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Implementing Housing First Initiatives and Programs for the Persistently Homeless Individuals and Families in Iredell County, North Carolina

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**IMPLEMENTING HOUSING FIRST INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS FOR THE
PERSISTENTLY HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES IN IREDELL COUNTY,
NORTH CAROLINA**

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Abstract

The purpose of this white paper study is to explore how Iredell County, North Carolina could effectively and efficiently implement housing first initiatives and programs for the persistently homeless using guidance from other counties that have successfully done so. The crisis of homelessness is growing at an alarming rate and current policy measures put in place to mitigate this issue are proving not to be as beneficial to the county of Iredell and the state of North Carolina as they could be. Iredell County North Carolina has not enacted Title V of the McKinney-Vento act which would allow for government properties to be used to house the homeless, and this study seeks to understand how this can be made possible in the county if it has already been implemented in other counties. There are several areas that this study will focus on to find that housing first initiatives are proven to be effective in placing homeless individuals and families in permanent housing and allowing them to become assets to society. These areas include the impact of homelessness on school aged children in Iredell County, policy, practices, and funding focused on this crisis in Iredell County, and how housing first initiative programs have been successfully implemented in other state's counties as a model for Iredell County to follow. Findings from the research and interviews conducted for this white paper study found that individuals and families with children in Iredell County who face persistent homelessness would benefit greatly from housing first initiative programs. School aged children need the security of a home to have successful academic achievement, and housing families and individuals could alleviate the burden homelessness has on their cognitive development. Findings show that State Representatives in Iredell County are aware of the problem of homelessness and have knowledge of policy and funding focused on mitigating the crisis. State Representatives do not have knowledge regarding Title V programs or Housing First initiatives.

Findings show that the Milwaukie County Housing First Program and the Vermont Pathways Housing First program were implemented and became a successful example for other counties to use as a basis of consideration and implementation. As the homelessness crisis is not one that can be remedied overnight, policy alternatives have been recommended for Iredell County using evaluative criteria to show that outcomes have the possibility to be successful if the strategic planning and implementation processes are carefully considered. It can be concluded that the crisis of persistent homelessness is an area where more research is needed to solve the problem and gain lasting solutions. Housing first initiative programs are a step in the right direction for this population in Iredell County who could benefit greatly from these programs that have proven to be a path forward toward permanent housing.

IMPLEMENTING HOUSING FIRST INITIATIVES AND PROGRAMS FOR THE
PERSISTENTLY HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES IN IREDELL COUNTY,
NORTH CAROLINA

Iredell County is a county located in the state of North Carolina with a population of at least 181,806 according to the 2019 US Census (QuickFacts Iredell County, North Carolina, 2019). Its county seat is in the northern town of Statesville and its largest town is its most southern one known as Mooresville. Annexed from Rowan County in 1788, Iredell is named for James Iredell who was one of the first Supreme Court Justices of the United States. “Iredell County is included in the Charlotte–Concord–Gastonia, NC–SC Metropolitan Statistical Area, as defined in 2013 by the Office of Management and Budget with data from the U.S. Census Bureau” (Iredell County, North Carolina, 2020). The county is one of the longest in North Carolina spanning 574 miles in circumference, and it is known for its many farms and rural areas, specifically in the northern region. In its early stages, Iredell County was mostly rural farmland where small, mid-sized, and large farms engaged in mixed agriculture, gristmills, tanyards, and distilleries. This rural setting lasted from the mid-1700s to the mid-1900s right before the construction of major highways that intersect in the county known as Interstates 40 and 77 (Iredell County: An Introduction, 2021). The construction of these major highways led to an intensified development of the county, as there was now quicker access to the large metropolitan area for commuters and those looking to move out of the city to quieter places while still having access to the area. Rapid population growth and development in the southern part of Iredell within the past decade has put pressure on the region to become a more suburbanized location. This in part is due to the popularity of the Lake Norman area for citizens residing in nearby Charlotte, one of North Carolina’s biggest and most popular cities (Iredell

County, North Carolina, 2020). It was also due in part to the emergence of the town of Mooresville, which saw the arrival of Lowe's Home Improvement corporate headquarters, as well as housing many of NASCAR's premier racing teams. The development of these "major corporate headquarters began to solidify south Iredell's status as an important employment center as well, bringing with it much-needed tax revenue to meet the demands of a growing residential population" (Iredell County: An Introduction, 2021). Within a decade, the population of Mooresville and its surrounding towns doubled in population with a booming housing development market (Tippett, 2014). These major changes led to many farmers selling their lands and moving to the more northern parts of the county to re-settle or re-establish their farmlands. A population of low-income families and individuals began to form, as these were people that could no longer keep up with the changing taxes and housing policies after the recession of 2008. Suburbanization has led city and county leadership to become weary of the image their region is projecting and feel an obligation to uphold that image. The sight of homeless individuals and families on the streets of fancy suburbia does not fit the beautiful setting these leaders wish to maintain. Because of this, Mooresville, the largest town in the county, with the highest employment rate and booming, does not allow for a twenty-four-hour homeless shelter for homeless families within city limits. The nearest family shelters can be found either twenty-five miles north in the city of Statesville, or twenty-seven miles south located in the city of Charlotte, which is in the county of Mecklenburg. Fifth Street Ministries located in Statesville, North Carolina, is the only twenty-four-hour homeless shelter in Iredell County. The shelter is in one of the worst parts of the city where outside there are acts of gang violence and massive poverty. Housing up to twenty-four families per night, Fifth Street Ministries is a nonprofit organization providing for the basic needs of homeless families and

individuals, while also acting as transitional housing to the chronically homeless who soon graduate to finding their own safe space to live. Besides the nightly shelter and transitional housing programs, Fifth Street also offers a community kitchen, nursing and medical staff, clothing inventory, and outside resources for special cases of abuse and violence for women and children. Being a nonprofit, this shelter does not cost Iredell County any funds and receives sponsorships and donations from individuals and organizations. Being the only twenty-four-hour homeless shelter that houses families takes a toll on the facility, thereby the limitation of only 24 families per day and night (Fifth Street, 2020). There is also a small homeless shelter for women and children located in a house in Mooresville. The Hope for Mooresville (HOME) women and children's shelter facility serves as temporary housing for women and children in crisis who have dealt with domestic violence and are residing in unstable situations. They offer "food and support services such as job placement, family care, mental health assistance, financial planning, and addiction help...as well as a mentoring program where volunteers serve as life consultants in the areas of child rearing, family relations, and work relations" (HOME About Us, 2020). HOME is also a nonprofit shelter costing the county of Iredell no money because they are a small organization unable to fund a facility fully engaged in housing families and individuals for twenty-four-hours at a time. It is a rotating shelter where there is a quick turn-around for the women and children who stay there. This leaves homeless families and individuals in the town of Mooresville and surrounding area at a great disadvantage concerning nightly shelter and education for those with school aged children. With the population of homeless persons and families growing by the day, one homeless shelter in the northern part of a county that is approximately 574 square miles in circumference is not enough to help solve the growing crisis. Research has shown that initiatives and policies focused on housing the homeless first are what

truly bring about change to this population of forgotten people (Foscarinis, 1991). North Carolina's Coalition to End Homelessness is one that works to help give resources to the homeless population via health and human services. They also work to fight against Veteran homelessness and rehouse families who have lost their homes in natural disasters (Our Mission, 2021). The coalition does not however have any current initiatives or policies that point to housing programs for the persistently homeless population throughout the state.

Literature Review

Impact on Families with Children

Experts in this field have researched the impact on family and home life of young children in a homeless situation. Studies on this topic show the importance of knowing how a homeless child's situation shapes them overall, and how growing up in shelters and hotels causes developmental effects in these young students. One such study conducted by Stephanie Hinton and Darlinda Cassel is outlined in their journal article, "Exploring the Lived Experiences of Homeless Families with Young Children." In their study, they seek to "to understand reasons families with young children become homeless; to become aware of beneficial resources available to families and their perceptions of the resources; and to examine the developmental effects that homeless living situations can have on young children" (Hinton, 2013). Their "research suggested common themes as to why and how parents and young children are affected by homelessness" (Hinton, 2013). They proceeded to interview eight different families living in a homeless shelter who had at least one child between the ages of 4 and 8. They found a common theme among the homeless families to be that of unhappy childhoods that led to homelessness. It is a patterned behavior as they themselves are now homeless with children. They found that the majority of participants in the study "described their unhappy childhoods as being the source of

their lack of resources and support system as an adult” (Hinton, 2013). Unhappy childhoods, along with other themes including joblessness, teenage pregnancy, and multiple children, ranked high as common themes that led to homelessness. Regarding resources perceived by these homeless families, all participants felt that the shelter provided adequate resources to aid in their recovery from homelessness. Resources including mentoring, counseling for marriages and families, GED preparation courses, and addiction control were seen as positive for the homeless families with young children (Hinton, 2013). “As a part of the shelter’s program, clients are encouraged to plan for the future when they leave the shelter... the shelter’s decision to constantly discuss life beyond the shelter allowed participants the ability to look ahead and plan for their next step, while participating in resources giving them the opportunity to make their goals a reality” (Hinton, 2013). Though parents had these resources made available to them, there was no way of hindering the impact that homelessness has on young children. “Many parents who had described a positive experience also described their young child(ren) as being angry and emotional since arriving at the shelter” (Hinton, 2013), while still others claimed ‘that due to the stability and constant routine her children were “a lot happier” since moving into the shelter than when they were living on the streets’ (Hinton, 2013). Lack of full supervision by parents for their children led to learned behaviors from others of being disrespectful to property in the shelter, disrespectful to other’s space in the shelter, and disobedience to parents. “Parents were also observed yelling and making negative comments towards the young child(ren)” (Hinton, 2013) as they are in stressful situations leading them to lash out. Young children can pick up on negative undertones and responses in turn forming their own negative patterned behaviors. “Parents interviewed described behavioral changes that occurred with their children; issues of anger and anxiety were raised as a result of being

homeless. A behavior change was noticed by all participating parents” (Hinton, 2013). The authors conclude their study by stating that though parents of children have an understanding of the pattern of homelessness as to why they are homeless, and an understanding of participation in resources offered to them, ““observations proved that families still struggled in understanding the basic needs of their children. It also seemed that parents did not fully understand the importance of early education and intervention. The study validates the importance of educating families of young children who are homeless as well as the importance of early childhood educators developing an awareness of ways to support children in a homeless situation”” (Hinton, 2013).

