

Mirta Rosales, parent coordinator at Public School 188 on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, where nearly 50 percent of the students were homeless in 2016. Credit: Todd Heisler/The New York Times.¹

Improving School Attendance for Homeless Children

A Model Program Pilot

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Primary and secondary school attendance is one of the most critical factors contributing to positive trajectories for children who experience severe poverty and homelessness. While other measures of educational achievement are important, if a child does not attend school on a regular basis, his or her opportunities for success are severely limited. Missing many school days disrupts learning and reduces the likelihood that children will acquire the knowledge, skills and resiliency necessary for a successful transition to adulthood.

The issue of K-12 school absenteeism is particularly acute for homeless children in the United States, who face multiple challenges to succeeding in school. Federal policies in place seek to promote the education of homeless children, but the local implementation of U. S. Department of Education policy directives remains a challenge.

The Improving School Attendance for Homeless Children (ISAHC) program model provides modest new training and coordination resources to identify, address and manage multiple systemic, intergenerational and logistical barriers to improve school attendance among homeless children. It is purposefully designed to rely predominantly on existing resources, adding only minimal new costs. The model uses a team approach, is data-informed and employs evidence-based practices. The ISAHC team, the most significant feature of the model, brings together staff from the NY City Department of Education (DOE) tasked with ensuring school attendance for students in temporary housing, with shelter provider staff, working together to analyze and address the issues underlying school absences. The ISAHC Model Program Pilot will be implemented at three homeless family shelters in New York City for an initial period of two years, commencing with team training in April 2018 and field implantation by May 2018.

GATEWAY HOUSING

Gateway Housing is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization established in October 2015 to transform New York City's homeless shelter system into an effective, evidence-based intervention that assists homeless people to become more independent and integrated into their communities.

Led by a board of directors and staff members with extensive expertise serving homeless New Yorkers and financing affordable housing, Gateway Housing works closely with government and nonprofit service providers to rehabilitate aging shelter stock to transform the city's current "one-size-fits-all" emergency homeless response. Gateway Housing develops financing and legal structures, architectural designs, project scopes and resident relocation plans to create transitional housing in the Gateway Housing model.

Because homeless New Yorkers often spend years in the shelter system, Gateway Housing resolved to understand and evaluate the services and supports that will most effectively help families and individuals become as independent and stable as they can be. To this end, Gateway Housing facilitates independent program evaluation to collect qualitative and quantitative data, including staff and resident experience, to identify transitional service interventions that have measurable impacts on residents' long-term housing stability and other positive life outcomes.

This approach enables Gateway Housing to assist homeless service providers to adopt person-centered service programs that employ proven, evidence-based practices and effective staffing patterns, training, and oversight. Gateway Housing facilitates, coordinates and shares findings and information, while delivering technical expertise on all aspects of its initiatives to participating providers, government and the affordable housing community at large. With continued success, Gateway Housing's transformation of the shelter system will have replicable implications for other localities in the United States



34.3% vs. 73.5%

Rates of “good attendance” for K-12 students with temporary vs. permanent status based on New York City housing status, in 2013 to 2014.^{2,3}

BACKGROUND

Education is the Gateway to Future Success

Satisfactory academic achievement, and high school graduation in particular, by their children are normative goals of parents and guardians in the United States. Attendance in primary and secondary school, (kindergarten to 12th grade, or K-12), and its associated educational progress are related to the development of knowledge and skills, as well as prosocial relationships, resiliency and other competencies necessary for future success.^{4 5}

If a child does not attend school on a regular basis, however, these basic achievements will remain unattainable, and their opportunities for success will be severely limited.⁶

The release by the US Department of Education (USDOE) of the 2013-14 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)⁷ provides a view of absenteeism in nearly every U.S. public school.⁸ The USDOE's *Report Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation's Schools: An Unprecedented Look at a Hidden Educational Crisis*⁹ as well as *Preventing Missed Opportunity: Taking Collective Action to Confront Chronic Absence*,¹⁰ a report by the national U.S. non-profit organization Attendance Works and The Johns Hopkins School of Education's Everyone Graduates Center highlight important evidence-based facts related to poor school attendance gleaned from the CRDC, the most striking of which include the following.

1. A child's absenteeism in the first month of the school year predicts poor attendance throughout his or her school year. Of those who miss two to four days in September, half also will miss nearly a month in the same school year..
2. Over 7 million (one in seven) U.S. students miss nearly a month of school each year.
3. Absenteeism and its adverse effects begin early. Of kindergarteners and first graders, one in 10 are chronically absent, and poor attendance influences demonstrated third graders ability to demonstrate reading proficiency by the end of their school year or risk being held back.
4. By sixth grade, chronic absenteeism is a leading indicator that a student will drop out before completing high school.
5. Research shows that students who miss 10 percent of the school year, whether excused (including suspensions) or not, have poorer academic performance. For most school districts, this percentage tallies about 18 days, an average just two days a month, and is considered chronic absence.
6. Students who live in communities with high levels of poverty are four times more likely than those who do not to be chronically absent and frequently for factors beyond their control, such as unstable housing, unreliable transportation and a lack of access to health care.
7. When students improve their attendance rates, they improve their academic prospects and chances for graduating from high school.
8. Most school districts and states do not collect or evaluate the data most likely to aid in decision making to improve school attendance. Data tracked tends to focus on how many students show up daily and how many are skipping school without an excuse. More useful data includes whether among the students who miss the most days had excused and unexcused absence, an indicator they may be headed off-track academically.

