

‘It’s made all the difference’

CityFHEPS Is Helping New Yorkers Leave Shelter, Avoid Homelessness, and Stay Housed

Brief

YVONNE PEÑA AND RACHEL SWANER

There are 350,000 New Yorkers who are homeless

Rising housing costs and financial insecurity have pushed homelessness in New York City to alarming levels. Every day since mid-May 2023, on average, more than 85,000 people have been living in the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter system—and over 34 percent are children.[1] This is nearly three times the amount since 2001.[2] For households in DHS shelters, stays are not short-term. On average, single adults are staying 1.4 years, families with children 1.5 years, and adult families 2.4 years.[3]

Yet DHS shelter numbers are just one measure of the city’s homelessness crisis. Throughout New York City, there are population-specific shelters—including those for survivors of domestic violence, runaway youth, young adults aging out of foster care, and families displaced by fire or hazardous conditions—as well as beds available at faith-based locations that are not included in the DHS shelter census. If counts also included doubled- and tripled-up households and people who are street homeless, the number of New Yorkers experiencing homelessness may exceed 350,000.[4]

In this context, it is no surprise that the City continues to grapple with how to help people

Community Service Society

JUNE 2026

find permanent housing and prevent more families from entering shelter—all while facing budgetary constraints. Homelessness has lasting consequences for people's health, educational outcomes, and long-term stability. Addressing homelessness is not only a matter of immediate costs, but of preventing deeper and more sustained strain on people and public systems over time.

In the 2024-2025 school year, more than 154,000 public school students—or about one in seven—were homeless.[5] Of these, approximately 65,000 lived in shelters,[6] and 63 percent of students in shelters were chronically absent.[7] Students in shelters also performed worse academically than their permanently housed peers, with far fewer meeting proficiency standards.[8] Children who grow up homeless are also more likely to experience anxiety and depression symptoms later in life.[9]

Adults experiencing homelessness face similarly severe harms. Homelessness is associated with significantly higher mortality rates,[10] and the loss of housing can disrupt work schedules, family routines, and mental health.[11] Research shows that when homelessness is not prevented, costs shift to other public systems such as healthcare, emergency services, and the justice system.[12,13]

These challenges are compounded by the realities of the labor and housing markets. High unemployment, scarce jobs, fluctuating hours, and stagnant wages[14] leave many families unable to afford housing on their own, even when working.[15] As a result, many rely on government assistance to leave shelter or avoid entering it. However, federal rental assistance remains limited, and recent federal actions threaten to further reduce existing supports[16]—leaving cities and states to fill the gap.



CityFHEPS: A pathway to housing

In response, New York City has developed rental assistance programs to help people leave shelter and remain housed. The largest of these is CityFHEPS,[17] a city-managed rental subsidy that helps low-income households exit shelter—or, for a smaller subset, avoid entering shelter—and afford housing in the private market.

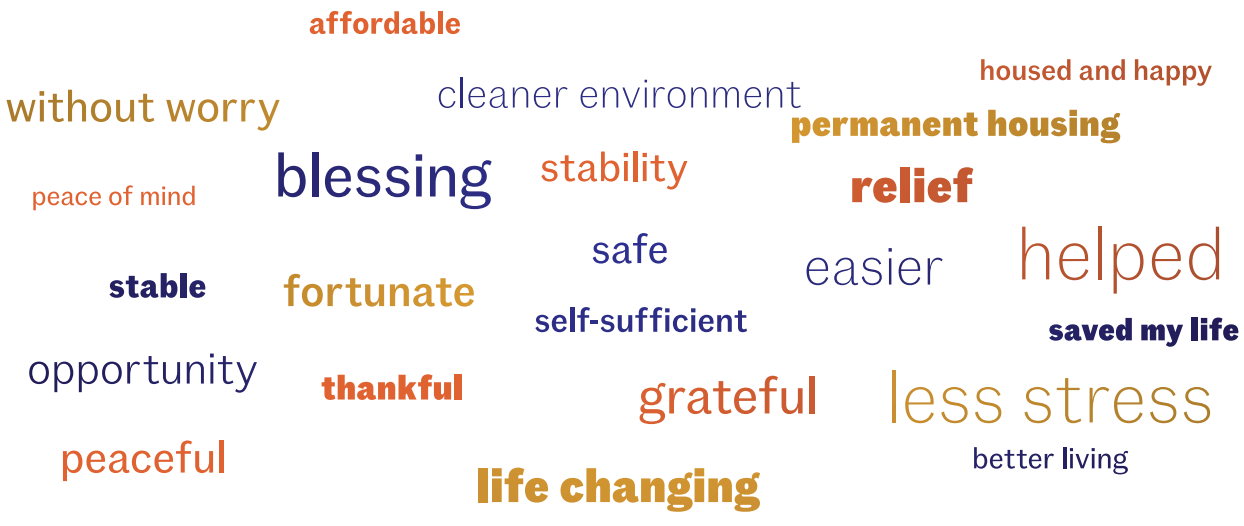
Created in 2018, CityFHEPS consolidated several earlier rental assistance programs and simplified access for households leaving shelter. In 2021, CityFHEPS was modified to more closely align with Section 8, the federal housing subsidy, in an effort to reduce "favoritism" among property owners toward any one housing assistance program.[18] Under the CityFHEPS program, households contribute 30 percent of household income toward rent.[19] CityFHEPS then covers the remainder, up to a maximum payment standard,[20] based on household size and number of rooms.