It is important for this study to focus on the impact of development that affects the behaviors and academic achievements of McKinney-Vento students. The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act is a federal act that was put in place by Congress in 1987 to protect the rights of homeless students while also ensuring that they too receive the appropriate quality of education as other students who are non-homeless receive (Jozefowicz-Simbeni et al., 2006). The law has since been amended numerous times to expand services to different groups of young homeless students, add incentives and allocation of funds to State and Local Educational Agencies, and ““increase focus on programming and community collaborations for improved academic success of homeless students”” (Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2006). A study conducted by Mary E. Haskett, Jenna Montgomery Armstrong and Jennifer Tisdale is detailed in their journal article “Developmental Status and Social–Emotional Functioning of Young Children Experiencing Homelessness.” ““The aim of this study was to gain understanding of homeless children’s social–emotional adjustment and their functioning in language, motor, and cognitive skills”” (Haskett, 2016). The authors ““hypothesized that the sample mean score on a standardized developmental test would be lower than the mean for the norming group. In terms

of domains of development, the authors expected that scores on language/communication development would be much lower than the norming group, but they did not have specific expectations about nonverbal/motor domains” (Haskett, 2016). Through a quantitative data analysis using statistical methods to test early childhood development, the authors found that results pointed to below average functioning of homeless children compared to the general population, or norming group, while also indicating the full sample mean quotient for the overall scale (96.18) was below the norming sample (Haskett, 2016). Through their study, the authors found that correlations exist between developmental, behavioral, and academic delays.

Benefits of Housing First Initiatives

Many studies in the arena regarding the homelessness crisis have concluded that housing the homeless first has resulted in major benefits for states and municipalities that have implemented the programs after adequate research and analysis specific to the needs of their area. One such research report was formalized by the University of Mexico (UNM) Institute for Social Research to show it cost less to house chronically homeless people than to leave them on the streets. The study was conducted using a cost benefit analysis of the heading Home Initiative and was commissioned by the City of Albuquerque Department of Family and Community Services. The Heading Home Initiative is a program that was designed and implemented in the city to first house homeless people, and then provide them the services they may need thereafter. “‘It’s a model called ‘Housing First’ and is a departure from traditional federal housing programs that require applicants to be employed, drug and alcohol free and possibly other factors before being given a place to live” (Hilf, 2016). Ninety-five participants of the Heading Home Initiative were a part of the UNM analysis and were followed for a period of two to three years to be a part of the research project. The analysis looked at how much each individual cost by

using various social and behavioral services, before and after being a part of the Heading Home program. Paul Guerin, a researcher in for the Institute for Social Research (ISR) described the process as being one where participants gave consent to allow their information regarding arrests, jail time, hospital and ambulance services, and information from all shelters be surrendered to the researchers conducting the project. ISR was given access to places where the participants obtained services that cost money (Hilf, 2016). During the time of the study, participants in the Heading Home project cost about \$1 MILLION less than before entering the program which is roughly a 15% cost savings. Researchers discovered that on average about \$14,700 was saved per person, and when ““that average is applied to the total number of eligible participants in the program, the study shows Heading Home resulted in a two to three-year savings of nearly \$5 million”” (Hilf, 2016). Every dollar spent on the program resulted in a cost savings return of \$1.78. The results of the study were not surprising to researchers who know that homelessness leads to an increase in emergency room visits, police and ambulance calls and other associated costs. Experts can look at the results and observe that because the Heading Home program did not only focus on healthcare and hospital data, but also on criminal justice, behavioral health, and social programs, policy makers should consider the implementation of this type of program at city, county, and state levels (Hilf, 2016). The researchers from ISR considered the cost. The results yielded evidence that programs such as these work and are cost effective for communities looking to cut expenditures concerning public safety.

Authors Angela Ly and Eric Latimer conducted a qualitative analysis for their journal article, *Housing First Impact on Costs and Associated Cost Offset: A Review of the Literature*, to test their hypotheses: 1.) Housing First programs for chronically or episodically homeless individuals is expanding rapidly in North America and Europe 2.) Overall costs of services used

by the homeless population can add up quickly, and lead to the potential for significant cost offsets with Housing First Programs (Latimer, 2015). The authors sought to provide an updated literature review focusing on the cost offsets of Housing First programs from 2007 to 2015. They conducted their analysis through a systemic review using MEDLINE, PsycINFO Google, and the Homeless Hub for grey literature. They noted that their method studied the increase or decrease of impact on service cost associated with Housing First, as well as net impact for overall costs and the cost of Housing First intervention (Latimer, 2015). After retaining twelve published studies (4 randomized studies and 8 quasi-experimental) and twenty-two unpublished studies, the author's results concluded that "Shelter and emergency department costs decreased with Housing First, while impacts on hospitalization and justice costs are more ambiguous. Studies using a pre-post design reported a net decrease in overall costs with Housing First. In contrast, experimental studies reported a net increase in overall costs with Housing First" (Latimer, 2015). Though their review may have casted doubt on whether Housing First programs can pay for themselves, significant cost offsets combined with their benefits for participants concludes that Housing First programs represent a more efficient allocation of resources than traditional services offer. (Latimer, 2015)

Economic Benefits of Housing First Initiatives

For communities to be able to implement such programs as the Heading Home program in Albuquerque, they must first be aware of their federal funding received through the McKinney-Vento Act policy. It is also a means by which the federal government allocates funding to states who ration out the funds to municipalities based on need. In her journal article, *The Politics of Homelessness: A Call to Action*, Maria Foscarinis reviews the issue of too few resources and programs provided by the McKinney-Vento Act and advocates for policy changes

and program implementation of housing the homeless for the economic benefit of counties and municipalities. Foscarinis believes that ““most of the McKinney programs are emergency in nature. A series of shelter programs provide funds for the acquisition, rehabilitation, and operation of emergency shelters, as well as programs providing funding for health and mental health care”” (Foscarinis, 1991). Unfortunately, these programs are grossly inadequate as McKinney-Vento funding cannot solve the underlying problems of homelessness. The national agenda for long-term solutions to the homelessness crisis needs to address the underlying causes which are housing and income. Foscarinis suggests that housing the homeless should be a priority in states and municipalities who are plagued by the problem, and that local governments should take the initiative to put their McKinney-Vento funding to better use. Funds cut from federal housing should be restored, and unused existing resources should be utilized in a cost-effective way to increase the supply of low-income housing. Foscarinis goes on to suggest the use of both unused city and federal property as affordable housing for homeless persons. ““Title V of the McKinney Act now requires certain of these properties to be made available for short-term use by homeless persons. This provision should be strengthened and expanded to allow all unused federal property to be converted into permanent housing for homeless persons. Given adequate rehabilitation and operating funds, these properties could provide significant long-term relief”” (Foscarinis, 1991). The author, being a part of the American Psychologists Association, makes note that the streets of cities and very rural areas are not safe for elderly homeless individuals dealing with mental health problems as they are more likely to end up in the emergency room or meet their death. She states it is imperative that this specific class of homeless individuals be made aware of their benefits that they are eligible for under the Social Security Act. Many who were not made aware of their benefits and have mental health concerns

become isolated without resources or are not capable of filling out the appropriate applications to receive the aid benefitted to them. Foscarinis strongly suggests that outreach programs be implemented by the U.S Social Security office to ensure that homeless persons, or those isolated away from family help, receive the benefits they are entitled to. This will lead to less elderly homeless individuals on the streets as their benefits will help them into low-income housing and mental health facilities. They will no longer be as big of a concern on the street for ambulance, police, and other public safety costs (Foscarinis, 1991).

For the purposes of this white paper study, it is imperative to analyze the criminalization of homelessness and how it affects the costs and services of public safety for many cities, towns, and municipalities. In their report, *No Safe Place: The Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities*, The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty analyze the criminalization measures in effect throughout the nation and describes why the law are ineffective in addressing the underlying causes of homelessness, expensive to taxpayers, and violate homeless person's constitutional and human rights (Poverty, 2014). To conduct their analysis, the Law Center had to survey 187 cities and assessed municipal codes that criminalize the way of life and behaviors of homeless people. Though lack of affordable housing and shelter space are the main cause of homelessness, cities and municipalities punish by law individuals living on the street for doing what they deem necessary to survive. According to their study, the Law Center found that 34% of cities impose city-wide bans on camping in public, 18% of cities impose city-wide bans on sleeping in public, 53% of cities prohibit sitting or lying down in particular public places, and 43% of cities prohibit sleeping in vehicles (Poverty, 2014). Some examples of gross criminalization policies found by the Law Center include Santa Cruz, California where 83% of homeless people are without shelter options and the city's policies on the criminalization of

camping in public, sitting, or lying down on public sidewalks, and sleeping in vehicles is taken very seriously. This is the same exact situation the 34% of homeless people in Orlando, Florida find themselves in as the tourist area does not provide shelter beds in the evenings. A key finding of this study is that there is a vast increase in the criminalization of homelessness across the nation. It was found that the increase was most dramatic when it came to city-wide bans on fundamental human activities such as camping, sleeping, sitting, lying down, and sleeping in vehicles in public (Poverty, 2014).

There are several key conclusions and recommendations made by the Law center to see what the benefits are for the economy of cities and towns, as well as to end the crisis of homelessness. One such conclusion is that Criminalization laws are costly to taxpayers. ““Criminalization is the most expensive and least effective way of addressing homelessness. A growing body of research comparing the cost of homelessness (including the cost of criminalization) with the cost of providing housing to homeless people shows that housing is the most affordable option”” (Poverty, 2014). An example of cost saving studies found by the Law Center was ““a 2014 economic-impact analysis by Creative Housing Solutions evaluating the cost of homelessness in Central Florida found that providing chronically homeless people with permanent housing and case managers would save taxpayers \$149 million in reduced law enforcement and medical care costs (public safety costs) over the next decade”” (Poverty, 2014). Policy recommendations made from the study include the federal government investing in affordable housing at a scale necessary to end homelessness while also playing a leadership role to combat the criminalization of homelessness by local governments and implement constructive alternatives. Ways the federal government can implement these policies include funding the National Housing Trust Fund through the Federal Housing Finance Administration releasing

profits from Fannie May and Freddie Mac that have been given to the US Treasury. Also, ““Congress should pass housing finance reform legislation that would provide at least \$3.5 billion per year for the NHTF”” (Poverty, 2014). Finally, the ““Department of Justice (“DOJ”) should ensure that its community policing grants are not funding criminalization practices. In addition, DOJ should write its guidance documents to actively discourage criminalization, and it should take a more active role in investigating police departments that violate the civil rights of homeless people”” (Poverty, 2014).

Research Design

To find and collect data for the purposes of this study, three separate studies and research methods were explored and used to answer the following questions regarding the need for housing first initiative programs in Iredell County: 1.) How are subgroups of persistently homeless individuals and families impacted by homelessness? 2.) What policies and practices are already in place to address the issue of persistent homelessness? 3.) Are there successful models of housing first initiative programs in other state’s counties? These studies are followed by an analysis of policy alternatives to be considered to take the place of the current practices used by Iredell County to address the persistent homelessness crisis.