As the USDOE *Report* notes: "Frequent absences from school can shape adulthood. High school dropout, which chronically absent students are more likely to experience, has been linked to poor outcomes later in life, from poverty and diminished health to involvement in the criminal justice system."¹¹

For children experiencing homelessness, success in school offers one of the only pathways out of a lifetime of deep poverty. But the persistent housing and familial instability experienced by almost all homeless children results in high rates of school absenteeism in this population. The subsequent disruption to the learning process reduces the likelihood they will acquire the subject matter expertise, life skills and resiliency necessary for a successful transition to adulthood.^{12, 13 14}

Barriers to School Attendance

According to federal definitions, homeless students reside in impermanent housing, including those in homeless shelters, and those living in doubled-up or other temporary housing situations.¹⁵ Many characteristics of homelessness negatively affect a child's ability to attend K-12 school regularly, and reduce opportunities to attain educational success. Housing instability creates a chaotic home learning environment, makes it difficult to commute to school, and is detrimental to a child's emotional and psychological well-being.

Moreover, homelessness can magnify negative parental behaviors that hinder children's school attendance. Adverse childhood events (ACE) can have lasting deleterious effects on an individual's academic achievement and graduation likelihood.¹⁶ Despite mitigation from known protective factors, such as social support and training for parents,¹⁷ homelessness can exacerbate the known negative relationship between parental ACE scores and child success.¹⁸

In addition, chronic absenteeism is often a multi-generational behavior. Motivating parents or guardians to help improve their children's attendance, (regardless of their own past educational achievement or experience) , will be critical to their children's success attending school and acquiring the benefits of education.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE OF NEW YORK CITY HOMELESS CHILDREN

At the beginning of 2018, New York City's homeless shelter system provided temporary housing to 22,970 children in more than 12,700 families,¹⁹ a 61 percent increase since 2009.²⁰ There are a number of indicators that homelessness and housing instability are increasing, though the homeless family census in the shelter system has remained relatively stable for the past two years, most likely due in part to public policy changes emphasizing homelessness prevention and targeted rent subsidies. Approximately ##% of the families residing in the shelter system live in "Tier II" shelters operated by not-for-profit service providers, while the balance reside in commercial hotels and "cluster-site apartments" in privately-owned rental housing.

Homeless families residing in Tier II shelters have more access to services than those living in other types of shelter. Despite this greater level of support, Tier II families experience many of the same challenges detrimental to school attendance as all homeless families, including those living outside the shelter system in doubled-up situations. In addition to social and familial challenges, New York City families face logistical issues and system-related policies and procedures that create additional barriers to good school attendance.

The New York City Department of Education (DOE) collects information about all public school students residing in temporary housing (including sheltered families and those living doubled-up). Two significant analyses of the DOE data regarding the status of this more broadly-defined cohort of homeless children in the New York City public school system inform the ISAHC Model Program Pilot:

2017 On the Map: The Atlas of Student Homelessness in New York City, Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness (ICPH), September 2017.²¹ We refer to this as the ICPH study, and it breaks out DOE data on children in shelters from other homeless categories in New York City for some analyses.

Not Reaching the Door: Homeless Students Face Many Hurdles on the Way to School, New York City Independent Budget Office, October 2016.²² We refer to this as the IBO study. The IBO report uses the same school attendance data as the ICPH study but concentrates on those in shelters. IBO also supplements the DOE data with a methodically collected qualitative data that further enhance the understanding of the circumstances surrounding and causing the poor attendance rates of children living in shelters.

The percentage of self-reporting students in temporary housing (STH) within the total New York City public school enrollee population has grown steadily since 2013-14 school year when STH comprised 8 percent to 9 percent in 2015-16 to an estimated 10 percent during 2016-17.

Of New York City children self-reporting a STH designation in the 2015-16 school year, 58 percent report living in doubled-up situations, 34 percent in homeless shelters and 8 percent awaiting foster care placements or residing in other temporary housing.²³

Moreover, many students are homeless during multiple school years. For example, the IBO study states two-thirds of the students who reported living in New York City homeless shelters during the 2013-14 school year had lived in a shelter one to three of the prior three school years.²⁴

Among the characteristics of STH in New York City shelters, race is often a significant factor. For example, both the IBO analysis of the self-reported DOE data from 2013-14 and the ICPH report of data from 2015-16 describe an unchanging picture: Nearly all homeless students residing in shelters are either African-American (53%) or Latino (42%).²⁵

The rate of K-12 school attendance of New York City students in temporary housing is abysmal and cause for concern. Average school attendance rates for homeless children in shelters are lower than their peers in both doubled-up housing situations and permanent housing across every grade from K to 12.²⁶ During the 2013-14 academic year, only about one-third (34.3%) of STH in shelters had “good” attendance, defined as less than a 10 percent absenteeism rate (compared to 73.4 percent of students *not* in temporary housing who had good attendance).²⁷ The remaining two-thirds of STH in shelters split about evenly between absentees qualifying as chronic (31.9 percent missed more than 10 percent of the school year) or severely chronic (33.9 percent missed more than 20 percent of the school year).²⁸