Today, over 64,000 households receive CityFHEPS.[21] It is the primary rental assistance program helping New Yorkers exit shelter and find housing. The majority of CityFHEPS households receive the rental assistance program while they are in DHS shelter, and about one in five households receive CityFHEPS as an eviction prevention measure.[22]

To understand how CityFHEPS is working for New Yorkers, in January and February 2026, the Community Service Society surveyed 550 New York City residents who currently had CityFHEPS; 497 of these respondents were currently housed. The survey asked about their experiences with the program, including whether it met their needs and how it affected their housing, finances, and well-being. The survey also asked about other aspects of the program, including applying for and maintaining the subsidy and searching for housing, which will be explored in future briefs.

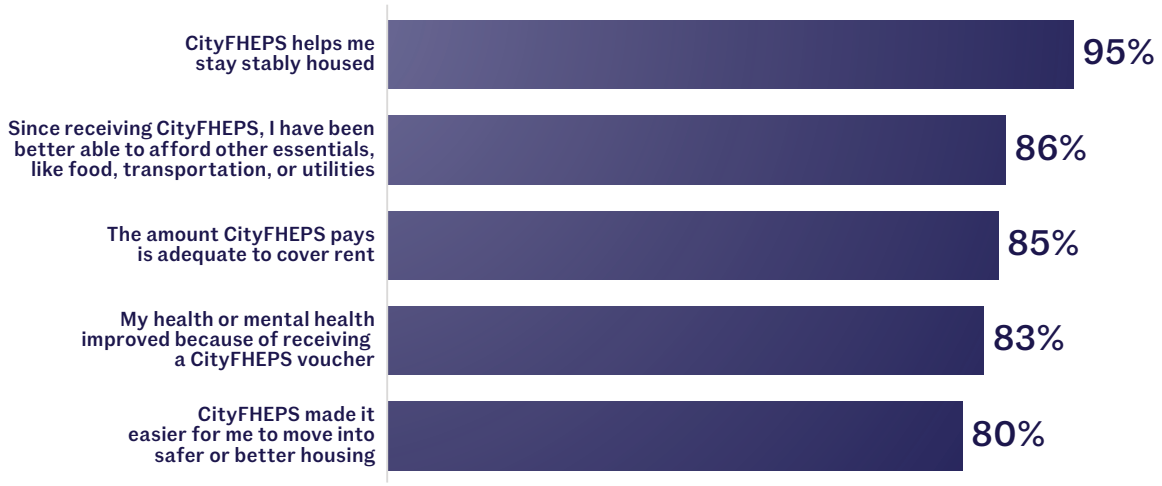
The findings presented here focus on the currently housed respondents. (See Appendix A for respondent demographics.) Their responses show that CityFHEPS is making a meaningful difference in their lives.

FIgure 1. CityFHEPS' impact described by respondents



Source: 2026 NYC Benefits Survey, CSS

Figure 2. Percent reporting positive impacts of CityFHEPS



Source: 2026 NYC Benefits Survey, CSS

CityFHEPS helps make housing affordable

Eighty-five percent said CityFHEPS is adequate to cover their rent.

While low-income households (below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, or $66,000 for a family of four) often struggle to make rent, the vast majority of CityFHEPS recipients surveyed reported that the program made their housing affordable.

