Voices from the Children's Aid Middle School STH Program:

Insights from Students, Parents, and Staff

December 2025

Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence

The City of New York
Mayor Eric Adams

ABOUT CIDI

The Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI) is a research and policy center located in the Office of the Mayor of New York City, reporting directly to the Deputy Mayor for Strategic Initiatives. CIDI fosters collaboration with all Health and Human Services agencies to promote citywide policy change toward the goal of improving the effectiveness of New York City government. CIDI embraces the Mayor's goal of delivering cross-agency solutions to big, bold issues that impact the health and well-being of the city's most vulnerable people.

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With much gratitude,
Maryanne Schretzman, DSW
Executive Director
New York City Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence

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During the 2023-2024 academic year, 13.4 percent of New York City students (131,351) lived in temporary housing. Temporary housing is defined as lack of a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, encompassing those who are staying with family or friends, living in shelter or unsheltered (e.g., in parks, cars). Research consistently links housing instability to elevated risks for students, including academic underperformance, school dropout, suspension, justice system involvement, and poor physical and mental health. School-based initiatives that strengthen relationships between students, parents, and school staff are associated with improved educational outcomes and increased student resilience.

To address the challenges faced by students in temporary housing (STH), the Children's Aid Middle School STH program was piloted during the 2023-2024 academic year, serving 29 STH at one Bronx middle school. This collaborative effort included Children's Aid, New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS), and the New York City Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI). Children's Aid's program aimed to improve school attendance, socio-emotional well-being, and educational outcomes. A core component was its program staff, which consisted of Youth Advocates (social workers and counselors) who provided or facilitated comprehensive support to students and their families, including:

- **Material and financial supports:** Food, clothing, school supplies
- **Mentorship and academic supports:** One-on-one mentoring, tutoring access, home/shelter visits, assistance navigating school
- **Enrichment activities:** Family activities and trips to parks, museums, and other cultural events
- **Referrals and communications:** Linkages to essential resources, facilitation of parent-student conferencing, open communication

This report details findings from CIDI's qualitative evaluation of the pilot program.

Methodology

CIDI collaborated with partner agencies to plan, implement, and monitor the program. The evaluation utilized qualitative methods: reviewing program documents, conducting site visits, and performing 29 semi-structured interviews (in English and Spanish) with students, parents, Youth Advocates, and school staff. Interviews explored perceptions of student academic confidence, family support, school-family connection, and trust-building experiences. Interview transcripts were analyzed thematically using qualitative analysis software.

Findings

All types of interviewees overwhelmingly reported positive experiences with the Middle School STH program. Key findings include:

- **Support:** Parents most appreciated informational, material, and financial assistance; mentorship by Youth Advocates; and field trips offering new experiences. Students, parents, and school staff described opportunities to improve the program by identifying the need for flexible scheduling.
- **Bridge-building:** Youth Advocates effectively connected parents and school staff, improving communication and fostering trust.
- **Academic motivation:** Youth Advocates linked academic effort to participation in enjoyable program activities, motivating students.
- **Socio-emotional and behavioral growth:** Youth Advocates helped students manage their emotions and avoid behavioral issues, and kept parents informed about their child's progress. Eighth grade students transitioning into high school expressed apprehension about losing program support when making this move.

Conclusions

The Middle School STH program was highly appreciated, successfully building trust and communication between participating students, their families, Youth Advocates, and school personnel. This feedback demonstrates the model's significant potential to address challenges exacerbated by housing instability, including student mental health, parental stress, and youth social engagement.

The Children's Aid comprehensive program model effectively served both students and their parents. A key strength of the program was its ability to meet students' and families' material and emotional needs through the trusted relationships it built with them. However, ongoing challenges were identified, including accommodating working parent schedules to align with those of key school and program staff. Schools must actively move from expecting parents to accommodate fixed schedules to creating flexible, creative and shared solutions, like evening appointment and virtual options, to engage parents and bridge the persistent gap between parent availability and standard school hours.

Future expansion or replication of the model would need to include dedicated resources for a robust long-term evaluation. This is essential to rigorously assess the program's impact and determine whether the potential identified in the pilot study translates into sustained positive outcomes.

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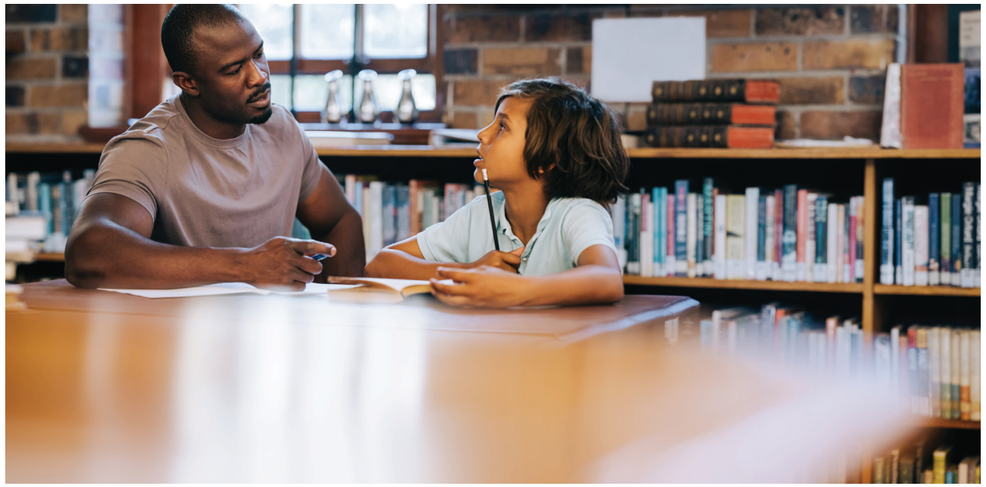
Literature Review & Background



The emotional, developmental, and behavioral consequences of homelessness for children are significant. School-based initiatives are associated with improved educational outcomes and increased student resilience.