Of note, New York City students in temporary housing who reside in shelters have the choice to remain in their “school of origin,” the school they attended before moving to shelter, or transferring to a school close to their resident shelter. While the schools with the highest numbers of students in temporary housing are geographically close to shelters, STH attend schools in every school district.²⁹

REASONS FOR ABSENTEEISM OF NEW YORK CITY HOMELESS CHILDREN IN SHELTERS

New York City public schools do not collect data on specific reasons children are absent from school. However, interviews conducted by the author of the proposal and the IBO study in particular document a range reasons a child does not attend school. The IBO study features a robust qualitative research component based on interviews and focus groups with more than 100 individuals representing staff members at 12 public New York City schools, with staff members from DOE’s STH unit, with New York City school principals and with parents of families living in shelters. The issues identified across these sources include:

- **Presence at PATH.** Conflicting priorities by New York City agencies for parents about where their children should be. For example, the Department of Homeless Services’ Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) intake center is in the Bronx and requires children to be present during interviews and processing, often for two or more days. Interviewees report most children miss school during this process.
- **Distance.** Families are often placed in shelters far from children’s schools of origin. While PATH attempts to place families in shelters closest to the school of the youngest schoolage child in the family, this goal is increasingly difficult to achieve. In 2011, DHS reported successfully placing 83.3 percent of families based on their youngest child’s school. During the first four months of Fiscal 2018, 51.0 percent of families with children were placed in shelter according to the youngest school-aged child’s school address.³⁰ Delays in arranging for transportation to school upon initial entry into shelter is frequently cited as a reason for absences, even when children are able to remain in their schools of origin.
- **Disruption.** Transferring to schools near shelter placements mid-school year can be problematic in many ways, particularly if a child has or needs an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to accommodate special needs. The IEP spells out a child’s learning needs, the services the school will provide and how progress will be measured. Transferring a student who has an IEP student, or one who is in the process of IEP evaluation, from one school to another can cause decreases in attendance.
- **Preparation.** Because children may not be prepared to attend school every day, parents may decide not to send them. While such readiness usually means completed homework, it can also mean having appropriate attire. For some STH readiness means having the required uniform. But for many, it is merely having clean clothes. Similarly, some shelters have on-site laundry facilities or funds to assist families in helping pay to wash clothes, but others do not.
- **Child Care.** A family member’s illness, even if limited to just one person, can easily cause all children in the family to be absent. This is particularly a problem if they require a parent to help them get to school. New York City Department of Homeless Services rules prohibit parents from leaving children unattended at shelters. Because the majority of families in shelters are single-parent, when this parent needs to stay at the shelter for a sick child, he or she cannot take other children to school. Shelters

frown on having parents from other families watch children, especially when an illness is involved, and shelters do not provide child care services for sick children.

- **Health.** Parents suffering from physical and mental health issues, particularly depression, may find getting their children up and ready for school on time a challenge.

TARGETING SCHOOL ATTENDANCE WITH ISAHC

The factors contributing to and realized in homeless situations are extremely difficult to change. Primarily under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, federal policies and practices that focus on homeless children's education are meant to ensure that these children have access and support needed to succeed in school. But implementation, particularly in large cities with complex school systems has remained challenging. Despite primary focus of myriad resources to ensuring school attendance, they are not producing system-wide positive results. The current resources at New York City shelters and DOE, however, afford targets of opportunity for relatively easier modification that might realize improvements in inconsistent school attendance of children residing in homeless shelters.

Gateway Housing, in partnerships with its participating service providers; BronxWorks, Help USA and Women in Need, has been examining how to impact homeless families while in shelters positively. Specifically, Gateway Housing seeks to leverage targets of opportunity to create a model of more effective and efficient service provision with a measurable, positive impact on school attendance, likely altering the trajectories of these vulnerable children significantly and resulting in other positive short- and long-term outcomes for the families experiencing homelessness.

The Improving School Attendance for Homeless Children (ISAHC) model is a shelter-intervention program laser-focused on school attendance and attuned to current barriers. Because it is tailored to the circumstances of the New York City shelter program, ISAHC presents the possibility of significantly altering the trajectories of these vulnerable children. With the modifications stemming from the ISAHC Pilot Program outcomes and validation, thoughtful replication and dissemination of the ISAHC program are anticipated to have relevance to other types of temporary housing situations in other communities seeking to reduce high school absenteeism rates among homeless children.

To develop the ISAHC model and Pilot Program, Gateway Housing engaged a nationally known leader in this field, Judith Samuels, PhD, who has extensive experience designing, testing and disseminating evidence-based interventions for homeless families. Dr. Samuels developed the ISAHC model with the input and assistance of organizations that work with homeless families, especially those who have responsibility for ensuring school attendance of homeless children living in shelters. The model also benefited from input of policymakers and program experts at the New York City Human Resource Administration (HRA), Department of Homeless Services (DHS), DOE, Advocates for Children of New York, and three shelter provider organizations within New York City.