One Brooklyn resident stated that "It's made all the difference. It's the only way I'm able to afford the home that I live in." A Bronx respondent noted he was "struggling with housing" before receiving CityFHEPS but is "now working part-time and able to afford what I need." Others emphasized the role CityFHEPS plays in making housing attainable, with one respondent saying it was "easier for me to find somewhere to live," and another noting that "rent payments [are] more affordable."

> **"It has helped me maintain a roof over my head when I couldn't afford it."**
>
> **– Bronx resident**

For people with disabilities or those on fixed incomes, CityFHEPS is especially critical to affording housing. A respondent in Brooklyn explained, "I'm disabled and could not afford to live anywhere in the city that I am from without the assistance." A Bronx resident said CityFHEPS was "helping me with overpriced rent while on a fixed income."

CityFHEPS provides access to better housing

Eighty percent said CityFHEPS made it easier to move into safer or better housing.

Shelter residents often report living in poor conditions[23] and feeling unsafe.[24,25] In our survey, one Manhattan resident said that being in a shelter was "like living in jail." For people with disabilities, shelter conditions can be especially challenging. In Brooklyn, one respondent remarked that being "in the homeless shelter [...] would be very difficult with my health condition."

> **"[CityFHEPS] allowed me to move my family into a safer neighborhood."**
>
> **– Brooklyn resident**

With CityFHEPS, respondents described being able to move into safer housing. With the subsidy, one Bronx resident reported he is "no longer living in the streets or a dangerous shelter."

For many, the difference went beyond safety. Comparing life in shelter to having housing through CityFHEPS, one Brooklyn resident described a shift toward greater self-sufficiency and control over daily life, now "having a roof over my head, a warm place to sleep, someplace to use the restroom comfortably, somewhere I can be able to cook my food the way I want to, nobody over my head telling me what to do."

CityFHEPS supports housing stability

Ninety-five percent said CityFHEPS helps them stay stably housed.

Beyond accessing safer housing, CityFHEPS also allows people to remain in their homes and avoid the constant risk of displacement. A Queens resident said that CityFHEPS helped her "feel more stable because rent in New York is so expensive, having assistance makes it possible to stay in my apartment and worry less about falling behind or having to move all the time."

> **"I don't have to be worried about if I'm gonna get kicked out or not."**
>
> **– Bronx resident**

Some respondents described CityFHEPS as preventing eviction and allowing them to remain housed over time. Others pointed to the number of years they had now been in their homes, highlighting the program's role in providing longer-term stability.

For families with children, this stability provides continuity and reduces the risk of losing housing. One Brooklyn resident described being able to "give my babies somewhere safe to sleep without the worries of getting kicked out," noting that with a child who has special needs and asthma, CityFHEPS made it possible to manage both housing costs and caregiving responsibilities without falling behind on rent.

A Manhattanite described how that stability has changed her family's outlook after a period of uncertainty in shelter: "CityFHEPS has completely changed my situation. Before, I was stuck in a shelter with my kids, feeling like we would never find stability." With the subsidy, she said her family now has "a stable roof over our heads," and "my kids can focus better in school." As she put it, "It's not just housing, it's given our family a chance to breathe and plan for the future."



CityFHEPS helps with affording other essentials

Eighty-six percent said that since receiving CityFHEPS, they have been better able to afford other essentials like food, transportation, or utilities.

By making housing more affordable, CityFHEPS frees up income for other basic needs. Respondents described being better able to cover everyday expenses that had previously been out of reach.

For some, that meant being able to afford transportation. One Bronx respondent shared that CityFHEPS has "helped with things like getting on the train," while a Manhattan resident stated he is now "able to afford [...] transportation, which is better for my job."

Others pointed to improved access to food. A Manhattan resident said that "I can now afford more groceries," while in the Bronx, one respondent credited CityFHEPS with allowing him to "have extra money for [...] [a] proper diet, groceries, and more."

> **"[CityFHEPS] helped me afford food."**
>
> **– Manhattan resident**

For many, the impact extended beyond immediate needs. Some described being able to put money aside. As one Queens resident said, the program "saved me money that I can use later on for emergencies." Another Queens inhabitant noted being able to "save money so I can have a better future." Others emphasized being able to provide for their families, including one Bronx respondent who said, "I'm able to afford other things my children need."