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School-Age Children in Temporary Housing

Temporary housing is defined as lack of a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, encompassing those who are staying with family or friends, living in shelters, or unsheltered (e.g., in parks, cars).[1] During the 2023–2024 academic year, approximately one in eight New York City public school students lived in temporary housing, the highest rate in the past decade (New York State Technical and Educational Assistance Center for Homeless Students, 2024). This statistic represents a steady rise from 8.8 percent in the 2020–2021 school year to 13.4 percent in the 2023–2024 academic year (New York City Public Schools, 2023). The increase has been intensified by the expiration of the pandemic-era eviction moratoria and the influx of asylum-seeking families, which locally has placed unprecedented strain on the City's shelter system (Benfer et al., 2021; New York City Office of the Mayor, 2023; Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2025).

The loss of stable housing is a profoundly disruptive event for families, often involving the loss of possessions, the disruption of daily routines, and the straining of family and social relationships (Brush et al., 2017). The myriad issues facing homeless families, along with competing priorities such as keeping a job, finding a home, and tending to children, can lead to parents' diminishing capacities to meet their children's emotional and developmental needs (Cunningham & MacDonald, 2012). The stresses on children as they navigate critical developmental stages creates unique challenges, often hindering their ability to learn, trust, and develop relationships outside the family (Brush et al., 2017).

Homelessness strains relationships and compounds the challenges facing children and families.

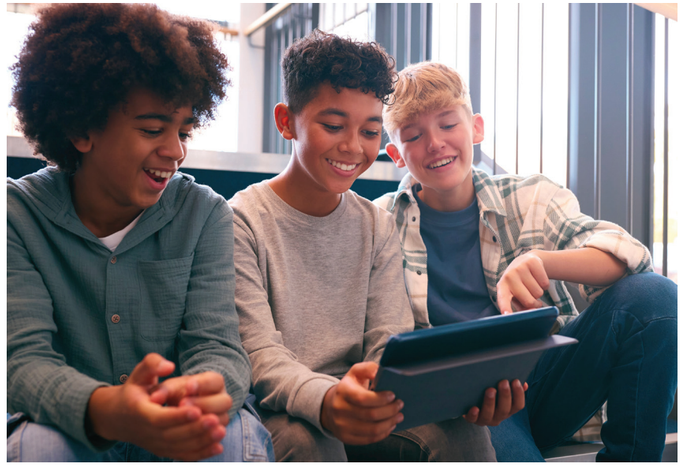
The consequences of homelessness for children are significant and well documented. A history of family homelessness is associated with emotional, developmental, and behavioral problems (Coker et al., 2009). Children experiencing homelessness are at an increased risk of adverse health and mental health outcomes compared to their stably housed peers. Furthermore, the logistical, financial, and personal barriers to accessing critical health and mental health services are often exacerbated by the experience of homelessness itself, creating a cycle of unmet need (Bassuk et al., 2015; Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006).

[1] The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act establishes the definition of homeless used by U.S. public schools and the educational rights to which homeless children and youth are entitled. The act defines "homeless children and youth" as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, including children and youth who are staying with family or friends, in shelters, or are unsheltered. NYCPS refers to students who meet MVA requirements as students in temporary housing, or STH. These terms are used interchangeably throughout this report.

Supports for Students in Temporary Housing

Housing instability is linked to academic underperformance, school dropout, suspension, justice system involvement, and poor physical and mental health.

The disruption caused by unstable housing is associated with negative academic outcomes, including lower standardized test scores (Fantuzzo & Perlman, 2007), increased absenteeism (Larson & Meehan, 2009), higher rates of grade repetition (Agustin et al., 1999), and elevated dropout rates (Garcia et al., 2017). Federal and local policies provide a framework to support students in temporary housing. The McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MVA) ensures students in temporary housing can remain in their "school of origin" for stability and mandates that every school district, including New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), designate a liaison for unhoused students (McKinney-Vento Education for Homeless Children and Youths Program, 2015). In response, NYCPS has launched initiatives like Every Child and Family is Known (ECFIK), which places staff in schools to build relationships with students and their families and connect them to resources.