The following are sections describing the methodology used for each study that was conducted, the participants of the study if applicable, why they were chosen, and interview questions. The methodology section ends with the findings of the three studies separated into three subsections. A conclusion to summarize the findings was added to the end of the methodology section to show how the data collected answers the questions regarding the need of housing first initiative programs in Iredell County.

Methodology

Study 1

To obtain comprehensive insight on the impacts of homelessness on individuals and families to make the case that housing first initiatives are beneficial to these groups in Iredell County, it is imperative that this study analyze a subgroup sample effected by this crisis. For the purposes of study number 1, public school children experiencing homelessness in Iredell County were chosen as the sample to collect data regarding the impacts that persistent homelessness has on their behaviors, social skills, and emotions, and how this plays a major role in their academic progress. “Public school data reported to the U.S. Department of Education during the 2018-2019 school year shows that an estimated **34,765** public school students experienced homelessness over the course of the year. Of that total, **1,211** students were unsheltered, **3,334** were in shelters, **4,986** were in hotels/motels, and **25,234** were doubled up” (North Carolina Homelessness Statistics, 2020). East Iredell Elementary School is a Title 1 school located in Statesville North Carolina and has the largest population of students in the county. Besides the 894-student count, East Iredell Elementary school has the largest McKinney-Vento population in the county as well. The elementary school is currently ranked #1715 out of 2,538 schools in the state of North Carolina putting them in the bottom 50th percentile (East Iredell Elementary School, 2003-2019). According to Public School Review for the school year 2016-2017, “the percentage of students achieving proficiency in math is 39% (which is lower than the North Carolina state average of 47%), and the percentage of students achieving proficiency in Reading/Language Arts is 31% (which is lower than the North Carolina state average of 46%)” (East Iredell Elementary School, 2003-2019).

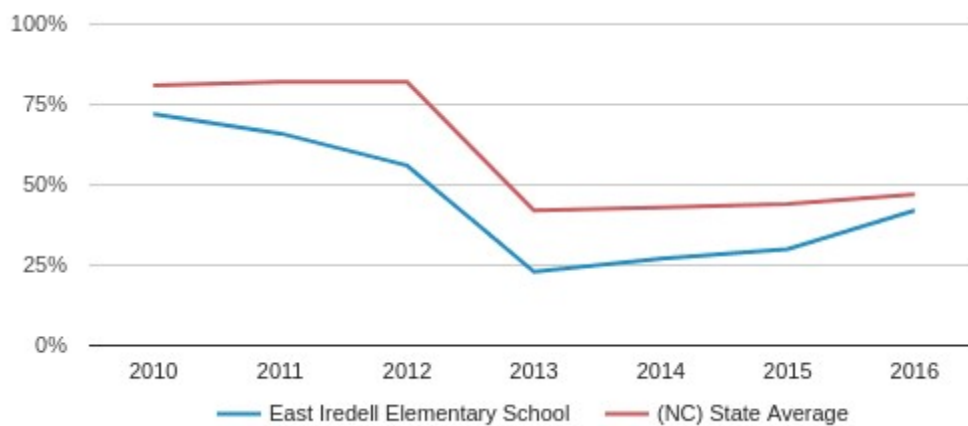


Figure 1. Math Test Scores (% Proficient) (East Iredell Elementary School, 2003-2019).

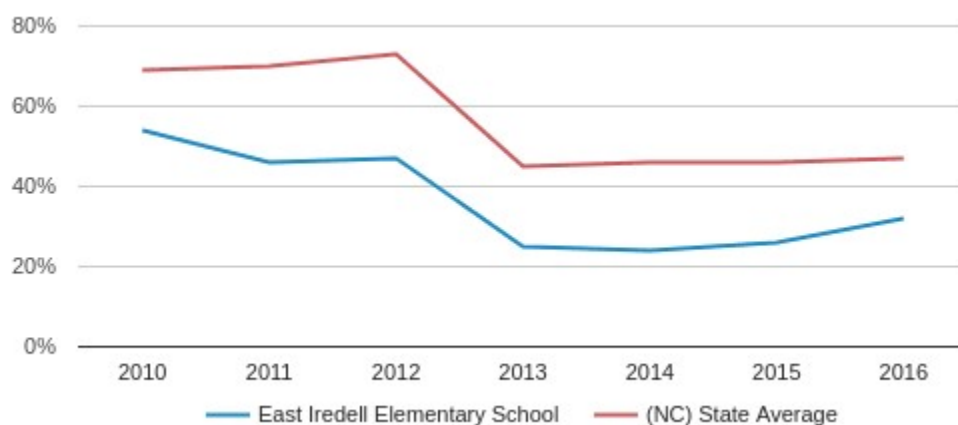


Figure 2. Reading/Language Arts Test Scores (% Proficient) (East Iredell Elementary School, 2003-2019).

Participants

With the intent of including the following data for the purposes of this study, personal interviews were conducted in the fall of 2019 with staff who are employed with East Iredell Elementary school. These professionals were able to give insight into the education of McKinney-Vento students, as well as describe their social behaviors and levels of academic

achievement. The interviews of the staff were done so anonymously and for that reason their occupations have been coded for this analysis: Two counselors (C1 and C2), a top-level school administrator (A1), and a first-grade level teacher (T1).

Counselor 1 has been in the profession for fifteen years and it was their third year as a counselor for the third to fifth graders at East Iredell Elementary school, as well as the 504-program coordinator. Counselor 2 has been in their profession for six years and was in their first year of interning at East Iredell Elementary school for the kindergarten to second grade students. East Iredell Elementary school is the only Title 1 school in the county to have two professional counselors. Both counselors work with behavior intervention planning and McKinney-Vento students. Though C2 is in their first year of internship with the school, both counselors are professionals in their field and are deemed valid sources for this analysis.

Administrator 1 is one of the main administrators for East Iredell Elementary school. A1 has been in education for twenty-three years and has worked as a main administrator for the school for eight months. It is their duty to keep all students and staff safe, and as the instructional leader, they are to ensure all students are learning and reaching their full potential. A1 has been deemed a valid source for this study as they have been in their profession for a length of time, and as such have dealt with students of all levels and backgrounds.

Teacher 1 has been teaching for fifteen years and is in their first school year of teaching at East Iredell Elementary school. Before teaching in North Carolina schools, T1 was a teacher in New York City schools and has been in Title 1 schools since the beginning of their career. T1 has been deemed a valid source as they have firsthand experience with students of many backgrounds and levels during their length of time in their profession.

Interview Questions

- 1.) What is your Occupation?
- 2.) What is your level Interaction with students and what amount of Observational Opportunities do you have?
- 3.) Please describe both positive and negative interactions you have had with students
- 4.) How strongly do you believe that homeless students have trouble acclimating to a social environment within the classroom?
- 5.) How often have you observed negative social behaviors amongst students; specifically those who are dealing with homelessness?
- 6.) Please describe negative behaviors you have observed being exhibited by these students.
- 7.) How often are students who are homeless moved in and out of the school due to their housing issues? Do you believe this has an impact on their behavior?
- 8.) How well do these students excel academically?
- 9.) Do you believe social behaviors and academic achievement go hand in hand?

Study II

For the purposes of study number two, conducting research to find out what interventions have been, or are being, put in place through policy and funding in Iredell County is imperative to the question of implementation of housing first initiative programs and why these would be beneficial in combating the persistently homeless crisis. As previously mentioned, there are only two emergency shelter organizations in the county considered to be nonprofits and functioning to house the homeless for at least twenty-four hours. It is vital to have a better understanding of what county and state interventions have been made available, and if or how these interventions

are impacting the persistently homeless in Iredell County. One such intervention has been put in place by the state of North Carolina, and its purpose is to have a positive impact on the persistent homelessness crisis in Iredell County. The North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness is an interventional program incorporated in the state as there was a growing need for advocacy and public policy change for homeless citizens and the organizations that were serving them (Our Mission, 2021). The policy agenda for the NCCEH seeks to end homelessness through prevention, an increase in access to funding for services as well as housing and homeless programs, production of affordable housing, and targeting policies that exacerbate poverty (Our Mission, 2021). State and local representatives in Iredell County have obtained knowledge of, and are tasked with formulating policy regarding persistent homelessness, as well as the allocation of funding toward this crisis.

Participants

To find and collect the data for this method, interview questions were formulated for the following groups and individuals:

- 1.) The directors of the two emergency shelters in Iredell County Hope for Mooresville (HOMe) and Fifth Street Ministries
- 2.) The North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness Representative to Iredell County
- 3.) The County Commissioners of Iredell County
- 4.) The State Representatives to Iredell County

Once successful contact was made with the groups or individuals, and they had received the questions to review, personal interviews were to be conducted to collect the data needed to answer the questions formulated for this research method. Several attempts at making successful contact resulted in only the state representatives to Iredell County having the availability to

answer the questions via email. These representatives are Jeffrey McNeely of District 84 and Grey Mills of District 95. Both representatives share in their representation of Iredell County as it is one of the largest in the state of North Carolina. These representatives have first-hand knowledge of the state budget and the state funding that is allocated to counties regarding housing and addressing the homelessness crisis.

Interview Questions

- 1.) What is your name and occupation?
- 2.) How long have you been a state representative?
- 3.) How important was the issue of housing and homelessness to you when running for a state position?
- 4.) What do you know regarding the homelessness crisis in Iredell County?
- 5.) Are there policies being discussed or proposed at the state level to combat homelessness in Iredell County?
- 6.) Do you believe more could be done to address this issue?
- 7.) Do you have any knowledge of what housing first initiative programs are?
- 8.) Is there specific funding that comes from that state to support homelessness programs or organizations in Iredell County?
- 9.) Does federal funding flow through state-level legislators regarding homelessness in Iredell County?

Study III

For study number 3, it is important to review policy and successful implementation used in other states that have counties where housing first initiative programs have been put into practice for use as successful models for Iredell County. It is also the goal of this study to find

programs that have utilized Title V of the McKinney-Vento Act to implement housing first programs. As can be observed in the literature review section of this white paper study, the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, New Mexico has analyzed housing first methods and conducted research to use toward implementation of these programs. Their research and implementation are examples of a successful model for Iredell County to follow regarding housing first initiative programs. For the purposes of this white paper study, research was conducted on other state's counties that have used similar research methods and experiments toward housing first initiatives for their homeless populations. Milwaukie Housing First and Vermont Pathways Housing First programs were chosen as successful models of implementation as both used research and methods to target specific homeless groups and lessen the number of those populations at a stable rate resulting in revenue the programs received to be operational to equal the same revenue received by the counties for having less homeless families and individuals dependent on state and county assistance programs.