While Dr. Samuels defined and designed the ISAHC model to focus on improving school attendance for children living in New York City Tier II homeless family shelters, additional expected outcomes include improved school performance, shorter shelter stays and increased stability upon shelter exit.

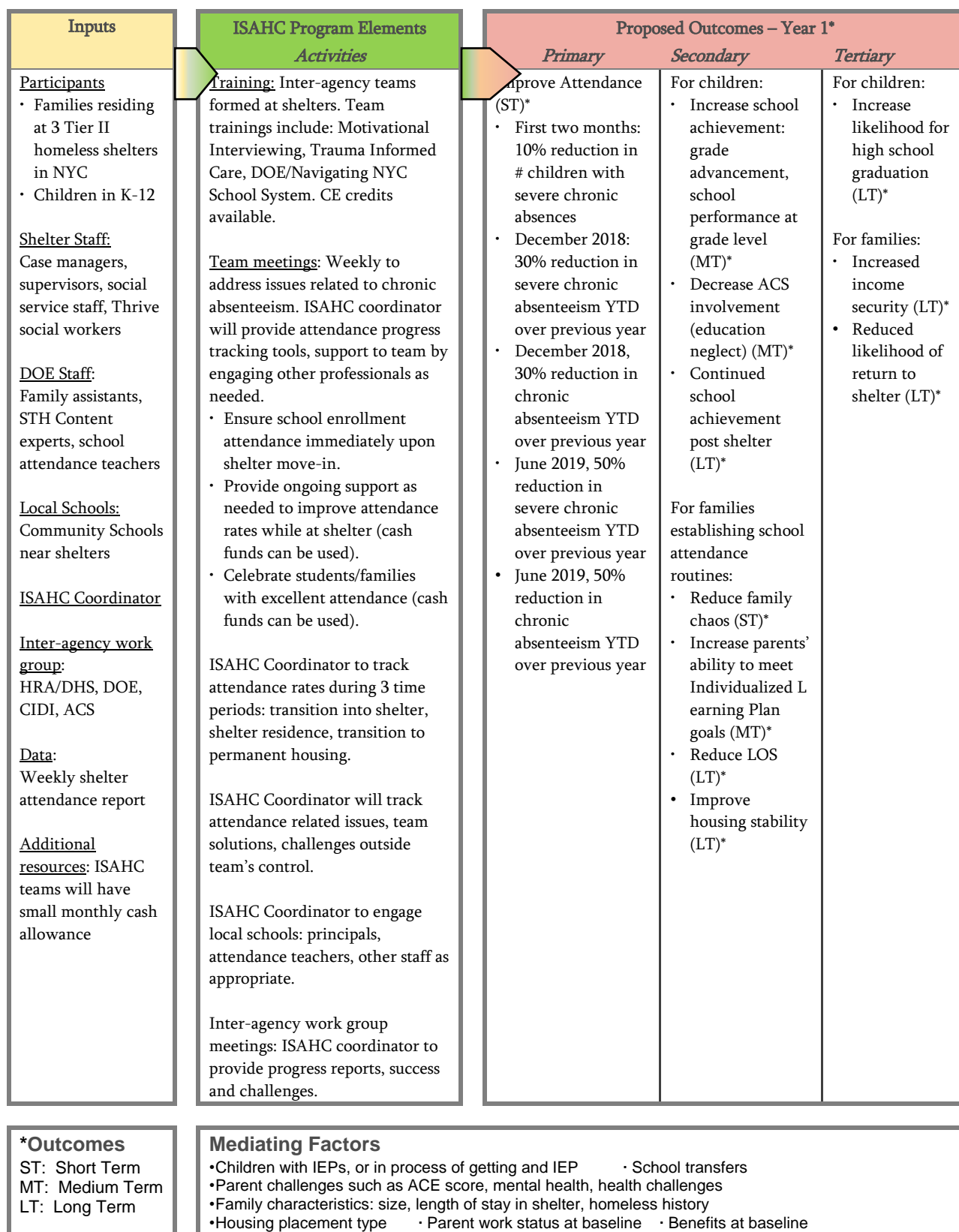
The ISAHC model is designed to use existing resources with minimal additional resources and coordination support to identify, address and manage multiple systemic, inter-generational and logistical barriers to improve and encourage good school attendance among homeless children. The model uses a team approach, is data-informed and employs evidence-based practices. Figure 1. presents the logic model of the ISAHC model. A detailed description of the model follows.

The Pilot Program will involve three homeless family shelters in New York City, each operated by a different shelter provider organization. The three shelters are similar, as all are Tier II and accommodate approximately 100 families. The Pilot Program is designed to last two years, commencing with team training in April 2018, and field implantation by May 1, 2018.

Gateway Housing has secured a two-year grant to evaluate the short-, mid- and long-term outcomes of the ISAHC model via a two-year pilot study. The ISAHC Pilot Program will involve three homeless family shelters in New York City, each operated by a different shelter provider organization. The three shelters are similar, as all are Tier II and accommodate approximately 100 families. The Pilot Program is designed to commence with team training in April 2018 and field implantation by May 1, 2018.