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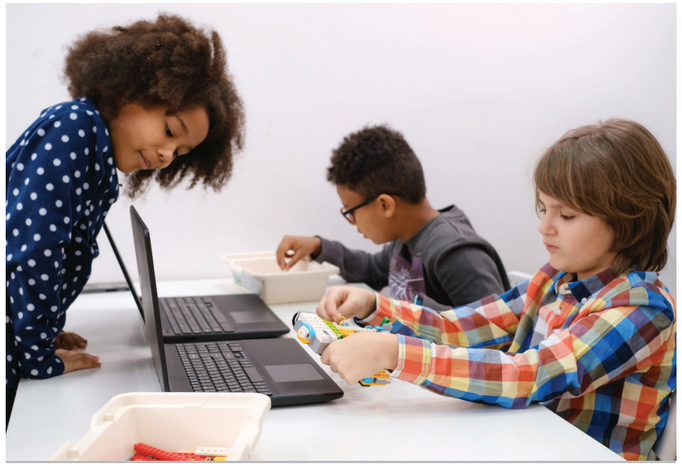
Supportive relationships positively impact student engagement and educational outcomes.

Programs like Attendance Matters facilitate shelter staff engagement with schools, students, and parents to address a variety of issues, such as transportation, to ensure students are attending school (Treglia et al., 2023). These initiatives underscore the power of school, student, and family partnerships to improve educational and socio-emotional outcomes for STH. Secure attachment to a supportive adult is protective against the adverse outcomes associated with housing instability. Research shows that teachers and caregivers can mitigate educational disparities by strengthening students' community connections, improving access to resources, and building upon their inherent strengths (Semanchin Jones et al., 2018; Gruman et al., 2008; Herbers et al., 2011). School-based initiatives that intentionally foster these connections are associated with greater school engagement, higher grades and attendance, and lower rates of disruptive behavior and suspension for students (Quin, 2017).



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Program Background

A foundational part of Children's Aid's program was its Youth Advocates, social workers and counselors who provided or facilitated comprehensive support to students and their families.

The NYCPS Office of Students in Temporary Housing, in conjunction with the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and the Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI), partnered with Children's Aid to design and implement a pilot initiative to support middle school STH. The group incorporated the following lessons learned from research: ensure the presence of supportive adults, increase school/community trust and communication, and provide service connections and basic necessities.

The Children's Aid program was designed with input from ACS, CIDI, and NYCPS through a continuous learning process that emerged in monthly meetings with Children's Aid. The process helped to identify issues and provide adaptive programmatic responses.

Program Elements

The goals of Children's Aid and its New York City government partners were to improve school attendance, socio-emotional well-being, and educational outcomes among middle school STH.

The program included one-on-one mentoring, academic support, assistance meeting material and financial needs, and connections to other services for both students and their parents. The program centered around the work of Children's Aid's Youth Advocates—social workers and counselors who provided supports and facilitated connections between and within the school, students, and parents.

The program design included the following:

1 Participants

The program included students and their parents who lived in shelter, doubled up with another family in a single apartment, or in other temporary housing.

2 Location

The program was located at a Bronx middle school that serves significant numbers of STH to ensure efficient use of the program's resources.

3 Staffing

The program employed social workers and counselors with the title of Youth Advocate over the course of its implementation. Youth Advocates had dedicated space within the school where they met with students and held programming.

4 Initial contact

The program paired Youth Advocates with STH and their parents in the summer prior to the academic year. Initial contact included explaining the program and its services and developing a custom plan focused on the family's specific needs.

5 Services provided by the program:

- Financial and material support to ensure that participants have adequate clothing, food, furniture, and school supplies.
- Weekly mentorship meetings with Youth Advocates to ensure that each participant has an emotionally supportive adult to provide guidance on navigating social situations inside and life circumstances outside of school.
- Academic support, either directly from a Youth Advocate or through referrals to Children's Aid tutors, teachers, and other educational services.
- Facilitation of enrichment activities, such as field trips and participation in after school sports, that STH may not otherwise have had the opportunity to experience.
- Service referrals for parents (e.g., GED courses) that seek to address, for example, medical issues and economic challenges that may have contributed to their temporary housing status. Youth Advocates access the Children's Aid continuum of services, community-based providers, and services provided by ACS Prevention, the Department of Youth & Community Development (including the Summer Youth Employment Program), and other City services.
- Programs to support relationships between students and their parents, such as the Parenting Journey seminars.
- Proactive facilitation of communication between parents and school staff, including multilingual capacity to help parents navigate school processes.
- Case conferences with students, teachers, and parents to address any academic issues that arise.

Key Program Assumptions

The program was built on a theory of change designed to address the foundational barriers faced by STH. The complete logic model describing program elements and intended outcomes are listed in Appendix A. The core assumptions were that trust would be built between parents, students, Youth Advocates, and school personnel. For example:

- **Financial and material supports** would provide essential resources—school supplies, furniture, a bed to sleep in, and reliable nutrition—to create a stable base for academic and social engagement.
- **Mentorship and academic supports** would foster a sense of school belonging, equip students with critical skills, and offer early intervention before social or academic issues escalate.
- **Enrichment activities** would serve as an incentive for attendance and structured recreational opportunities, including family activities and trips to parks, museums, and other cultural events.
- **Referrals and communication** would address immediate family needs, reframe school as a trusted resource, and build strong parent-staff partnerships through open communication and parent-student conferencing. Parenting groups would employ a Parenting Journey model that uses a strengths-based, trauma-informed approach.

It was hypothesized that by combining these elements parents would view schools as a resource and that supporting students would engage and motivate them to attend school and focus on their work. This increased outreach and engagement, along with age-appropriate activities and support services, would lead to improved attendance, higher scores, and socio-emotional well-being. The Youth Advocate role was central to the process as it tasked these program staff members with identifying and addressing any gaps in communication or support.