Findings

Study I

The interviews conducted of each participant in study number one consisted of eight to thirteen questions, and each interview lasted between thirteen to forty-five minutes. Data was gathered and broken up into three themes according to the questions asked during the interviews and the answers given by the participants. These themes are: (1) Specific Interaction with McKinney-Vento Students, (2) Behaviors and Academic Achievement, and (3) Resources vs. Research. For the purposes of this white paper study, and to specifically show the significant impact on school aged children experiencing persistent homelessness, only sections one and two

have been included. These sections of the analysis summarize the questions asked and the answers given by the participants.

Specific Interaction with McKinney-Vento Students

It was vital to the validity of this data gathering to note the level of interaction between student and participant to reassure their professional analysis of the students. Each participant was asked their level of interaction with McKinney-Vento students throughout the course of the day. It was also asked whether the interactions were positive or negative and to give detailed encounters of each. As the participants are part of a school consisting of McKinney-Vento and nonhomeless students, their levels of interaction vary per day according to the specific need of a child. According to C1 and C2, each morning they are outside of their office as a means of a “check-in” station to be sure these students have essentials they need such as coats and socks. These check-ins last about five minutes, and C1 and C2 noted that on average they are speaking with 50% of these students between 15-30 minutes per day. Each participant has several opportunities per day to be in direct observation of these students; it was specified by A1 that they are in the position to make rounds each morning as classes begin to observe and note both positive and negative behaviors exhibited by all students. As A1 has the opportunity of direct observation, much more so does T1 who is in the classroom with students from anywhere between 5-7 hours per day. The best opportunity for T1’s interaction with students is during the small group rounds during the English Language and Math portions of the day. T1 noted that it is during these times they are more effectively able to gauge the progress of the student academically as well as socially.

Through the direct observation and interaction with the students, each participant can see firsthand positive and negative attributes that impact the lives of McKinney-Vento students.

Participants noted that many of these children are housed in hotels, or the one shelter offered to the homeless population in the entire county of Iredell. These living circumstances have led to several of these students, those living in and outside of the district, to be truant several times during the week, not being found to be arriving by the same bus each day, and also leaving essentials they need for the day at their current living quarters. It was specifically noted by T1 that snacks are provided in the classroom as one is never sure if the child went hungry overnight or will go home and not have a meal. C2 noted that every Friday food bags are handed for the weekend to ensure these students are fed. All participants commented that the lack of private space once these children return to their current living arrangement is a great cause for concern and impacts the students in vast ways. Lack of sleep due to the lack of a private room or more than 5 people in a room has led some of these students to be quite cranky the next day in class, while also preventing them to have adequately done their at home assignments. C2 noted that the biggest intervention for many of these students experiencing this crisis is sleep as it helps with many areas of a child's development and wellbeing. C1 likewise noted that lack of sleep by these students has caused negative behavioral patterns in a specific student who is living in one room occupied by five people. A1 noted that they have frequently seen some of the same McKinney-Vento students in their office weekly for various reasons ranging from a feel better pep talk as a reassurance of their value and safety, to disciplinary conversations resulting from exhibited negative behaviors.

Behaviors and Academic Achievement

As discussed in the previous theme, a lack of a secure environment by these students has led to some troublesome behaviors that may or may not also impact their academic achievements. It was asked of the participants to discuss whether they believe in their

professional opinion that behaviors correlate with academic achievement, and to describe in detail both negative and positive behaviors observed. It was noted by three of the four participants that behaviors exhibited by McKinney-Vento students have a direct correlation to their academic achievement, but it varies from student to student; some may do well in their academics but exhibit poor behaviors and vice versa. On the contrary, A1 noted that though there is a correlation between the two, it is not as various. If the student is exhibiting negative behaviors, they are doing poorly in their academics as well. Many of the poor behaviors exhibited by these students consist of profanity, name calling, curt or frustrated speech to their peers and teachers, as well as disruptive meltdowns and physical altercations involving hitting or shoving. T1 described the actions of various students in their classroom who have caused disruptions while class was underway, having to send them to walk the hallway as a break, or exercise taking deep breaths to cope with the situation. Both T1 and C1 noted that there are students who need frequent breaks to get through the day. Some students have a hard time acclimating socially with other students, while others have trouble following the rules of the class or respecting the instructor. C1 noted that a reason for some of these negative behaviors can be attributed to the mentality of a student who has moved many times from school to school or housing to shelter. They may have the idea that since they are not usually putting down roots in a specific school, why should they be comfortable where they currently receive their education if they are bound to move again? C2 also noted that change in behaviors can stem from a student having been in a stable living environment to suddenly having been moved to a hotel or homeless shelter. Adapting to change for these students can be quite difficult when applied with other factors of their lives. Whether it be that the parent has lost their job or a relative has passed away, these students feel the impact of change and cope with it differently. Each participant

discussed that the students who are McKinney-Vento have been observed to have changed behaviors depending on their current situation. This can be attributed to the student's personal worries and anxieties of not having a secure place to live, enough to eat, lack of sleep, or seeing their parent struggle to maintain security instead of being an influence of strong character for their child. These worries and anxieties have a way of spilling over to the academic achievement of these children experiencing this crisis. It was asked of the participants if in their professional opinion they feel there are enough resources to help guide, train, and prepare faculty and staff for negative behaviors in their school. The answer to this was very similar by all participants in that the resources are not there as funding focusses on academic achievement and learning gaps. Many students who have moved from school-to-school experience lapses in their education leading to them falling behind in several subject areas, and even missing certain standardized state tests. It is in the participants' understanding that the learning gaps take precedence over frequent negative behaviors, and that once the funding is available, it would be better suited to explore resources allowing for a more in-depth knowledge into the behaviors exhibited by these students.

Academic achievement is impacted not only by student's situations, but by how they are responding to their situation. As discussed above, it is likely that many McKinney-Vento students have correlations between their behaviors and academic standings, and it varies per student. T1 noted there is a student in the classroom who is progressing very nicely in reading and Language Arts, but unfortunately has exhibited negative behaviors on average twice a week. It is observed by T1 that these negative behaviors have an impact on the student's progress. Though they are a lower-level reader, their potential to be at a better level should supersede their behaviors but has yet to do so; the behaviors seem to supersede the academic achievement. As noted by C1, there

are currently no McKinney-Vento students who participate in the school's Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) program. According to North Carolina's definition of giftedness, students who are a part of AIG are ““gifted students perform or show the potential to perform at substantially high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience or environment”” (Academically or Intellectually Gifted, 2019). C2 noted that many of the students are underachieving in the grade level, and many are still catching up in several subject areas. All participants agree that the environment, both outside of education and socially among peers, has an impact on academic achievements. The school strives to ensure the security and value of each student to ensure they're feeling welcomed into a community and are not outsiders due to their circumstances. This environment produces positive behaviors in some McKinney-Vento students as well as boost their academic achievements. Being highly praised and rewarded has also had an impact. The correlation of behavior and academic achievement is evident through the participant's observations of students who exhibit negative behaviors and poor academic standing, vice versa, or positive academic standing and negative behaviors.

Study II

Due to their limited availability, Representatives Mills and McNeely were unable to participate in a formal interview. Findings for study number two were gathered through the answers given to the interview questions to the best of their knowledge, and the representatives sent their responses via email. The following is a summary of the answers given by each representative with a paraphrasing of the key points they presented.

Representative Grey Mills

Representative Grey Mills (Mills) is an attorney who first ran for a North Carolina House of Representatives seat in 2008 and served two terms consecutively from 2009-2012. After the

sitting incumbent announced his retirement, Mills decided to seek re-election and won the seat for his third term in 2020. During this election, he was motivated by the current COVID-19 pandemic affecting the communities he sought to represent and found this crisis to take precedence over any other issues. Mills had the opportunity to focus on homelessness in Iredell County this past year as he was asked to locate information for a schoolteacher who needed it for an upcoming class. He found that the most helpful information came from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human services (NCDHHS) but did not disclose what information his office received or shared to the teacher from this department. Mills went on to note that there are several state programs in place aiming to assist people to find permanent housing, and target those with either extremely low incomes or who struggle with disabilities. It is his belief that more should be done regarding this crisis, but tax dollars are limited, and there is no guarantee of more to the amount of funding that can be allocated to address the issue. He is familiar with affordable housing groups such as the Housing Finance Agency and the Housing Coalition but is unsure of their involvement in housing first initiative programs. Mills knows that the state budget covers all counties, as well as NCDHHS programs, but because the budget was not passed due to the governor's veto, it is difficult to know if there will be more funding this year that is allocated toward housing projects in Iredell County. There are federal funds that flow to states and local governments that have conditions or restrictions on how the money is to be spent and individual legislators such as Representative Mills have little influence on the flow-through funds from the federal government.

Representative Jeffrey McNeely

Representative Jeff McNeely (McNeely) is the owner of G&M Milling and was elected to North Carolina House of Representatives in 2020 where he is now serving his first term. He

felt the call to lead the people of his district during the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and has set out to have their best interests at the forefront since obtaining his seat. He is aware of the persistently homeless' needs in Iredell County, but this was not a key factor in his desire to run for office. McNeely is aware that there are several homeless shelters in the county doing their best to combat the issue of keeping homeless individuals safe and off the streets, but that there should be more attention to this population. Because the state budget has not passed due to the governor's veto, there is little guarantee to additional funding to housing projects in Iredell County, but McNeely had the ability to share some of the funding details as follows:

- **\$15M in State Fiscal Recovery Funds to the Department of Health and Human Services for rapid rehousing services for individuals and families at risk of homelessness.** In both the House and Senate versions of the budget, the funds are for financial assistance to cover security deposits and rental assistance, utility deposits and utility assistance, temporary hotel stays, housing navigation services, and case management services. The House version of the budget added allowable uses to the provision, including home improvements, home repairs, activities to increase local capacity for housing services, and funds to support vulnerable seniors ages 60 and older to remain in in-home living arrangements.
- **\$100,000 NR in both years of the biennium to the NC State Bar for Pisgah Level Services for the Veterans Assistance Program,** which assists homeless or otherwise vulnerable military veterans with access to services and resources to obtain permanent housing and improve access to benefits.

McNeely believes that more could and should be done regarding the persistently homeless in Iredell County and is very interested to find out more information regarding housing first initiative programs and the Title V Program from the McKinney-Vento Act. He sees that the problem has gotten worse over the years and needs to be addressed differently to make a lasting impact and change that will lead to a path of successful implementation of programs that will give homeless families permanent housing.