To lead the Pilot Program Evaluation, Gateway has engaged two experienced researchers in homelessness. Jay Bainbridge, PhD, associate professor of Public Administration at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, NY, will serve as the study principal investigator. Dan Treglia, PhD, a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Policy and Practice in Philadelphia, PA, will serve as investigator. Previous to their current positions, both served in the New York City's Department of Homeless Services. Dr. Bainbridge was the assistant commissioner of Policy & Planning and Dr. Treglia was deputy director of Research. Both have designed and conducted experimental and quasi-experimental evaluations of programs addressing homelessness and their impacts through primary survey data, qualitative interviews and administrative records from DHS, HRA, New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS), New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), and the Veterans' Administration (VA). Key to the evaluation is collaboration with The Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI), a research/policy center located in the Office of the Mayor of the City of New York headed by Maryanne Schretzman. Also, Dr. Samuels will manage several aspects of the qualitative data collection and analyses examining the implementation and fidelity of the ISAHC model. Together, Drs. Bainbridge, Treglia and Samuels comprise the lead investigators for ISAHC Pilot Program Evaluation.

Figure 1. ISAHC Pilot Program Logic Model



ISAHC MODEL AND COMPONENTS

Team Approach

The ISAHC teams at each shelter include a constellation of professionals, regardless of the agency or organization to which they report, who in some way are responsible for assisting homeless families with ensuring regular school attendance of their children. These multi-agency teams are the most critical component of the ISAHC model. With a diverse range of expertise, experience, skills and knowledge, ISAHC team members collaboratively can assess the situation of each child with poor school attendance. They then can provide a holistic approach and identify solutions at ground level across agencies and systems that address each family's challenges as they relate to school attendance.

Research on inter-agency solutions has informed the ISAHC model,³¹ recommending that each of the three pilot shelters have:

- clear aims;
- agreement between partners on team members' roles and responsibilities and on team timetables
- multi-agency steering group;
- commitment at all levels of the organizations involved;
- good systems of communication;
- information sharing behaviors and infrastructures, including IT systems; and
- support and training for staff members in new ways of working.

The three pilot ISAHC teams will receive training in two evidence-based practices designed increase individual team members' skills: motivational interviewing and trauma-informed care. Evidence supports that inter-professional training can help remove barriers to collaborative work. Thus each will train together as a group. An excellent guide to inter-agency workgroups describes 12 benefits to members of partnered multi-agency team members all of which should occur in the ISAHC teams:³²

1. Taking part in joint activities and projects
2. Sharing views that are listened to by others
3. Able to effect change
4. Knowing contributions are valued
5. Sharing decision making
6. Finding solutions to problems in partnership with others
7. Being respected by other practitioners
8. Sharing ideas, knowledge and expertise with other practitioners
9. Participating in regular inter-professional training
10. Understanding different practitioners roles and responsibilities
11. Having agreed vision, aims and objectives
12. Helping remove children's barriers to learning

ISAHC Team Members

Members of an ISAHC team will include, but is not limited to:

- ISAHC Coordinator
- Shelter staff members: case managers, case management supervisors, Director of Social Services
- Client Care Coordinators, also know as Thrive social workers
- DOE STH Staff, specifically STH Family Assistants assigned to shelters

- DOE Attendance Teachers and/or staff members from schools local to the homeless shelter

The ISAHC Coordinator is a new role and will assist all three ISAHC pilot teams. The ISAHC coordinator will assist with team meetings to ensure the principals of the model, concepts from the training sessions, absentee data reports and tools are used as prescribed. The ISAHC coordinator will also identify solutions to attendance challenges that cannot be solved by a team due to needed system or policy changes. The ISAHC coordinator also will ensure that schools local to the shelters participating in the Pilot Program are informed and kept up-to-date on the work and progress of the ISAHC teams. The coordinator will meet with school principals and other school staff members as recommended by the principals. The Coordinator will establish a relationship with the DOE Content Experts located in the borough STH offices. Ongoing communications between the local schools, STH offices and the ISAHC teams will be enhanced by inclusion of the local school Attendance Teacher as a member. The Coordinator will encourage the team to engage families in their efforts to improve school attendance. These activities may include holding parent education sessions and recognition events for families whose children have good and/or improves school attendance. The ISAHC coordinator will be hired by Gateway Housing so he or she may remain independent and used by the team as a nonpartisan mediator when needed. See job description attached appendix.

Shelter staff members of the ISAHC team will be determined by the shelter directors. They will be encouraged to assign staff from different responsibility levels, such as case managers, case management supervisors and a director of social services. These staff members will be the most familiar with the families and their daily lives and challenges. However, they typically are not as familiar with policies and practices within the DOE or New York City public K-12 schools. Shelter staff members working directly with families that have children with chronic school absenteeism will be encouraged to participate in ISAHC team meetings, particularly when their assigned children are discussed.