Ultimately, the program's long-term goals were to use these enhanced supports to ensure successful grade transitions, strengthen family connectedness, and help students not only to succeed academically but to thrive in both their academic and socio-emotional development.

Program Enrollment

In the 2023-2024 academic year the program enrolled 29 students from the Bronx middle school. Later sections of this report describe the study CIDI conducted to learn more about the Middle School STH program.

THEORY OF CHANGE

PROGRAM SERVICES This section includes a non-exhaustive list of services and activies provided through the program.	**PROGRAM ASSUMPTIONS** This section describes assumptions of how program services will help students in temporary housing (STH) and their families.	**INTENDED OUTCOMES** This section specifies short- and long-term goals of the program for STH and their families.
Financial Support, e.g., clothing, food, furniture, and school supplies	Reduce the stigma for STH by ensuring they are prepared for school	**Short-term Goals** Increase school engagement and desire to come to school
Weekly Mentorship Meetings with a Youth Advocate	Help STH feel comfortable and provide them with skills, advice, and services to address issues early on	Improve educational and socio-emotional outcomes such as attendance, exam scores, and wellness
Academic support, e.g., Children's Aid tutors, teachers, and other educational services	Ensure STH have dedicated, individual time to reduce potential learning gaps	Reduce behavioral challenges and school disciplinary actions
Enrichment activities, e.g., field trips and participation in after school sports	Provide STH with incentives to attend prosocial recreational opportunities	**Long-Term Goals** Improve academic performance and school attachment
Service referrals for parents, e.g., GED Courses, parenting seminars	Address issues as they arise and shape parent perceptions of the school as a resource	Successfully support student's high school transition
Proactive facilitation of communication between parents and school staff, including multilingual support	Build trust in the school and demonstrate school's investment in student success	Improve family connectedness
Case conferences with students, teachers, and parents to address academic issues that arise		

Two Students, Two Trajectories:
An Illustration of the Middle School STH Program[2]

The following vignette uses composite narratives to illustrate different outcomes for two middle school students living in temporary housing. Ana and Oscar's experiences illustrate what can happen when schools, families, and supportive staff work together to find solutions for students—and what can happen when collaboration does not occur. Ana and Oscar enter 8th grade at the beginning of the 2023-2024 academic year but at different schools.

Ana and Oscar **navigate similar challenges** such as feeling disengaged from school.

School 1

- Ana **starts to miss days at school**. Sometimes she skips school with other truant students and other times she wakes up too late and stays in bed.
- Ana's teachers and guidance counselors **try to contact her parents**, but both work at jobs where they are not permitted to answer personal calls during work. **Ana's parents find it difficult to understand** the phone messages school staff members leave for them, as English is not their first language.
- Ana's **grades drop** and the number of assignments she misses grows.
- **She fails most of her classes** in the first semester and her teachers warn her that she may need to repeat 8th grade. Ana does not see how she can catch up on homework and begins to respond to teasing by **getting into fights**.
- **Poor grades and a school suspension strain Ana's relationship with her parents.**

School 2

The summer before the academic year begins, Oscar is selected to participate in his school's **Middle School STH program. He is paired with a Youth Advocate**.

- Oscar **starts to miss days at school.** When Oscar misses several days of school, **his Youth Advocate contacts his parents**. The Youth Advocate phones after traditional work hours and s**peaks his parents' preferred language**. The Youth Advocate offers to phone Oscar on school day mornings to ensure he is up on time to catch the train.
- When one of Oscar's teachers tells the Youth Advocate that he has missed some assignments, the Youth Advocate convenes a meeting between Oscar, his guidance counselor, and his parents. The group's goal is to **create an academic plan to improve his grades**.
- When a teacher notices that Oscar and another student are having a conflict, the teacher calls Oscar's Youth Advocate. **The Youth Advocate listens** to Oscar and **makes suggestions on how he can peacefully resolve the situation**.
- At the end of the academic year, **Oscar moves on to high school, feeling more prepared to take on new academic challenges.**

[2] The students and families described in the vignette are composite representatives based on the research team's observations and the research literature. The student names are fictional and used for illustrative purposes only.

Research Questions

CIDI sought to learn how students, parents, school staff, and Youth Advocates experienced the Middle School STH program, with a focus on the key assumptions embedded in the initiative's design. This study aimed to identify lessons learned and implications for the program itself, for its future expansion, and for other efforts to assist students in temporary housing. Four research questions guided the study:

- How did students, parents, Youth Advocates, and school staff experience program efforts to support students and parents?
- How did students, parents, Youth Advocates, and school staff experience program efforts to improve trust and communication?
- How did students, parents, Youth Advocates, and school staff experience the program's efforts to help students academically?
- How did students and parents experience program efforts to provide social and emotional support and reduce school behavioral challenges?

03
Methodology

CIDI conducted site visits and performed 29 semi-structured interviews with students, parents, Youth Advocates, and school staff. Interviews explored perceptions of student academic confidence, family support, school-family connection, and trust-building experiences.

Preparations for the Middle School STH pilot began in May of 2023 and students were identified for program participation. The program was set to launch in August of 2023. Throughout the summer, the CIDI research team examined program materials, conducted site visits, and regularly met with Children's Aid's staff (including Youth Advocates) and stakeholders to resolve implementation issues and deepen CIDI's understanding of the program.

