 40% of parents of infants reported having support for caring for themselves and their child

Children's Health and Wellness

- 25% of parents of children aged 1-5 reported a decline in their children's behavior; 40% of parents of school aged children reported a decline in behavior
- 46% of parents of children aged 1-5 reported their child's health stayed the same, with 16% reporting a decline in health and 9% an improvement in health
- 35% of parents of school aged children reported a decline in their child's ability to concentrate; 48% reported their child's school performance stayed the same; 17% reported a decline in school performance; and 21% reported an improvement in school performance