Study III

Milwaukee County Housing First Program

Milwaukee County Housing First philosophy provides housing for the homeless without pre-conditions. The program has found that the most vulnerable in the community can solve only one problem at a time, and without housing and knowing where their next meal will come from, having shelter becomes the most important issue (What is Milwaukee County Housing First, 2021). “Since 2008, with the creation of over 600 units for individuals who have either been homeless or at risk of homelessness, Milwaukee County has made substantial progress in the development of permanent supportive housing” (Housing First Initiative: A partnership between Milwaukee County and the City of Milwaukee, 2016). The goals of Milwaukee Housing first are:

1. Immediate access to housing with no barriers
2. Recovery oriented Case Management
3. An individualized approach with autonomy, personal choice, and self-determination
4. Support-driven care
5. Social community integration and community development (Housing First Initiative: A partnership between Milwaukee County and the City of Milwaukee, 2016).

Once individuals or families are in stable housing and living conditions, wraparound services, which range from rehabilitation and counseling to job training and placement are offered for further intervention. To date, Milwaukee County Housing first initiative approach has led to over 2,000 homeless individuals being placed in permanent housing (Why Key to Change?, 2021).



Figure 3. Rate at which housing was achieved after Housing First Program (What is Milwaukee County Housing First, 2021)

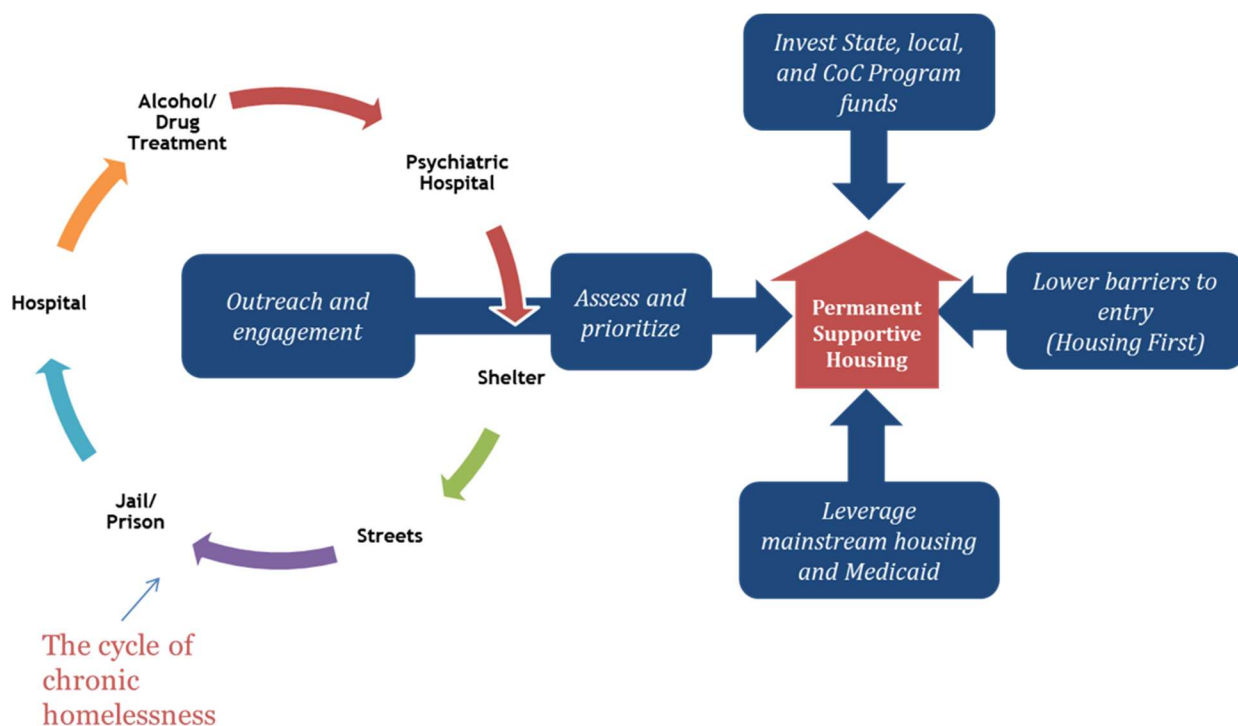


Figure 4. Logical Model of Prioritizing Housing First (Housing First Initiative: A partnership between Milwaukee County and the City of Milwaukee, 2016)

Their housing first community consists of several key positions that aid in the success of the program. The Housing First Resident Advisory Council exists to offer residents a way to evaluate the Housing First program and recommendations that provide opportunities to residents to improve their lives. This council meets regularly and is made up of Housing First residents and staff (What is Milwaukee County Housing First, 2021). “The Resident Advisory Council also serves as a training tool for Housing First staff. Staff members learn more about the challenges and needs of the chronically homeless and newly housed as they interact with them over time. The Resident Advisory Council is a bridge that links the two.” (What is Milwaukee County Housing First, 2021). The program also offers a personal development and creative expression service that allows resident to express and tell their stories in ways that are enriching and healing to their lives. It is also a way for others to hear testimonies and know they are not alone in their journey.

The Milwaukee Housing First’s community integration has allowed the outside community to be involved in the efforts that the housing first initiative program is striving for. Milwaukee County Housing First program receives \$600,000 from the city of Milwaukee toward the tenant-based rent assistance portion of the program, as well as an increase of \$350,000 for Milwaukee County’s My Home Funding (What is Milwaukee County Housing First, 2021). Monetary donations, personal items, and volunteers giving their time have been integral parts in the success of the program. “From the community, the month-long donation drive put on by Blue's Egg, or the production of a resident artwork gallery by the Grand Avenue Club, every effort is another step closer for each resident to re-join life in our community.” (What is Milwaukee County Housing First, 2021). Milwaukee County Housing First costs about \$2

million in funding per year, and this has led to revenue being added back into the county. The county has reduced its Medicare costs by \$2.1 million per year, reduced its mental health care costs by \$715 thousand per year, and has reduced costs to their legal system by \$600 thousand dollars per year (What is Milwaukee County Housing First, 2021).

Pathways Vermont Housing First Program

Pathways Vermont was founded in 2009 to implement a housing first program in several counties that would aid in combating the persistently homeless crisis facing these areas regarding homeless individuals dealing with severe mental illness. Founders and members of the organization wanted to follow recommendation from housing and mental health experts who stated that treatment of mental health and entering recovery trajectory is very difficult with the added burden of homelessness (Pathways Vermont Housing First Program, 2021). According to the organization's mission statement, "Housing First asserts that housing is a basic human right and provides a model for supporting individuals with long histories of homelessness and multiple disabilities access and maintain permanent housing through long -term mental health services and psycho-social support" (Mission & History, 2021). Pathways participated with the statewide Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness to advocate for the statewide expansion of the Housing First model. Using funding and support from a 2009 to 20014 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration grant, Pathways Vermont implemented a first-of-its-kind, rural focused Housing First program that not only provided housing, but support services to those with mental health and substance abuse conditions (Mission & History, 2021). The organization grew vastly within the short time span of five years and became aware of their ability to meet the needs of other community groups that had gone without adequate intervention regarding mental

health through partnerships and programs. Their various programs include: “the Pathways Vermont Support Line and the Pathways Vermont Community Center that both provide immediate access to non-judgmental, compassionate support for Vermonters who have experienced trauma and mental health crisis; and the Pathways Vermont Soteria House, provides residential, adaptive support for individuals experiencing their first mental health crisis, hopefully preventing the need for hospitalization” (Mission & History, 2021). A formal partnership with the State of Vermont’s Departments of Corrections and Mental Health allowed the organization to aid in decreasing institutionalization from prisons and hospitals, and by launching Supportive Services for Veterans Families program the organization expanded their reach to helping support homeless veterans in Vermont (Mission & History, 2021). As of March 2021, Pathways Vermont is well established in six counties and has helped over 560 homeless individuals obtain permanent housing with the program’s retention rate, which is the percentage of individuals being stably housed per night, remaining at 85% for the last two years (Pathways Vermont Housing First Program, 2021). The organization costs about \$2 million per year, and the state of Vermont continues to estimate that \$1.7 million in revenue is saved in the budget by supporting permanent housing of at least 220 individuals consistently and avoids at least \$2 million in additional hospitalizations per year. On average per month, Pathways saves \$260,000 in psychiatric hospital stays, \$170,000 in incarceration costs, and \$40,000 in emergency housing costs (motel stays) (Pathways Vermont Housing First Program, 2021).

Conclusion of Findings

The conclusion of these findings are consistent with the hypothesized question asked for conducting these studies. Study number one shows that living in unstable environments largely

impacts homeless elementary school students who, because of these conditions, under achieve socially, behaviorally, and academically. Their development in these areas falls to the below average ranking in their classrooms. Lack of security, privacy, and adequate self-care through sleep and appropriate family interaction leads to changes in behaviors by these students. As they are learning to adapt to changes in their environments, the changes in their demeanor and attitude towards life also changes. Moving from a secure home to an emergency living space leads to heightened emotions in these students who express these emotions in different ways. The interviews by the professional staff at East Iredell Elementary gave a firsthand account of the impact on academic achievement in students who lack secure housing and are faced with the burden of persistent homelessness. The participants in this method found positive correlations with the students who obtain secure housing for longer periods of time and did not have to continue to move from school to school or out of a school district. Placing a child in a secure environment correlates to a positive impact on academic achievement resulting in growth in the development of their behaviors, social skills, and emotions.

Study number two shows that there are interventions in place set by the state to help the persistently homeless in Iredell County, but these interventions do not always lead to the guarantee of permanent housing. Both representatives noted that state and federal funding is limited to housing projects within counties, and that there is specific state funding allocated each fiscal year toward addressing the issue. There is also the agreement that more could be done for this population of people, and it seems that this can only occur with more funding availability. Neither Representative Mills or McNeely were sure of what housing first initiative programs are, or what Title V programs from the McKinney Vento Act allow for regarding the use of government properties for the needs of the homeless. Because of the very real and serious issues

their constituents are facing regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, housing projects are not at the forefront to combat homelessness at this present time, but it is important that families and individual's needs are taken care of when it comes to their health and safety. This is assured more easily of course if people have adequate housing, but being state representatives limits their influence on overall funding coming from the federal government toward making a lasting change for the persistently homeless. Both representatives are eager to understand more of what is available to help answer the questions of how to approach this issue and get positive results and are interested to learn more about what housing first initiative programs offer in making the difference their community needs.

