

FAMILY HOMELESSNESS

It is not just adults who experience homelessness. Their children do as well. This creates unique challenges for providers of emergency shelter for families.

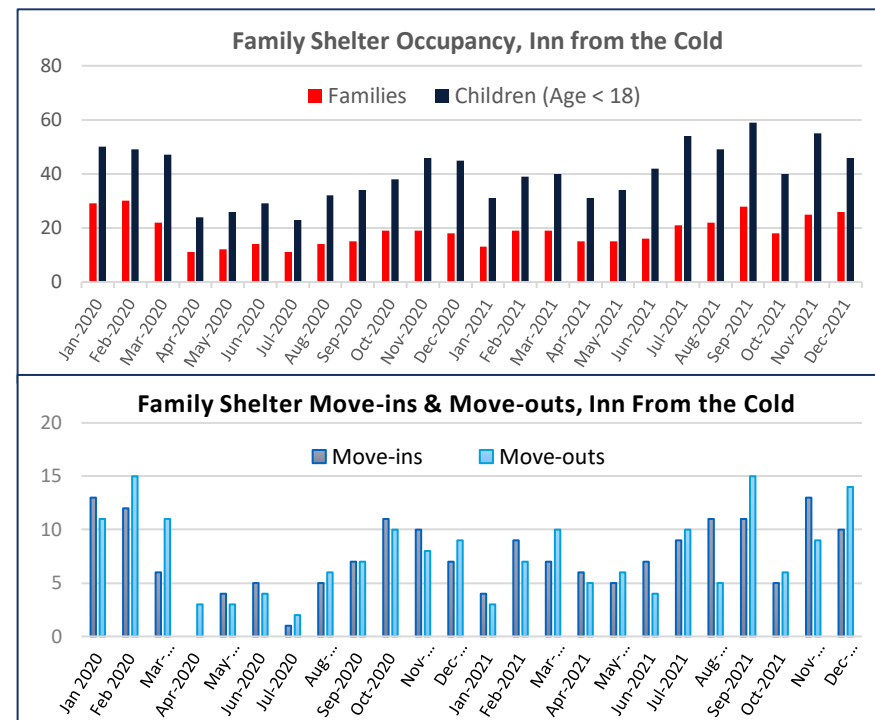
Providing emergency shelter to adults experiencing homelessness is difficult. When dependent children are involved the challenges, and the responsibilities, of agencies providing assistance are greater still. In Calgary, there are two organizations equipped to provide emergency shelter to families with children: [Brenda's House](#) and the [Inn from the Cold](#) (The Inn). The larger of these is The Inn which provides shelter for approximately 60% of all families with children who are experiencing homelessness in Calgary and who are choosing to access an emergency shelter.

Breaking the link that has been [revealed](#) to exist between experiencing homelessness as a child and as an adult is an important part of efforts to address homelessness. Understanding the link begins with understanding who experiences family homelessness. Recent data provided by The Inn shows that two-thirds of families using that shelter are single parent (with 87% of those headed by a woman) and one-third are two-parent families. Just over half of families using The Inn self-report as Indigenous, a third are non-Indigenous Canadians, and 14% are new arrivals to Canada. Just over 80% of the children in these families are between 0 and 12 years of age.

Understanding the reasons for shelter inflows (move-ins) and outflows (move-outs) is key for identifying policies that will be effective at keeping children from experiencing homelessness.

The top figure reports the number of families and dependent children using The Inn each month over two years, from January 2020 to December 2021. Changes in the number of families and children staying in the shelter varies by month because the number of families moving into the shelter, and the number moving out, varies by month. These monthly movements are reported in the second figure. In the average month, approximately 40% of families residing in the shelter are new move-ins, meaning they were not residents of the shelter in the previous month. Similarly, approximately 40% of the families currently using the shelter will move-out sometime during the month. These data are not sufficiently detailed to reveal how many of these families cycle in and out of the shelter, an issue that is the subject of important [research](#).

Shelter operators like The Inn do more than provide a bed. Prevention and diversion efforts to



Source: Data provided by David Sandoz, Manager of Reporting & Evaluation, Inn from the Cold.

reduce the need for shelter stays are a top priority. In 2021, 1 in 5 families staying in the shelter benefited from financial support to quickly regain housing. The Inn reports that over the past 2 years approximately 50 families have been stably housed through its prevention and diversion program.

Developing public policies effective at slowing entries into, and speeding exits from family shelters is an important issue deserving of close study. But good quality data collected over a period long enough to produce precise measures is difficult and expensive to collect, maintain, and analyze. Providing shelters with the capacity to collect and report data like these is the first step toward developing effective public policies aimed at keeping children and their parents out of homelessness and out of homeless shelters.