

No Advantage: Thousands of Families at Risk of Returning to Shelter when City Rental Subsidy Expires

By Giselle Routhier

2010 brought about an all-time record for family homelessness, and now thousands more are at risk of returning to shelter as a result of the City's flawed rental subsidy program.

Established in 2007, Advantage NY is a two-year rental subsidy for families who are working, are on disability benefits, or who have an active child welfare case. At the end of two years, regardless of a family's circumstances or need for additional assistance, they are cut off. This year, thousands will "graduate" out of the program – putting an end to their subsidies.

The time limit is the most serious problem for working Advantage recipients, who may be employed but do not make enough to cover food and other necessities in addition to their rent. Indeed, City data demonstrate that the typical Work Advantage family is placed into an apartment with a monthly rent of \$1,100, but earns barely more than \$1,200/month.

What we are left with is a simple math problem. Families, usually headed by single mothers working low-wage jobs, simply cannot afford their rent without financial assistance in the form of a rental subsidy.

The resulting consequences are serious. City data show that by the end of 2009, just over 2,000 families had exhausted their Advantage subsidy. By the end of 2010, 5,289 families will join them in losing their assistance. And in 2011, over 7,000 families will lose their assistance. City data also show that by October of 2009, already over 900 reapplications for shelter had been submitted by families who lost their Advantage subsidy!

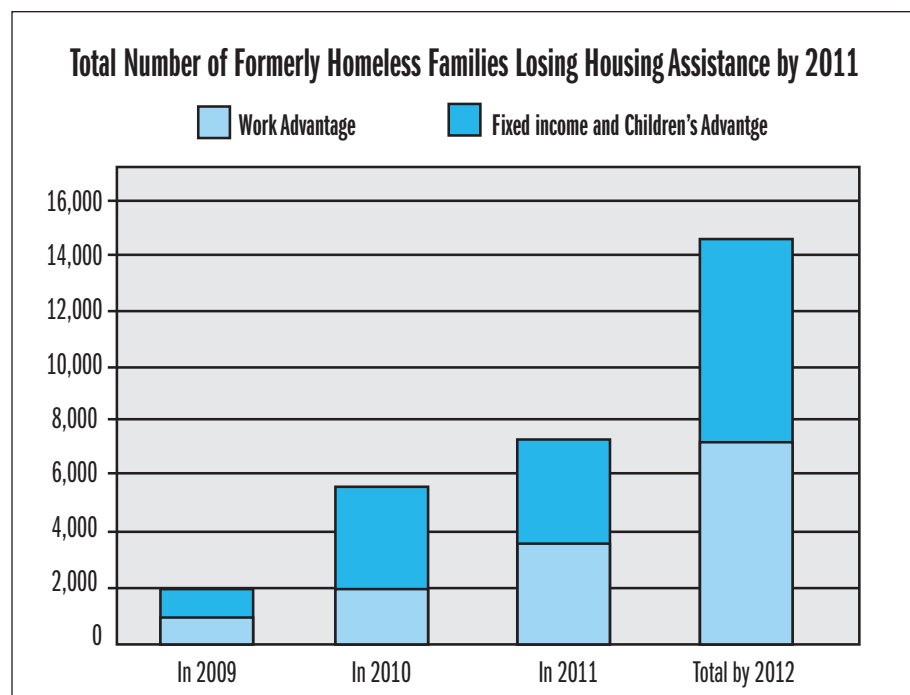
These staggering numbers pose a serious problem for formerly-homeless

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families. Many children, who have already been through the trauma of being homeless once, are now facing the possibility of a return to shelter.

Additionally, the City is proposing changes to the current Advantage program that would require greater contributions from families while offering them less assistance, making it clear that there is no end in sight to the dilemma of thousands of families reaching the end of their subsidy.

The Coalition for the Homeless continues to urge The Bloomberg



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administration to utilize proven, effective solutions to homelessness, such as long-term, flexible housing assistance similar to federal Section 8 vouchers. New York's homeless children and families deserve a real chance to succeed in their independence.

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