Study number three shows that Housing First program implemented successfully yield positive results for both the persistently homeless population and the counties where they reside. The data collected from the two programs points to unambiguous evidence that this model is one that should be considered by counties that face this crisis on regularly and that have policies in place that are not yielding the results communities need to see major improvement. Milwaukee's Housing first model gives evidence that taking restrictions out of the equation of sheltering homeless individuals puts them at an advantage to seek other resources for aid and help once the burden of secure housing has been lifted. There is freedom to then take care of other pending life issues that have kept them bound from participating and functioning a full capacity in their societies. Having resources and programs available on the premises or at the housing first residential area takes costs away from the county and brings revenue back to the county or even state budget. Vermont Pathway's specific approach toward the mental health aspect of homeless individuals yielded excellent results for their homeless population whose needs are being met through both housing and medical care. The resources made available in this example allow for

individuals to see a turnaround in their life regarding the way they can respond to treatments and interventions after the issue of housing has been lifted from their shoulders. Major revenue with regard to public health has been brought back into the six counties and the state of Vermont who now have less expenditures in this area of their budgets. These housing first examples are models for a clear path forward to success for counties who would like to consider putting these policies and programs into practice for their persistently homeless population.

The conclusion of this method did not yield an example showing programs being implemented into counties using Title V programs from the McKinney-Vento Act. Instead, it is evident across both examples that funding from nonprofit organizations, partnerships with state agencies, monthly and annual fundraisers, along with donors were the main source of revenue for these programs. Both Milwaukie County and Vermont Pathways are nonprofit organizations with programs that were established after individuals saw a major problem in their communities regarding the persistently homeless and how there seems to be no amelioration to the crisis with the current policies and practices that were put in place previously. Because of the formation of these organizations, funding came from like minded state agencies and nonprofit organizations seeking to solve the problem by a different means than what had been used and proven ineffective in answering the question of how to bring lasting positive impact to the persistently homeless population needing a clear path to success in being permanently housed. The research found because of this method points to implementation of housing first initiative programs occurring once a nonprofit organization has been formed to take on the problem using resources from statewide partnerships and other nonprofit organizations. There is no evidence in these examples that prove Title V programs are necessary for the successful implementation of these programs.

Analysis of Policy Alternatives

As the homelessness crisis is not one that can be totally ameliorated overnight, it is vital that Iredell County considers policy alternatives to the current policies and practices that are already in place, along with the consideration of Housing First Initiative Programs. The three studies conducted in the methodology section drive the formulation of this policy analysis section and are part of the evaluation of alternatives. These policy alternatives are being considered using evaluative criteria to show that outcomes have the possibility to be successful if the strategic planning and implementation processes are carefully thought out and effectively managed.

Having various policy alternatives requires an assessment of which alternative would best suit the homelessness situation in Iredell County, North Carolina. To do this, evaluation criteria have been chosen based on how to assess the problem that homelessness poses to the local community, municipality and statewide. Each policy alternative specified will be evaluated against the following criteria and assessed on a scale for ranking according to a high, medium, and low scale.

Table 1 Sideby-Side Comparison of Alternatives by Criteria for Iredell County, North Carolina

Criteria	Alternative 1: A Second 24 Hour Homeless Shelter	Alternative 2: Housing First Initiatives and Programs	Alternative 3: The North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness
Political Acceptability	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	HIGH
Ability to Address or Ameliorate the Problem	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM
Cost to Implement	MEDIUM	LOW	LOW
Ethics and Equity	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH

Figure 5. Table of Policy Alternatives and Evaluative Criteria

Evaluative Criteria

Political Acceptability and Feasibility

Political acceptability and feasibility refer to a policy or policy alternative's likelihood to be politically acceptable by the policymakers and stakeholders who may be involved in the policy process (Zhao, 2016). It is important to know the stance and attitude of policymakers before moving forward with the implementation of policy alternatives. If there is too much opposition or not enough support for the policy alternative, it would be deemed politically unacceptable and the likelihood of the policy going forward would not seem sufficient to be adopted (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020). This type of criterion would allow alternatives to be ranked higher if there is more of a likelihood that they would be widely accepted and supported by most policymakers.

Being that the homelessness crisis is growing day by day, it would be in the best interest of county commissioners and state representatives in Iredell County to consider accepting the alternatives suggested in the Policy Alternatives section and weigh the outcomes of each one that is presented. Because of the suburbanization that has taken place in the county, the demographic of low-income families and individuals has been pushed out of key areas where there are economic and employment opportunities. The sight of homeless families on the streets of suburban areas is not something that policymakers and stakeholders would like to be a regular occurrence. When viewing the current public policy regarding homelessness in Iredell County, County Commissioners and State Representatives should consider what changes need to be made to address that problem that have not already been presented or proposed at the county and state levels. It is in their best interest to be involved in public policy that is for the betterment of a population struggling to find permanent housing, or at least a shelter that will house their family in an area where they are more likely to find employment. These representatives have more of an opportunity to mobilize and speak on behalf of others being that their positions give them more authority, they have more expertise in this area, and possess resources that regular citizens do not have access to (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020). The political acceptability and feasibility criterion would be a way to assess how County Commissioners and State Representatives gauge their political acceptability of the recommended policy alternatives and consider the outcomes that each one would present before moving forward to implementation of any kind.

Ability to Address or Ameliorate the Problem

The ability to address and/or ameliorate the persistent problem is an evaluation criterion that refers to the degree by which each alternative would aid in reducing the amount of homeless individuals and families in Iredell County, North Carolina, while addressing the appropriation of

funding for these public policy issues (Zhao, 2016). It is important to weigh the efficiency of the outcomes of the policy alternatives by means of cost effectiveness and sustainability once implementation has occurred (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020). Addressing the issue of homelessness requires an assessment of how the outcomes of the alternatives will be sustained long enough to make a lasting impact in addressing the problem both physically and economically. The ability to address and/or ameliorate the problem is an evaluation criterion that can have higher ranking alternatives if the outcomes can efficiently address or ameliorate the problem to the most positive degree (Zhao, 2016).

Knowing what the produced outcomes would be regarding the recommended policy alternatives would grant County Commissioners and State Representatives a better picture as to how implementation after evaluation of the outcomes could very well address the homelessness crisis in Iredell County. When assessing how the recommendations have not been put into practice in ways that have efficiently addressed the issue, there is a means to use this evaluation criteria to take a better look at how public policy can be changed to be more efficient and sustainable in ameliorating the underlying problem of adequate housing for low to no income families in Iredell County. It is important that policymakers and stakeholder look at previous policy patterns that have not been sustainable enough to continue on after new elected officials have taken office and either left issues the way they stood, or addressed the problem in a way that adoption of a policy that did not produce effective outcomes (Bardach & Patashnik, 2020). This criterion would be beneficial for County Commissioners and State Representatives in Iredell County to assess how past policy stands up to newly recommended policy with different outcomes than have been previously produced to permanently address the problem.

Cost to Implement

The cost to implement evaluation criteria refers to the costs that would accrue due to implementing the policy alternatives into Iredell County, North Carolina (Zhao, 2016). This criterion can be evaluated using various cost-effectiveness and benefit-cost analyses to determine which policy alternative's outcomes are most likely to be economically and fiscally positive for the county. Using these analyses would give a better picture at how spending funds to assist in solving the problem would or would not be equally beneficial for the policy makers, stakeholders, and the county overall. The cost to implement the outcomes of the policy alternatives would be ranked higher if they cost the county and/or the state a lot of funding regarding implementation (Zhao, 2016).

As with most public policy changes and implementation strategies, it is in the best interest of Iredell County representatives to weigh the outcomes of the recommended policy alternatives through cost-effectiveness and benefit-cost analysis. As research has shown, implementing practices of housing the homeless first has shown cost effectiveness and a return on the investment. Iredell County may not be using their federal funding in a way that adequately allocates funds to different areas that address the homelessness issue. In conducting a benefit-cost analysis using original policies, representatives and experts in Iredell County could come to the realization that there is a possibility to reallocate funds appropriately according to what the McKinney Vento Act has allowed for after being amended. The establishment of nonprofit organizations within counties is beneficial in bringing revenue back to the county and state as well as garnering support of donors and sponsors to the cause. Most homeless shelters are deemed nonprofit organizations, and housing projects have the potential to receive federal and donor funding, so representatives of Iredell County would find the cost to implement criteria

beneficial in weighing how the policy alternatives may be more cost effective than previous policy has allowed.

Ethics and Equity

The ethics and equity evaluative criteria refer to how well policy alternative outcomes will maximize the total good and specified universalism on reducing the homelessness problem in Iredell County, North Carolina (Zhao, 2016). This criterion helps to weigh how good the outcomes will be for those specifically affected by being homeless and looking to be in permanent housing. Equity, also likened to fairness, is at times subjective and can be assessed in different ways. When it comes to the crisis of homelessness, ethics and equity should be taken into consideration as a priority in how to effectively approach the problem that is affecting whole families that need to remain healthy and safe off the streets in cities and towns that are within county limits. The ethics and equity evaluative criteria can be ranked high if the outcomes of the policy alternatives bring fair housing distribution among the homeless population to the most degree (Zhao, 2016).

Homelessness is something that brings morals and ethics to the forefront as those in leadership, and regular citizens, do not wish to see their neighbors out on the streets without adequate shelter for their families. Iredell County Commissioners and State Representatives should view ethics and equity as a priority in addressing the problem of persistent homelessness within the county. Fair distribution of costs and benefits also play a factor in this criterion as the good of those experiencing homelessness should supersede the cost of housing them which is a greater benefit than the cost. “The economic efficiency of a funding approach depends partly on the user’s behavior and on what it costs to implement” (Zhao, 2016). This situation does not call for homeless individuals and families to be consumers of twenty-four-hour shelter or temporary

housing, and the cost should ethically fall upon the federal funding that should be set aside for this crisis. The Commissioners and State Representatives would benefit from this evaluative criterion that calls into question the ethics and equity the County of Iredell wishes to impose on solving this problem of homelessness.

Policy Alternatives and their Analysis

Alternative #1: Establish Another Twenty-Four-Hour Homeless Shelter

Programs and resources for the needs of the homeless do exist in Iredell County, but they are not adequate in keeping homeless individuals and families off the streets of cities and towns in the county during the day or night. Many emergency housing shelters are either open for nightly hours, or are a haven during the day offering educational, medical, and recreational services to the homeless in the community. In Iredell County, there is one twenty-four-hour homeless shelter with the capability of housing twenty-four families per night. Fifth Street Ministries located in Statesville, North Carolina, is the only twenty-four-hour homeless shelter in Iredell County. The shelter is in one of the worst parts of the city where outside there are acts of gang violence and massive poverty. Housing up to twenty-four families per night, Fifth Street Ministries is a nonprofit organization providing for the basic needs of homeless families and individuals, while also acting as transitional housing to the chronically homeless who soon graduate to finding their own safe space to live. Besides the nightly shelter and transitional housing programs, Fifth Street also offers a community kitchen, nursing and medical staff, clothing inventory, and outside resources for special cases of abuse and violence for women and children. Being a nonprofit, this shelter does not cost Iredell County any funds as instead it receives sponsorships and donations. Being the only twenty-four-hour homeless shelter that houses families takes a toll on the facility, thereby the limitation of only 24 families per day and

night (Fifth Street, 2020). Iredell County has recently seen the establishment of the HOME Facility in Mooresville, which is a temporary women's and children's shelter that acts as transitional housing. There is also a soup kitchen public pantry facility in Mooresville to serve the homeless who are without meals or food. All these facilities are nonprofit organizations that do not cost the county any type of funding. Nonprofit organizations are funded via donations by donors and through raising funds at fundraisers for the cause of the organization. They also receive federal funding and grants from the state depending on the type of assistance that is required to keep the facility and programs going. The Title V Program that is now in existence from the McKinney-Vento Act should be considered toward the use of abandoned buildings to create shelter for the homeless, another twenty-four-hour homeless facility could be established in Iredell County closer to the area of the town of Mooresville.