The Client Care Coordinators, or Thrive social workers, are a relatively new addition to the New York City shelter workforce. These clinically trained staff members, all of whom have Master degree-level training in social work, will play an important and particular role on the ISAHC teams. Their clinical training will add a level of understanding related to the children and families' constellation of challenges. As a member of the ISAHC, these social workers will help the team problem-solve during meetings by ensuring that solutions the team develops are realistic for the families. As part of their regular work, client care coordinators conduct biopsychosocial assessments of families in shelters. Their insights regarding the clinical features of challenges facing such parents and children will be a valuable asset to the ISAHC teams. Client care coordinator assessments include mental health and physical health histories, which employ a standardized battery of diagnostic tools such as:

- For Mental Health
 - Primary care Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Screen (PC-PTSD)
 - Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) for depression
- For Substance Abuse
 - Drug Abuse Screening Test (DAST-10)
 - CAGE Questionnaire and the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT-C)
- For Anxiety Disorder
 - Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7)
 - CRAFFT (Car, Relax, Alone, Forget, Friends, Trouble) Screening, an additional tool for adolescents in the household between ages of 12 and 17

DOE STH Family Assistants assigned to each of the three shelters participating in the Pilot Program will be members of their shelter's ISAHC team. STH Family Assistants are anticipated to seek guidance and support from the STH Content Experts and STH Central Staff on a regular basis to resolve student issues identified by the ISAHC team.

To meet the mandates of the federal McKinney Vento Act, recently reauthorize and revised under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) effective on October 1, 2016,³³ DOE created three groups of STH-focused staff members: STH Content Experts or Liaisons, STH Family Assistants (approximately 117, all assigned to shelters), and STH Central Staff located at the five New York City borough offices).

The duties of Family Assistants located in shelters are complicated by the number of schools with which they need to work to ensure every child at the shelter can succeed in school. Because families may choose to keep children in their schools of origin before entering the shelter system or to enroll them in schools local to the shelter, a single shelter can have resident children who attend dozens of different schools. Some shelters have high numbers of children attending origin schools, while others have more attending schools local to the shelter, the later of which can aid in the successful coordination of services. School choice is an extremely important decision for families when they enter a shelter, and the Family Assistants play a key role in the decision-making process. If a child is going to remain in his or her school of origin, the selection often entails working with the Family Assistant to set up a workable travel plan, which can involve using public transportation or arranging for special DOE STH busing.

Family Assistants can also provide additional data about children's attendance and other school performance criteria during ISAHC team meetings by accessing the DOE data system. If the Family Assistant does not normally have access to the data system while at the shelter, access will be made available during team meetings through the ISAHC Coordinator's laptop, equipped with Internet access.

DOE Attendance teachers and/or staff members from local schools whose responsibilities include monitoring the school's daily and weekly attendance reports. Every public school in NYC has such attendance teachers, who also investigate the causes of absences, speak with parents/guardians about attendance issues, and work to resolve issues that cause absences. Attendance teachers from schools local to shelters participating in the ISAHC Pilot Program will join as a member of the ISAHC team. However, at the school principal's request, other members of the school staff can be appointed to join the team. The ISAHC Coordinator will work directly with local schools to ensure the attendance teachers are engaged in the ISAHC program.



Delays in arranging for transportation to school upon shelter entry frequently is cited among the reasons for absences when children remain in their school of origin.³⁴

DATA-INFORMED APPROACH

Each ISACH team will meet weekly to review attendance records, identify issues and problem-solve using their resources. Each team will have access to a weekly attendance report for each school-age child residing in their shelter. Currently, HRA/DHS generates a daily computerized "match" of the DOE public school

attendance data with the HRA/DHS shelter census listing every child residing in a homeless shelter. This match is the most accurate attendance record for homeless STH in New York City. The ISAHC Coordinator will be responsible for ensuring that someone who works at the shelter, designated by the shelter Director, downloads the report through the HRA/DHS Juniper system and brings it to the weekly ISAHC team meetings.

The ISAHC teams will use the attendance data reports to identify children who are experiencing high or chronic absenteeism. They will prioritize children with the highest absentee rates in their discussions and work to address issues that prevent children from attending school. The team also will use the data to identify children who have good attendance on a weekly basis, and shelter staff members will be encouraged to find ways to celebrate children and families that have good attendance. The ISAHC team will decide how best to celebrate and recognize these children.

Using the attendance data reports will allow the ISAHC teams to focus on absentee rates and track progress. Additional information will provide context to their evaluations and be brought to bear as the ISAHC teams work together to help families address their school attendance issues. The sources, via participation of shelter staff members, include demographic, work, residential and other information about the parents and children from CARES (the HRA/DHS shelter resident information system), information Family Assistants contribute from DOE and school contacts, and family insights from the Client Care Coordinators.

ISAHC TRAINING

The three pilot ISAHC teams will participate in training courses in three specific areas: Motivational Interviewing, trauma-informed care, and navigating the New York City education system. Each course will be offered on-site at each of the three shelters shortly before the ISAHC Pilot Program begins. To accommodate normal expected staff turnover, the training courses will be offered twice again during the year for new ISAHC team members and as “booster” sessions for those who have already attended the training sessions but would like a refresher.