CIDI developed an interview guide in consultation with Children's Aid staff. The interview questions were jointly designed to assess the impact of the program on student and family needs, communication, trust, academics, attendance, socio-emotional well-being, and behavior. CIDI piloted the interview instruments with program staff and adjusted as needed for clarity, timeliness, and to ensure that the research questions were being properly assessed. The semi-structured interviews would consist of ten to fourteen open-ended questions and last for up to an hour.

In the spring of 2024, Children's Aid staff recruited student, family, Youth Advocate, and school staff interviewees. The team used a convenience sampling method, selecting interviewees based on their availability. Each adult interviewee provided informed consent to participate upon receiving an overview of the study, an explanation of the voluntary nature of participation, and assurances of anonymity. Youth under 18 years of age provided assent and researchers received parental consent for them to participate in the interviews. Children's Aid compensated parents and students for their interview participation. Depending on the interviewee's preferences, researchers conducted interviews at the school or on Zoom, in English or in Spanish. Interviews were audio recorded with participant consent and professionally transcribed. Field notes captured nonverbal cues, context, and the interviewer's observations.

NVivo software was employed to facilitate the thematic analysis of interview transcripts. Researchers began by importing anonymized transcripts into the software and organizing them by interviewee. Researchers then grouped (coded) interviewees' responses to questions by concepts or patterns. Once researchers developed a preliminary grouping framework, two researchers analyzed a sample of transcripts until arriving at a shared consensus, increasing inter-rater reliability. As each transcript was reviewed, relevant excerpts were highlighted and assigned to specific categories, allowing for efficient data retrieval.

NVivo's visualization tools were used to explore patterns and relationships, aiding in the interpretation of the data. This approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of participant perspectives. The team held peer debriefing sessions both internally and with experts in order to refine the analytical process. Upon identifying major findings, the team selected quotes from interviewee to exemplify each theme.

Sample

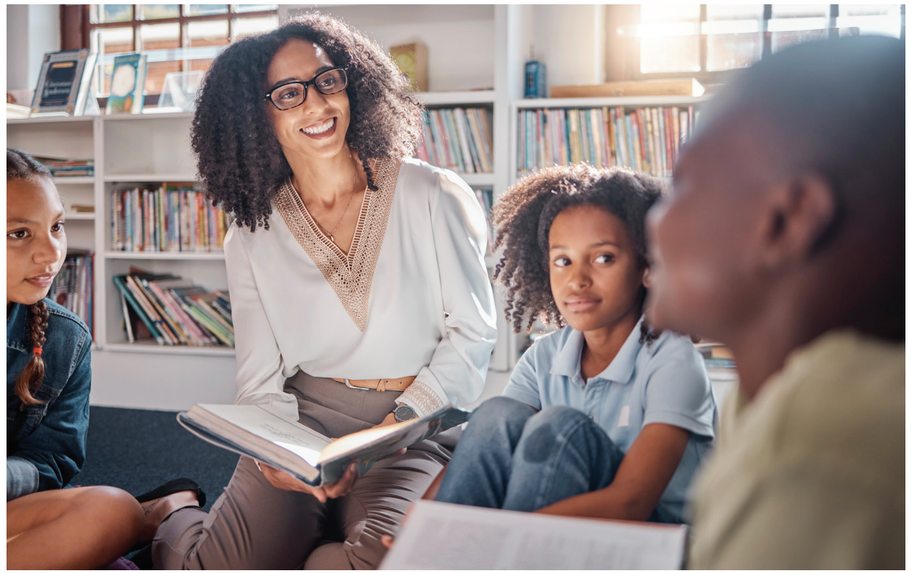
CIDI conducted 29 interviews in total: ten with students who participated in the program, 15 with parents of students in the program, two with school staff, and two with Youth Advocates. Most interviewees identified as female, and researchers conducted nearly half of the interviews in Spanish. Most student interviewees were in 7th or 8th grade at the start of the 2023-2024 academic year. See Table 1 for details of the interview sample.

Table 1. Description of the Interview Sample

	Students N=10	Parents N=15	School Staff N=2	Youth Advocates N=2	**Total N=29**
Gender					
Female	6	14	1	2	**23**
Male	4	1	1	0	**6**
Interview Language					
Spanish	5	8	0	0	**13**
English	5	7	2	2	**16**
Grade Level					
6th Grade	1	NA	NA	NA	**1**
7th Grade	5	NA	NA	NA	**5**
8th Grade	4	NA	NA	NA	**4**

NA=Not Applicable

04
Findings



This section presents findings regarding the four research questions that guided this study. On the following page, findings are summarized for all research questions.

Next, findings for each question are presented in detail.

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1. **Support. How did students, parents, Youth Advocates, and school staff experience program efforts to support students and parents?**

   Parents most appreciated informational, material, and financial assistance. Students valued Youth Advocate mentorship and field trips offering new experiences. Students, parents, and staff described opportunities to improve the program by identifying the need for flexible scheduling and ensuring availability of male Youth Advocates.

2. **Bridge-Building. How did students, parents, Youth Advocates, and school staff experience efforts to build trust and communication?**

   Youth Advocates effectively connected parents and school staff, improving communication and fostering trust.