Political Acceptability and Feasibility (Medium): Establishing another twenty-four-hour homeless shelter in Iredell County closer to the Mooresville area is politically acceptable and feasible as county and state representatives have been made aware of the situation through the establishment of the previous homeless shelters. Donations and funding are needed by these shelters who use fundraising events to garner revenue. One such charity event, known as "The Light is Always On," which is held annually by Hope of Mooresville is attended by many county and state representatives each year (Sprauge, 2017). This shows an involvement by those with the capability to legislate concerning the issue of homelessness and that they are aware of the situation. This criterion is ranked medium due to the lack of current discussion and legislation proving the acceptability of another twenty-four-hour homeless shelter that would house more families. If there is not enough interest to devise a resolution or bill regarding this problem at the present time, it shows a little doubt of the policy alternatives acceptability and feasibility.

Ability to Address or Ameliorate the Problem (Medium): Establishing another twenty-four-hour homeless shelter in Iredell County closer to the Mooresville area would have the ability to address and/or ameliorate the problem of homeless families being unable to find shelter in this area of the county. Another homeless shelter would provide a means of temporary stability concerning housing for these homeless individuals and families. As studies, such as the one carried out by University of Mexico (UNM) Institute for Social Research, have shown there is significant improvement in the lives of homeless families who are housed without having to follow the traditional criteria of “being employed, drug and alcohol free and possibly other factors before being given a place to live” (Hilf, 2016). A shelter closer to an area that provides economic and employment opportunities is optimal for these families searching for better work conditions that are not far from where they are residing. This would take the pressure off of families having to find a way to work from a shelter that is over twenty miles from their employment. Because outcomes of this alternative are not 100% proven effective without an actual in-depth analysis of implementation, the ability to completely ameliorate the problem of homelessness via the establishment of another homeless shelter is ranked medium until such time that an assessment of this caliber can take place.

Cost to Implement (Medium): The cost to implement another twenty-four-hour homeless shelter in Iredell County close to the Mooresville area would not have a high cost once county and state representatives appropriately allocate federal funding from the McKinney Vento Act toward the project. Policymakers and stakeholders should have an awareness of the Title V amendment to the act which allows funding to be used for “properties to be made available for short-term use by homeless persons. This provision should be strengthened and expanded to allow all unused federal property to be converted into permanent housing for homeless persons.

Given adequate rehabilitation and operating funds, these properties could provide significant long-term relief” (Foscarinis, 1991). The use of this funding would lower the costs of implementation significantly, as well as put funds back into Iredell County who is spending money on temporary resources for the homeless. Because the outcomes of this alternative cannot predict other such costs for implementation of another homeless shelter, cost to implement is ranked at a medium until a plan is put into action to proceed with a homeless shelter project.

Ethics and Equity (High): Establishing another Twenty-Four-Hour homeless shelter in Iredell County near the Mooresville area has high ethics and equity. Another shelter closer to a thriving community where there are numerous opportunities for families to be housed temporarily with stability is what brings equity to this situation. When a homeless shelter is further away from school districts and communities that have better standards, it places a burden on homeless individuals and families that do not have access to public transportation as it is not provided in Iredell County. It is ethical to establish such another twenty-four-hour homeless shelter to keep these families safe and healthy and give them a chance to establish themselves without the pressure of moving from place to place each day.

Alternative #2: Housing the Homeless First Initiatives or Programs

A big issue with homelessness is the cost of public safety in many municipalities that do not have the crisis under better control. When it comes to local government, the public safety department is responsible for various means of keeping the population safe from dangerous hazards, crime, natural disasters and so on. It is broken down into smaller departments who are responsible for specific safety jobs. This includes firefighters, ambulatory and emergency

medical services, and the police department (Department of Public Safety, 2020). According to Iredell County's Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the Fiscal Year ending in June 2019, Public Safety is the second largest expenditure to come out of the county's general fund. Budgeted at \$46.4 million, Iredell County's actual cost for public safety during the fiscal year amounted to \$41.2 million. Though they were under budget in this category, their final amount increased by \$3.9 million from the previous fiscal year. During the fiscal year ending in 2019 there was an increase in the number of times public services were needed due to property crimes involving homeless persons. There were emergency calls made to service residents with complaints of loitering, vandalism, homeless individuals sleeping on their property, and disturbing the peace during late night hours. In an article published by the Mooresville Tribune, Mooresville police chief Carl Robbins stated that "the department probably gets one or two calls a week concerning a suspicious person, suspicious activity, trespassing or the request for additional patrols that can be tied back to a homeless person...any homelessness is a problem for a community" (Sprague, 2015). The city of Statesville saw its largest number of homeless individuals to stay overnight in jail due to disturbance of the peace, loitering, assault, and public indecency by the close of the fiscal year. It was estimated to be about 215 individuals during the year. The police chief of Statesville remarked that, "Many homeless individuals seek shelter by any means they can, even if just for a night. They will cause a disturbance to garner attention that warrants a call to us, and we go and get them," (Johnson, 2019). Acts of violence and serious healthcare conditions also led to many calls in the past fiscal year. Homeless individuals who have attacked each other or assaulted someone to rob them result in a call to emergency medical services. Many homeless individuals are without the proper health insurance and become ill without their proper medications. Several individuals were found passed out on the streets of

Statesville due to an underlying health condition that resulted in immediate need for emergency medical services (Johnson, 2019).

Many studies in the arena regarding the homelessness crisis have concluded that housing the homeless first has resulted in major benefits for states and municipalities that have implemented the programs after adequate research and analysis specific to the needs of their area. One such research report was formalized by the University of Mexico (UNM) Institute for Social Research to show it cost less to house chronically homeless people than to leave them on the streets. The Heading Home Initiative is a program that was designed and implemented in the city to first house homeless people, and then provide them the services they may need thereafter. “‘It's a model called 'Housing First' and is a departure from traditional federal housing programs that require applicants to be employed, drug and alcohol free and possibly other factors before being given a place to live’” (Hilf, 2016). The study was conducted using a cost benefit analysis that looked at how much each individual homeless participant cost by using various social and behavioral services, before and after being a part of the Heading Home program. Paul Guerin, a researcher in for the Institute for Social Research (ISR) described the process as being one where participants gave consent to allow their information regarding arrests, jail time, hospital and ambulance services, and information from all shelters be surrendered to the researchers conducting the project. ISR was given access to places where the participants obtained services that cost money (Hilf, 2016). During the time of the study, participants in the Heading Home project cost about \$1 MILLION less than before entering the program which is roughly a 15% cost savings. Researchers discovered that on average about \$14,700 was saved per person, and when “‘that average is applied to the total number of eligible participants in the program, the study shows Heading Home resulted in a two to three-year savings of nearly \$5 million’” (Hilf,

2016). Every dollar spent on the program resulted in a cost savings return of \$1.78. The results of the study were not surprising to researchers who know that homelessness leads to an increase in emergency room visits, police and ambulance calls and other associated costs. When looking at the results of this type of study, experts and policymakers in Iredell County and the state of North Carolina can observe that because the Heading Home program did not only focus on healthcare and hospital data, but also on criminal justice, behavioral health, and social programs, they should consider the implementation of this type of program at city, county, and state levels (Hilf, 2016).

Political Acceptability and Feasibility (Medium): Housing the homeless first initiatives or programs in Iredell County near the Mooresville area politically acceptable and feasible because county and state representatives have concerns regarding the sight of homeless individuals and families on the streets of suburban areas. Rapid population growth and development in the southern part of Iredell within the past decade has put pressure on the region to become a more suburbanized location. This in part is due to the popularity of the Lake Norman area for citizens residing in nearby Charlotte, one of North Carolina's biggest and most popular cities (Iredell County, North Carolina, 2020). County and state representatives would find a housing first initiative or program for the homeless appropriate in a suburban setting rather than a homeless shelter that sticks out more than a residential building. Because such an alternative has not been adequately assessed or analyzed in Iredell County by leadership, there is no guarantee that the outcomes of this alternative would have enough support. Therefore, political acceptability and feasibility are ranked medium until such an analysis by county and state representatives can be discussed and further assessed.

Ability to Address or Ameliorate the Problem (Medium): Housing the homeless first initiatives and programs could address and ameliorate the problem of homelessness in Iredell County. Research has shown that establishing homes for individuals and families more rapidly leads to the likelihood that they will not become homeless again. The Heading Home Initiative research study resulted in 85% of participants to stay the course of their programs, become consistently employed, and find permanent housing (Hilf, 2016). Because these types of programs focus on the entire picture of the lives of homeless individuals and families, it offers an opportunity to feel more established and thrive where they are to take the final step to remain in permanent housing. Without proper analysis it is difficult to gauge how much these initiatives and programs will affect the homeless population, so the outcomes of this policy alternative are ranked medium as to whether they could address or ameliorate the problem of homelessness.

Cost to Implement (Low): The cost to implement housing first initiatives and programs in Iredell County near the Mooresville area would have low costs as research has shown doing so leads to the county and state paying less money in public health and safety expenditures. A qualitative research study conducted to focus on the cost offsets of Housing First programs from 2007 to 2015 in North America found that the “shelter and emergency department costs decreased with Housing First, while impacts on hospitalization and justice costs are more ambiguous. Studies using a pre–post design reported a net decrease in overall costs with Housing First” (Latimer and Ly, 2015). The researchers proved their hypothesis that overall costs of services used by the homeless population that can add up quickly, lead to the potential for significant cost offsets with Housing First Programs (Latimer and Ly, 2015). There is significant research in this area to show that costs to implement housing first initiatives and programs have the potential to be low and put funding back into the county revenue.