CityFHEPS helps improve well-being

Eighty-three percent said their health or mental health improved because of receiving CityFHEPS.

As respondents described, not having to worry about losing housing or falling behind on rent has had clear impacts on well-being. For many families, this shows up first as greater peace of mind. One Bronx respondent described how CityFHEPS "took a certain load off my shoulder," while another said, "It saved my life. I am in a much better place mentally." Others reported experiencing "less stress" and "more hope."

> **"I've been able to get my first apartment for myself and my kids. That's something I'm quite proud of and grateful for."**
>
> **– Staten Island resident**

For some, physical health improved as well. A Manhattan resident noted, "I suffer from chronic pain. [CityFHEPS] helps a lot—it puts a roof over my head and allows me to take things a little easier."

This stability has also allowed some to focus on longer-term goals. As one Brooklyn resident shared, "I am currently in college getting my bachelor's degree and not having to worry about rent has changed my life completely."



CityFHEPS provides more than housing

Respondents described CityFHEPS as shaping many aspects of their lives beyond housing and affordability. For some, having a home marked a major milestone. As one Brooklyn resident put it, CityFHEPS "got me my 1st place." With that foundation, respondents described ripple effects in other parts of their lives.

School and employment. With housing no longer an immediate concern, respondents described being able to invest in their future. One Brooklyn respondent said because of CityFHEPS, he is able to "live a successful life and can continue my studies," while a Queens resident shared, "they pay all my rent. I'm able to focus on whatever I need to get done so I can go back to work." A Manhattan resident similarly noted that CityFHEPS made it possible for him "to get an apartment, go to school, and go to work. I have a place I can call home."

Safety and family reunification. For others, CityFHEPS has meant safety and the ability to leave dangerous situations. A Bronx resident said that CityFHEPS "helped me and my kids escape [domestic violence] and start a new life."

One Manhattan respondent described a similar situation: "I was in a domestic violence situation and because of CityFHEPS, I was able to secure housing and maintain my safety."

Some emphasized the role CityFHEPS played in keeping families together. A Bronx resident said, "I'm living my life [in a] safe apartment, my daughter back in my life," while a Staten Island respondent credited the program with "helping me with housing [and] putting my family back together and also giving me responsibilities that I didn't have before."

Dignity and a place to call home. Respondents described CityFHEPS as their path to no longer living on the streets or enduring dangerous conditions. One Bronx resident said that CityFHEPS "kept a roof over my head. [There's] nothing like being in the cold outside [with] nowhere to go. I'm grateful." Another shared that CityFHEPS has made a difference in her life "by keeping me warm from freezing to death in the winter," while a third New Yorker simply declared, "I'm not on the street."

CityFHEPS supports stability for a better future

Together, these findings show that CityFHEPS is doing more than just helping people leave or avoid entering shelter; it is helping New Yorkers remain housed, stabilize their lives, improve their well-being, and build toward the future. As housing costs continue to outpace incomes, programs like CityFHEPS will remain essential to preventing homelessness and supporting long-term stability. While broader investment from state and federal partners is needed, CityFHEPS demonstrates that targeted rental assistance can make a meaningful difference in people's lives.



Appendix A: Respondent Demographics (N=497)

Age Range	
18-24	10.6%
25-34	32.4%
35-44	29.4%
45-54	14.8%
55-64	10.6%
65+	2.3%

NYC Borough	
Bronx	52.0%
Brooklyn	22.5%
Queens	13.6%
Manhattan	9.1%
Staten Island	2.7%

Gender	
Man	52.2%
Woman	47.4%
A different gender	0.4%

Race/Ethnicity*	
Black or African American	60.7%
Hispanic/Latino/Latina	30.8%
White	21.3%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	3.0%
Asian	2.5%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.8%
A different race/ethnicity	1.8%
Prefer not to answer	1.0%

* Percentages add to more than 100 because respondents could choose more than one.