3. **Academic Motivation. How did students, parents, Youth Advocates, and school staff experience the program's efforts to help students academically?**

   Youth Advocates linked academic effort to participation in enjoyable program activities, motivating students.

4. **Socio-Emotional and Behavioral Growth. How did students and parents experience program efforts to provide social and emotional support and reduce school behavioral challenges?**

   Youth Advocates helped students manage their emotions and avoid behavioral issues and kept parents informed of their child's progress. Eighth grade students transitioning into high school expressed apprehension about losing program assistance when moving to high school.

1. Support

How did students, parents, Youth Advocates, and school staff experience program efforts to support students and parents?

Parents most appreciated informational, material, and financial assistance. Students valued Youth Advocate mentorship and field trips offering new experiences. Students, parents, and staff described opportunities to improve the program by identifying the need for flexible scheduling and ensuring availability of male Youth Advocates.

Twelve out of 15 parent interviewees (80 percent) noted the program's material and financial support as its most impactful element. Parents also liked parenting courses and other programming designed for them, with some citing GED classes, Parenting Journey seminars, and assistance connecting with doctors as particularly valuable. Parents appreciated Youth Advocate responsiveness, highlighting their ability to discern needs and problem-solve together. For some parents, the program provided a lifeline to secure necessities that were otherwise unavailable:

> *Whenever I need something, I reach out to Ashley [a Youth Advocate] or to anybody from the school and I always get the help that I need. Last time Ms. Patricia [a Youth Advocate] gave me gift cards for food. 'Cause I told her that we needed food and she gave me some gift cards.*

School staff commented on the program's ability to meet the varying needs of students and their families. One staff member commented:

> *It's like a personalized, tailored attention program for students who have very critical needs, not just in the school but outside the school. And a lot of those things really affect them. So having this personalized program is really helpful.*

Youth Advocates recognized the importance of this support for parents, who at times reported being overwhelmed. One Youth Advocate shared their perspective on how their programming and outreach enabled support for parents:

> *We carry a lot of things on our shoulders alone. Some of them are single mothers so they didn't have that support. They didn't have anyone else that supported them with their child. And we were able to carry that for them at school.*

In addition to this support, the program provided the opportunity for enrichment activities. Many parents expressed appreciation that their child engaged in fun experiences through the program that they could not provide themselves, including field trips or getting a manicure. One parent commented:

> *Some parents like me, I'm not able to take them all the time to the movies or out to eat or even bowling or let's say anything of activities, good activities. . . . So you guys are actually doing something I can't and I appreciate it.*

When not meeting needs directly, the program sought to connect families and students with resources. Almost all interviewees of all types reported that Youth Advocates connected students and parents to services and resources inside and outside the school.

However, these resources were not always available to all parents due to scheduling logistics. Six parents (46 percent) recommended that the program include more flexible scheduling so parents could attend programming provided by Children's Aid. One parent, who wanted to participate in GED courses but had not found a way to enroll, commented:

> *I think they need to accommodate working parents. The time does not work for working parents. Either they could do it early in the morning or in the afternoon.*

Feedback from interviews with parents highlighted additional opportunities for growth, including clearer communication with parents about the program's purpose and who served as their child's point of contact at any given time:

> *The program . . . was not too organized because we started with one person and then that person left, and I wasn't sure who was the next person who was going to be working with us.*

One Youth Advocate suggested expanding staffing to include a male Youth Advocate, noting that some students may be better able to relate to a male mentor:

> *I think that for next pilot program there should also be a male figure. Because we do have a lot of older teens in 8th grade that are a little bit too grown for us. . . . And maybe because they don't have that male figure that they can hang out with.*

2. Bridge-building

How did students, parents, Youth Advocates, and school staff experience efforts to build trust and communication?

Youth Advocates effectively connected parents and school staff, improving communication and fostering trust.

In the Middle School STH program, Youth Advocates sought to build trust and increase communication between students, parents, school staff, and themselves. Interviewees reported that Youth Advocates enhanced both trust and communication and also cited many examples of collaboration to support students. Participating parents and students formed close bonds with Youth Advocates, often viewing them as trusted mentors and messengers embedded in the school.

Eleven out of 15 parents interviewed relied on Youth Advocates to tell them about their child and any behavioral issues they exhibited. Parents frequently identified Youth Advocates as their first point of contact for their child's behavioral or wellness issues.

> *She found shelter in Patricia as there were things she would tell Patricia that they wouldn't share with me. . . . Even when I feel like something is happening to her, I just say: "Patricia, please, can you call [child's name] to find out what's going on?"*

Most parents said that Youth Advocates enhanced communication with the school, often serving as a way to communicate more openly due to the trusting relationship built between the Youth Advocate and the parent. One parent stated:

> *The communication was great because [in general] there's [school] workers that you really can't communicate with or speak to truthfully, and [the Youth Advocates] would understand where you're coming from.*

Another parent described a feeling of relief that an adult they trusted supported their child in school and helped them navigate school issues:

> *I feel very comfortable . . . I call Patricia whenever I need something. I mean, we have a good connection. Our connection is excellent. I'm so happy about that because you don't get along so well with just any teacher like I get along with Patricia.*