Ethics and Equity (High): Providing Housing first initiatives and programs in Iredell County near the Mooresville area has high ethics and equity. Because the area is suburban in nature, a residential housing development or building would look more appealing than a homeless shelter or emergency housing. To place homeless individuals and families in housing that provides stability brings equity to their situation as they are given the chance to have a settled and safe environment to begin to thrive with their families and establish consistent employment. It is ethical to house those without a home who have little to no income to aid in bridging the gap they are experiencing after the loss of a job or home. Housing first initiatives and programs have proven to be cost effective for the counties and states that provide them to the homeless population and has shown to result in less chronically homeless individuals and families that live in that area.

Alternative #3: North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness

In early 2000, the state of North Carolina needed a response to the increasing number of individuals and families that were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness (NCCEH) was incorporated in the state as there was a growing need for advocacy and public policy change for homeless citizens and the organizations that were serving them (Our Mission, 2021). “The mission of the North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness is to end homelessness by creating alliances, encouraging public dialogue, securing resources, and advocating for systemic change. NCCEH works with communities to address root causes of homelessness by developing and implementing data-driven strategies that are focused on permanent housing and appropriate services” (Our Mission, 2021). The policy agenda for the NCCEH seeks to end homelessness through prevention, an increase in access to funding for services as well as housing and homeless programs, production of affordable

housing, and targeting policies that exacerbate poverty (Our Mission, 2021). There are two main programs used by the NCCEH to aid in implementation of the changes the coalition wishes to bring to the homeless population in North Carolina, and Iredell County is a part of both programs.

The Balance of State Continuum of Care (BoS CoC) is a program that was created in 2005 to help rural communities apply for Continuum of Care funding from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. This type of funding helps the homeless population through the continued development of permanent supportive housing, transitional housing, supportive services, and is only accessed through an annual application process (North Carolina Balance of State Continuum of Care, 2021). The BoS represents 79 out of 100 counties in North Carolina as the largest Continuum of Care and is organized into Regional Committees who help in coordinating local work and planning. Written standards have been developed to provide guidance for how to implement and operate programs to have the greatest chance at ending homelessness, and policies have been created that focus on key areas such as Follow-up for rapid housing and anti-discrimination to ensure just service to homeless individuals and families (North Carolina Balance of State Continuum of Care, 2021). Iredell County is a part of the Western Group 1 and is in region four for the purposes of the Regional Training Groups. There is a Regional Lead who is responsible for carrying out tasks assigned by the Regional Lead Job Description and works with the regional team to accomplish the goals listed in the BoS CoC Action Plan (North Carolina Balance of State Continuum of Care, 2021).

In the year 2007, North Carolina implemented the SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery) “program that assists eligible adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to apply for SSI/SSDI disability benefits. The program was begun to help address the low benefit

approval rates for people experiencing homelessness” (NC SOAR Initiative, 2021). Federal disability benefits are helpful to pull individuals and families out of homelessness as it helps to provide an income to those who are disabled and out of work. These benefits include a monthly check, health insurance, and help families obtain access to affordable housing, income for living expenses, healthcare, and mental health services (NC SOAR Initiative, 2021). SOAR also provides training to caseworkers who work directly with clients to aid them in preparation of their SSI/SSDI disability applications as well as submitting them. The NCCEH provides these case workers with the adequate training, supports them, and tracks the outcomes of their SOAR cases. According to the January 2018 SOAR Outcomes sheet for Iredell County, there was a 90% approval of applications for homeless individuals to receive their SSI/SSID benefits. The average amount of time these individuals and families experienced homelessness was approximately 3 years and 4 months (NC SOAR Initiative, 2021). The SOAR program is seeing much success among applicants in Iredell County and is proving to be an excellent resource to aid the homeless population that qualify for these types of benefits.

Political Acceptability and Feasibility (High): The North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness is politically acceptable and feasible in Iredell County as the county is involved in the major programs offered by the coalition. Involvement in the coalition by the county has the potential to lead developed guidance for how to implement and operate programs to have the greatest chance at ending homelessness, and policies have been created that focus on key areas such as Follow-up for rapid housing and anti-discrimination to ensure just service to homeless individuals and families (North Carolina Balance of State Continuum of Care, 2021). The elected regional leader for the coalition presiding in Iredell County has the responsibility to ensure that the regional team accomplishes the goals provided by the coalition.

Ability to Address or Ameliorate the Problem (Medium): The North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness could address and ameliorate the problem of homelessness in Iredell County because of the county's involvement in the coalition. The purpose of the coalition is to end homelessness by creating alliances, encouraging public dialogue, securing resources, and advocating for systemic change. NCCEH works with communities to address root causes of homelessness by developing and implementing data-driven strategies that are focused on permanent housing and appropriate services” (Our Mission, 2021). The policy agenda for the NCCEH seeks to end homelessness through prevention, an increase in access to funding for services as well as housing and homeless programs, production of affordable housing, and targeting policies that exacerbate poverty (Our Mission, 2021) Because there have been steps taken to ameliorate homelessness in the county by the establishment of several shelters and resources, it is evident that the coalition has played a role in addressing the problem of homelessness in Iredell County, but there is yet to be evidence of complete amelioration as more work needs to be done.

Cost to Implement (Low): There is low cost to implement The North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness in Iredell County as the coalition is federally funded along with outside donations and sponsorships since it is a not-for-profit entity in North Carolina. The county's involvement in the SOAR program of the coalition has led to putting funds back into the hands of homeless individuals who apply for and begin to receive SSI/SSDI benefits. According to the January 2018 SOAR Outcomes sheet for Iredell County, there was a 90% approval of applications for homeless individuals to receive their SSI/SSID benefits. The average amount of time these individuals and families experienced homelessness was approximately 3 years and 4 months (NC SOAR Initiative, 2021). Federal funding being put into the pockets of homeless families takes

the financial burden off the county and leads to little cost of implementation of the coalition and the programs it provides.

Ethics and Equity (High): There is high ethics and equity in Iredell County being involved in the North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness. The programs provided by the coalition allow for a plan of action to be put in place for the county to follow through with giving a better chance of a positive outcome for homeless individuals and families. The programs bring equity to the homelessness situation in Iredell County in that they bring immediate assistance and resources through trained caseworkers not leaving these families to figure out paperwork and resource guidance on their own. It is ethical for Iredell County to be involved in the coalition as it provides resources that have little to no cost to implement for a population in need of safe shelter and a means to be established through consistent employment or receiving funds through federal benefits.

Conclusion and Final Policy Recommendations

This white paper study sought to explore how Iredell County, North Carolina could effectively and efficiently implement housing first initiatives and programs for the persistently homeless using guidance from other counties that have successfully done so, and through enacting Title V programs from the McKinney-Vento Act. Data collection through qualitative methods showed the impact that homelessness has on school aged children who are one of the subgroups in the homeless population of Iredell County, and that these impacts pose a major threat to their cognitive development and academic progress. It can be concluded that evidence found through research shows secure housing for school aged children, even if for six months, has a positive correlation on their behaviors and academic success. In Iredell County we find that

most interventions and funding focused on responding to the impacts posed on the homeless comes from county and state agencies who are limited by budgets and taxpayer dollars. It is evident from the testimony of the State Representatives that more could and should be done to respond to the problems that persistent homelessness has on individuals, families, and the community. Public safety expenditures and public health costs in Iredell County have seen significant increases regarding the homeless community who have needs that must be met but are dependent on help afforded them mostly through state and county means.

Looking to outside sources for productive information on how to respond to the persistently homeless community's issues would benefit Iredell County who needs a model different from the current policies and practices they have previously and are presently engaged in. Housing first programs when considered and implemented successfully have proven to be one of the more effective ways in mitigating homelessness and bringing revenue back into the county and state that have pursued these practices. It is evident from data gathering regarding housing first programs in counties located in other states that it is possible for Iredell County to implement such programs. Both models researched for this study show that alleviating the burden of not having secure housing leads individuals and families toward a means of addressing other persistent issues that they face. The Milwaukie County model gives a clear example that taking restrictions out of sheltering individuals and families leads to addressing issues of unemployment and drug abuse. Having secure housing where there are also services and resources available to families and individuals leads to a likelihood of fixing many broken aspects of their lives and placing them on a path to having permanent housing while also coming out of state and county benefit programs. The Vermont Pathways model is an example of how targeting a specific group of persistently homeless lessens the number of individuals to be found

within the specified group. Targeting the mental health issue that many homeless individuals face was a successful way to target the problem by focusing on what this community of people most needed and how they could best be helped. Having a specified focus allowed Pathways to create more than five different programs within counties to mitigate several aspects of mental health issues faced by different homeless individuals. This practice has led to an increase in revenue for the entire state of Vermont regarding public health and not only the counties that have implemented the programs. Successful models such as these should be considered by counties seeking ways to respond to the persistently homeless population to have better results than what they are currently experiencing.

Though this study sought to find housing first initiative programs that use Title V from the McKinney-Vento Act for the implementation of their programs, the study was not successful in doing so. The models found for this study are non-profit agencies and organizations that utilize aid from county and state agencies as well as outside organizations and donor's funding. The alternative policy analysis done for this study observed that all three policy alternatives provide positive net benefits to Iredell County and it is recommended by this study that these policy alternatives be considered for implementation through proper means and strategic planning practices. Alternative #3 gave insight into Iredell County's involvement in North Carolina's Coalition to End Homelessness results in a high ranking for use by the county and is the highest recommended among the three alternatives. Though it remains to be seen how effective the coalition is in completely ameliorating the homelessness problem in Iredell County, there is evidence that the programs are being put into practice to help alleviate the crisis through the establishment of shelters and emergency housing. This coalition has an extremely low cost to the county, and if there were a possibility for it to be coupled with the implementation of housing

first programs, the costs would be that much less, and the results of establishing successful programs that would lead to permanent housing in the county could become a reality. As Iredell County is already involved in North Carolina's Coalition to End Homelessness, it is ethical to remain a part of the programs that provide financial benefits to the homeless individuals and families that qualify for them. It is the final recommendation of this paper that Iredell County seeks by any means necessary a collaboration with the North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness to discuss and consider housing first initiative programs by studying models and practices that have been successful in their endeavors in other state's counties. As observed through the Vermont Pathways model, the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness played a vital role in the successful implementation of the organization. These successful models show proof and evidence that counties such as Iredell could see the possibility of ameliorating the issues and problems that persistent homelessness has on individuals and families, as well as to cut county and state expenditures while bringing revenue back to the budgets and taxpayers. It will take outside study, research, and resources to observe how to form organizations, strategically plan, and successfully implement these programs that will alleviate the burden of housing for the homeless, lead them to addressing other persistent issues that they face, and put on a path to permanent housing. It is up to Iredell County and its leaders to look to successful models to see what is best for the county and the persistently homeless community. (Bobish 2021).

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