The Motivational Interviewing and Trauma courses will be provided by the Center for Urban Community Services (CUCS) Training Institute, a leader in social service sector training in New York City. CUCS is modifying these two courses to fit the circumstances specific to homeless families in shelters and to focus on addressing school attendance and success. The modified courses will include anecdotes, cases and other examples related to the ISAHC team’s work. The New York City education system course will be offered by Advocates for Children of New York, an organization deeply involved in ensuring that appropriate programs and services are in place in the City and across the State for students in temporary housing.

Foundations of Motivational Interviewing, Full-Day Training

Change is difficult for most persons, yet is the driver of most service planning and goal-setting. Motivational Interviewing (MI), developed by Miller and Rollnick,³⁵ is an evidence-based practice that helps people recognize and address problem behavior (present or potential) and get them moving along the path to change. MI is intended to help resolve ambivalence and creates an “openness” to change and a prelude to other services and further important therapeutic work. This training provides an introduction to the basic principles and skills associated with MI, including expressing empathy, rolling with resistance and avoiding common roadblocks to change. Staff members trained in MI often work more effectively with the change process experienced by many service recipients in their personal journeys to address issues of focus. This course is accredited as a New York State Social Work Continuing Education Course and is also OASAS Certified.

Trauma & Its Aftermath: New Thinking About Trauma-Informed Care, Full-Day Training

Though statistics vary, experts agree many members of homeless families are trauma survivors whose experiences shape their responses to services. Trauma-Informed Care is an engagement technique that recognizes recognizes the presence and influence of trauma histories in the lives of survivors. This training

provides an introduction of the new diagnostic criteria from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM–5) for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other trauma-related disorders, as well as other symptoms and behaviors resulting from trauma. Assessment, safety issues, medication and symptom management are explored at both case management and programmatic levels. The training explores vicarious trauma issues. Attendees will acquire better understanding of trauma-informed care and the clinical skills needed to support persons healing and recovering from trauma histories. This course is accredited as a New York State Social Work Continuing Education Course and is OASAS Certified.

Navigating the New York City Education System, Half-Day Training

This course would be offered in a series of four quarterly training modules at each of the three shelter sites. This course will include training ISAHC staff members to read and interpret attendance reports. Additional topics covered by this course are:

- Where to find help at school: An overview of the DOE, general education system and how New York City school supports are structured and can be accessed
- Educational rights of New York City students in shelters: basics of federal and local regulations with an emphasis on school stability and trouble-shooting transportation issues
- What parents should know about their children's education and how they can be more involved: Parental involvement/engagement and trauma-sensitive practices
- Helping parents navigate special education system

SHELTERS PARTICIPATING IN ISAHC PILOT PROGRAM

Three shelter provider organizations have agreed to participate in the ISAHC Pilot Program: Help USA (Help), Women in Need (WIN) and BronxWorks. Each of these organizations have designated two (2) shelters for the Pilot Project to enable comparisons and model evaluation. For each organization, one shelter will implement the ISAHC model and be paired with another shelter that does not follow the model. Table 1. reports key indicators of the six participating shelters.

Table 1. ISAHC Pilot Program Shelters and Absentee Rates

Provider Organizations	Designated Shelters	# Family Units	# School Age Children	Chronic Absenteeism Rate
BronxWorks	Nelson: ISAHC	79	150	60%
	Jackson: Comparison	95	183	48%
Help USA*	Crotona: ISAHC	96	180	55%
	Hamilton: Comparison	150	250	55%
Women in Need	Junius: ISAHC	216	418	56%
	Liberty: Comparisons	203	701	57%

*School-related Data for Help USA shelters is preliminary

As previously noted, on shelter entry, families can choose to keep their children in the “school of origin” or transfer them to schools local to their shelter assignments. The ISAHC Coordinator, working with the Family Assistant, will engage the schools deemed local to each of the three ISAHC shelters. Some of the schools near ISAHC shelters are part of the DOE Community Schools (CS) initiative, which includes weekly attendance meetings at the individual School schools. For the Pilot Program, the ISAHC Coordinator will work with CS principals and DOE CS staff to ensure children residing in ISAHC shelters and attending CS but with poor attendance are discussed during the CS’ weekly attendance meetings.

For the Pilot Program geographically local schools include:

- BronxWorks (Bronx): PS 170, PS 303, PS 70
- Help USA (Bronx): PS 211 (CS), PS 10, PS 352, East Bronx Academy for the Future (CS)
- Women in Need (Brooklyn): Christopher Avenue Community School (CS), PS328, PS150, PS298

The BronxWorks Nelson shelter and the Help USA Crotona shelter are in the 2nd and 3rd highest school districts in NYC respectively for the number of students in temporary housing.

EVALUATION

As noted above, Gateway Housing has secured a grant to conduct a 2-year evaluation of the ISAHC model pilot program. And while the evaluation protocol is in the final development stage, it is intended to follow closely the proposed outcomes in the above logic model. The model features five categories of proposed outcomes of interest that involve children, families or parents, to be evaluated. Indicators of outcomes will be informed by baseline and follow up data from defined sources, collected in a rigorous approach to enable objective comparisons. In addition, the evaluation will include a qualitative study of the implementation and fidelity of the ISAHC model at the three shelters.