Interviewees from all groups shared examples of how Youth Advocates built trust by facilitating successful case conferences for students. In these meetings, Youth Advocates convene parents, teachers, and guidance counselors to develop academic or behavioral plans for an individual student. Youth Advocates were key in connecting parents and school staff. In one example, a school staff member attempting to connect with a parent shared how a Youth Advocate assisted in the process:

> *There is a kid in another class who his mom came in, [I had] never seen his mom before, except this time . . . whatever Ms. Ashley did, she was able to get the mom on the phone and then get the mom inside the building.*

A school staff member described how program staff was able to get parents into the school for meetings and to complete important school paperwork:

> *The fact that they [Youth Advocates] were able to connect with mom, walk her through every step, get the paper back, and make sure that it was in the school. Like, there was a lot of that follow up through the STH personnel for that.*

Youth Advocates often served as a bridge for Spanish-speaking parents, who were less apt to access school resources they believed were not meant for them. Promoting trusting relationships between Youth Advocates and Spanish-speaking parents encouraged parents to inquire more about how to support their child. One parent discussed attempting to plan a parent-teacher conference with an English-speaking teacher:

> *We both went to the school . . . and I said, "Patricia, please, do you think we can go to the school—because very few people speak Spanish at that school—to ask about my daughter's grades?"*

3. Academic Motivation

How did students, parents, Youth Advocates, and school staff experience the program's efforts to help students academically?

Youth Advocates linked academic effort to participation in enjoyable program activities, motivating students.

The Middle School STH program also aimed to improve attendance and academic outcomes. The team asked interviewees how the program impacted student academic performance and readiness for grade promotion. Twelve out of 15 parents (80 percent) believed their child improved academically, while five out of ten students (50 percent) believed the same. One student recounted how the program improved their math skills:

> *It did help me academically. When I was failing math, Ashley [a Youth Advocate] would help me and encouraged me to do better. So when I had a really low grade I kind of bumped it up 'cause I started doing my work even more.*

Most responses from parents, students, and school staff emphasized Youth Advocate encouragement as an influence on academics rather than academic interventions such as tutoring. Parents shared how students connected their academic success to participation in the fun parts of the program, such as receiving gift cards or attending field trips:

> *It keeps him motivated. He says, "Mommy, I have to do my homework. If I don't get good grades I won't get to go on the outing."*

Ten parents (66 percent) believed their child was prepared for the next grade. Most interviewees based this assessment on behavioral cues rather than grades or test scores.

> *I think he is [ready for the next grade]. He hasn't shown me otherwise. When he was moving from elementary to middle school, he did express that he wasn't ready and he was anxious. . . . Now he isn't showing any negative emotion towards moving on to the next grade at all.*

4. Socio-Emotional and Behavioral Growth

How did students and parents experience program efforts to provide social and emotional support and reduce school behavioral challenges?

Youth Advocates helped students manage their emotions and avoid behavioral issues and kept parents informed of their child's progress. Eighth grade students transitioning into high school expressed apprehension about losing program assistance when moving to high school.

CIDI sought to understand the program's influence on student social and emotional wellness. Five students (50 percent) and ten parents (66 percent) noted that student behavioral issues existed before the program was implemented. These included outbursts in class, fighting with other students, and other disruptive behaviors. During the academic year, school staff and parents began to use Youth Advocates as primary contacts to work through emotional self-regulation issues with students. One parent shared an example of their child's Youth Advocate intervening after a behavioral issue to remind him of his goals:

> *There's a little, like, mini counseling sessions. . . . I called and asked for assistance, and they would, like, sit him down and speak to him. Remember this. Remember that. Remember the aim you have for school.*

Eight parents (53 percent) and six students (60 percent) recounted that over the course of the program Youth Advocates became trusted authority figures who helped students learn how to manage their feelings. Students consistently discussed comfort in reaching out to their Youth Advocate when they felt upset or overwhelmed. One student stated:

> *When I get angry . . . it is easier not to get angry. I reach out to an Advocate and I will tell them what happened, or I will calm myself down and extract myself from the situation.*

Parents also described how the program helped them grapple with parenting stress. Seven parents (47 percent) noted the importance of Youth Advocates in helping them remain aware of their child's behavior and academics. Parents called Youth Advocates to receive updates on their child's activities in school or to coordinate behavioral interventions and expectations. Parents discussed their child's emotional wellness with a Youth Advocate when the child was unwilling to discuss their feelings with their parents. Students also described how Youth Advocates helped them express themselves:

> *We would talk about things that I normally wouldn't talk about with other people. And it was like a fun environment for me to talk with her and stuff. . . . We would just be talking about positive things and what's going on.*

> *So, at first it was kind of hard to get adjusted to having Ashley [a Youth Advocate] very close to me and stuff like that, like talking to me. But slowly I started getting used to it and then I got really happy when I got to talk to her.*

Half of high school-bound students, when asked about their readiness to graduate to a new school, expressed hesitance about going on to the next grade. One parent connected this apprehension to unease about not having the same social and emotional supports, in part because of the fear that supports like Youth Advocates would not be available in high school:

> *Despite graduating, he still says he doesn't want to leave school because he's very happy here. He says they won't give him in another school what he receives here. . . . After all, what child wouldn't want to be in a place where they're treated well, have people they can count on, and always receive support and guidance in whatever they might need?*

Youth Advocates noted similar concern for students going to high school without continued program support:

> *It's high school. It's like a whole different world. Like you're now not on your own but you're more independent than you were in middle school. They're not going to be on top of you the way that we are.*

05
Conclusions

The Middle School STH program was highly appreciated, effectively serving both students and their parents. Its ability to meet students' and families' material and emotional needs through the trusted relationships was a key strength, while ongoing challenges included accommodating working parent schedules to align with those of key school and program staff. Schools must actively move from expecting parents to accommodate fixed schedules to creating flexible, creative and shared solutions, like evening appointment and virtual options, to engage parents and bridge the persistent gap between parent availability and standard school hours.