Endnotes

1. In Dataset Changelog accessed on April 30, 2026, a figure of 80,000 first appeared on May 16, 2023. NYC Open Data – DHS Daily Report.
2. Coalition of the Homeless. "Why Are So Many People Homeless?"
3. Office of the New York City Comptroller Brad Lander. 2023. "Review of the New York City Department of Homeless Services' Programs and Services."
4. Coalition for the Homeless. 2026. "How many people are homeless in NYC altogether?"
5. Advocates for Children of New York. 2025. "Student Homelessness in New York City, 2024–25."
6. Ibid.
7. Kramer M. 2026. "63% of NYC homeless students were chronically absent from school last year, new report says." CBS News.
8. Advocates for Children of New York. 2026. "Educational indicators for students experiencing homelessness, 2024-25."
9. Keen R, Chen JT, Slopen N, Sandel M, Copeland WE, & Tiemeier H. 2023. "Prospective Associations of Childhood Housing Insecurity With Anxiety and Depression Symptoms During Childhood and Adulthood." JAMA Pediatrics, 177(8):818–826.
10. Roncarati JS, Baggett TP, O'Connell JJ, Hwang SW, Cook EF, Krieger N, & Sorensen G. 2018. "Mortality Among Unsheltered Homeless Adults in Boston, Massachusetts, 2000-2009." JAMA Internal Medicine, 178(9):1242-1248.
11. Acharya B, Bhatta D, & Dhakal C. 2022. "The risk of eviction and the mental health outcomes among the US adults." Preventive Medicine Reports, 29:101981.
12. Culhane DP, Metraux S, & Hadley T. 2002. "Public service reductions associated with placement of homeless persons with severe mental illness in supportive housing." Housing Policy Debate, 13(1): 107–163.
13. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2018. "Permanent Supportive Housing: Evaluating the Evidence for Improving Health Outcomes Among People Experiencing Chronic Homelessness." Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

14. Obaidy M, Parrott J, & Mehrotra A. 2024. "Wage Compression Or Wage Divergence? Real Wage Growth Comparison between New York City and the U.S., 2019-2023." The New School Center for New York City Affairs.
15. Shapiro E. 2025. "When they go home after working all day, it's not to a home." The New York Times.
16. For example, the federal government is now clawing back funding for the Emergency Housing Voucher program, which helps keep over 7,500 households in homes across New York City. The Housing Choice Voucher Program has not received a substantial enough investment from U.S. Congress to allow the city to issue Section 8 vouchers to meet the need of households on the voucher waitlist.
17. CityFHEPS stands for City Fighting Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement.
18. Brand D. 2021. "Council Will Hold Long-Awaited Vote to Raise Value of NYC Housing Vouchers." City Limits.
19. The Rules of the City of New York. Title 68: Human Resources Administration, Chapter 10: City Fighting Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement (CityFHEPS), Subchapter A: CityFHEPS – Tenant-based Rental Assistance, § 10-06 Calculation of CityFHEPS Rental Assistance Payment Amount – Apartments and SROs. Effective September 13, 2025.
20. 2025 and 2026 CityFHEPS payment standards can be found here.
21. The City of New York. 2026. "Mayor's Management Report: Preliminary Fiscal 2026."
22. Based on CSS analysis of New York City Department of Social Service data through November 2022, received February 2023 by FOIL request.
23. Office of the New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer. 2020. "Audit Report on the Safety and Wellbeing of Infants Residing in Sampled Department of Homeless Services Shelters."
24. Smith GB. 2021. "Sleeping behind the Bronx Zoo: why some New Yorkers choose streets over shelters." The City Reporter.
25. Giambrone A. 2026. "Homeless women sought shelter in NYC. They found chronic violence and dysfunction." Gothamist.

Survey Methodology

The 2026 NYC Benefits Survey was designed and conducted by the Community Service Society of New York in partnership with Seven Letter Insight to capture New York City residents' recent experiences applying for, renewing, or recertifying public benefits. Between January 7 and February 9, 2026, 2,000 NYC residents completed the survey via online panels and text-to-online outreach. Surveys were completed in English, Spanish, Russian, and Chinese.

The sample included 727 respondents who had applied for or recertified for CityFHEPS within the past three years. For the analysis presented in this report, we weighted the data to reflect the demographic and geographic characteristics of NYC CityFHEPS participants. The margin of error for the CityFHEPS sample is ±3.6 percentage points.

Among the 727 recent CityFHEPS applicants, 550 were approved. For this report, we chose to only look at the 497 who had found an apartment with their CityFHEPS subsidy; we excluded the 53 who were still looking for an apartment.

Closed-ended survey questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The survey included an open-ended question asking respondents how CityFHEPS has made a difference in their lives. Open-ended responses were analyzed thematically, with answers coded and grouped into common themes reflecting shared experiences.

For more information, contact Yvonne Peña at ypena@cssny.org

Community Service Society