Summary

The Middle School STH program was designed to support students in temporary housing to improve their attendance, socio-emotional well-being, and educational outcomes.

Interviews conducted with students, parents, Youth Advocates, and school staff demonstrated that the program provided valuable support for parents, enriching experiences for students, and helpful connections between parents and school staff.

The program's responsiveness to material and financial needs allowed parents to feel less overwhelmed in the face of sustained challenges. Students felt heard and understood by trusted mentors who supported their academic and behavioral growth while also providing new experiences. Youth Advocates encouraged students to succeed academically and helped to reduce socio-emotional burdens for students and parents. Field trips and social activities provided social enrichment in creative ways, often combining academics and cultural experiences.

These exploratory findings suggest that the Middle School STH model is a promising strategy to provide holistic support to students and families experiencing housing instability.

The alignment of existing research and findings from this study suggests the Middle School STH program model meets the unique and diverse needs of students and families in temporary housing. The connections Youth Advocates built with students, families, and school staff allowed for clearer communication and trust-building between the school and parents. Moreover, parents expressed less stress in navigating the school and addressing their child's developmental needs. This study provides support for adopting a comprehensive model for middle school students in temporary housing.

It also underscores the need for continuous adaptations, including scheduling adjustments to accommodate working parents and staffing model adjustments to ensure a team approach.

Future Direction and Limitations

This study was exploratory, and the methodology has limitations. CIDI was not able to select a random sample of interviewees or compare the experiences of the Middle School STH group to a similar group of students and families that had not received services. Program expansion should include a well-supported mixed methods evaluation component sufficient to provide more comprehensive and rigorous information on changes in academic performance and validated measures to assess student engagement and the mental health of both students and parents. The number of families served in this evaluation was limited and cannot be generalized.

Appendix

Children's Aid
Every step of the way

Children's Aid Logic Model

IMPACT Students and families will receive tailored comprehensive supports in order to remove barriers to students' learning and development so they can thrive academically and socially.

RATIONALE Children's Aid is a trusted partner for the campus's principals and within the local community. Our established presence and network of partners will support the successful implementation of this project through an expansion of services that includes staff dedicated to meeting the specialized needs of students in temporary housing and their families.. Our established presence and network of partners will support the successful implementation of this project through an expansion of services that includes staff dedicated to meeting the specialized needs of students in temporary housing and their families.

TARGET POPULATION 27 6th through 8th graders and 1 rising 6th grader who are identified as currently in temporary housing and their families (siblings and caregivers).

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	INTERMEDIATE-TERM OUTCOMES
• Funding: OCS, DOE STH Pilot, DYCD • Pilot Partners: NYC Public Schools, ACS, CIDI • CA Community School Strategy including CA Advocate Mentor Model • Relationships with Feeder Shelters • 1 FT STH Resource Coordinator; 3 PT STH Youth Advocates • Community School Staff: Director, Data Specialist, 3 Youth Advocates • New Visions Portal, CA data systems • DESSA • School admin & faculty • Training: case conferencing; Advocate Mentor strategies; ACS Prevention Services, DESSA Administration • CA Agency Resources and Partnerships: Bronx Prevention Services, Go!Healthy Initiative • Food pantry run by Food Bank for NYC • DYCD and ExpandEd afterschool and summer programs	• Assets and Needs Assessment • School/Family Orientation • Datainformed Weekly Team Meetings with continuous improvement templates; Biweekly dashboard • Weekly Individual counseling with STH social workers for students without IEPs • Mandated counseling with DOE social worker or guidance counselor for students with IEPs • Weekly mentoring sessions with Youth Advocate including 45minute 1:1 private sessions and small groups • Individual Case conferencing, or Individual Student Review (ISR) • Small group sessions including focus on social skills • SEL Assessment (DESSA) twice annually by Children's Aid • Crisis intervention for individual and families • Family outreach to address student and family barriers, including home visits • Monthly family engagement activity • Conduct individual parent outreach to identify concrete needs • ESL/GED course • Expanded learning opportunities like DYCD afterschool support activities and other CA afterschool activities • Tutoring or other academic support • Connect participants and families to summer services, experiences, and programs (ie. camp, SYEP) • Summer camp for families including Parenting Journey • Support HS transitions for 8th graders • Participant Surveys April June; Caregiver Survey to understand effectiveness of services • Coordination of school and community resources • Referrals	• # of mentoring sessions • # of counseling sessions with social worker • # of small group sessions • # of students enrolled in summer or afterschool activities • # of family outreaches and home visits • # of family events • # of ISRs • # of Referrals to internal and external services • # of participants receiving vision/dental screenings and annual physicals	• Improved YTD attendance • Reduced Chronic Absenteeism	• Improved YTD attendance • Reduced Chronic Absenteeism

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