While school attendance is the primary indicator to evaluate the effectiveness of ISAHC model, the interventions of the model are anticipated to yield other benefits to the participating children and their families, including parents and siblings. Therefore, the Pilot Program indicators include not only those specific to participating children but also several expected to measure the ISAHC model's impact on families. The Pilot Program has prioritized these indicators as either secondary or tertiary. Table 2. summarizes the ISAHC Pilot Program outcomes, mediators, indicators and sources of relevant data for those indicators.

Of note, the ISAHC Evaluation Team will work with Gateway Housing, CIDI, HRA/DHS, DOE, and other stakeholders to finalize the evaluation protocol. Moreover, the ISAHC Pilot Program will adopt an adaptive design approach. That is, the ongoing qualitative evaluation enables the ability to appraise model fidelity on an ongoing basis and incorporate findings with immediacy into the design and functionality of the ISAHC model during the pilot's execution.

Data Sources

A brief survey will be administered to families participating in the ISAHC Pilot Program during their shelter enrollment, which will provide primary data for indicators that are not otherwise available from administrative data sources. This includes the Adverse Childhood Events (ACE) scale, the six item Resilience scale and a 12-item HOPE scale.

Qualitative data for the model implementation and fidelity study will be collected via techniques such as meeting observations with note-taking, semi-structured interviews with ISAHC team members and weekly reports from the ISAHC coordinator.

Evaluation Techniques

Baseline assessment will include retrospective analyses of data collected up to two years prior to families' enrollment in the ISAHC Pilot Program. Outcome assessment will include analyses of data collected prospectively during the program and up to two years following the families' program enrollment.

Data will be assessed using multivariate regression statistical techniques, as appropriate, and controlling for differences in characteristics of families, schools, placement types and facilities. Where possible, ISAHC Pilot Program indicators will be compared to overall New York City trends.

Table 2. ISAHC Pilot Program Outcome Measures (C = child; F = Family; and P = Parent)

Outcomes Categories	Indicators	Data Sources
	Primary	
Education/Academic Achievement (C)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DOE / Automate to Schools (ATS)
	Secondary	
Education/ Academic Achievement (C)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # School transfers or attended Special needs/ IEP School performance at grade level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DOE / ATS
	Secondary	
Shelter/Housing Stability (F)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Days in shelter for 2 years post enrollment Return to shelter rate Housing placement/exit types (subsidized, unsubsidized, unknown) Distinct shelter stays for 2 years following shelter exit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DHS/ CARES
	Tertiary	
Income security (P, F)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work status during pilot Duration worked by any family during pilot Total earned income during pilot Cash assistance type received (disaggregated by type, e.g., Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Safety Net Assistance (SNA), One Shot Deal; and NY Safety Net, One-Shot; We Care NY) Total cash assistance received Enrollment and duration of any family member in Medicaid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NYS DOL HRA/ WMS
Child welfare status/Family Stability (F, C)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster care placements Foster care-indicated investigations Prevention services receipt and duration Reunion of children placed in out-of-home care with their families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACS /CARES
Mental health (P)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> THRIVE social worker assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DOHMH
Childcare (C) / Psychosocial (P)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New York State's Universal Prekindergarten Program (UPK) Resilience (Six-item Resilience Scale) Hope (12-item Adult Hope Scale) ACE (10-item questionnaire) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACS/DOE Entry survey

BUDGET

Program Budget Narrative

1. **ISAHC Coordinator:** The role of the ISAHC Coordinator is described above. This position is full time. See Appendix for draft job description.
2. **ISAHC Pilot Program Manager::** Gateway Housing will hire Judith Samuels, PhD, to manage the ISAHC pilot project and supervise the ISAHC Coordinator. Dr. Samuels will dedicate approximately 1.5 days per week to the ISAHC pilot program. Dr. Samuels will be engaged on a contractual basis. Responsibilities of the Program Manager include:
 - A. Attending weekly meetings and participating in more frequent phone calls (as needed) with the Program Coordinator. These communications ensure proper supervision and assist the Coordinator with addressing issues that may arise within the ISAHC Teams.
 - B. Participating in meetings and phone calls with ISAHC-involved shelter provider organizations, as needed
 - C. Developing and managing appropriate communications with New York City government agencies. Attending meetings with DOE, HRA/DHS and other organizations, as necessary.
 - D. Serving as liaison between the ISAHC Pilot Program and the Gateway Housing Board members and other funders. Provide quarterly reports and other documents, as requested.
 - E. Assisting ISAHC Coordinator with tracking program results.
 - F. Acting as liaison to ISAHC Pilot Program evaluation team to help coordinate data collection and interpretation of results
3. **Equipment** (year one only): The ISAHC Coordinator will be working both in an office and in the field, at each of the three shelters participating in the Pilot Program. This diversity of locale will require both voice and data communications to remain in communication and accessible while mobile.
 - A. Cell phone will be used by the ISAHC Coordinator for work-related communications.
 - B. Laptop/tablet computer is the most appropriate computer device for the scope of work entailed in the Pilot Program. Requirements include light weight, able to support Microsoft Office, remote access capabilities (most likely via tethering to mobile device), and keyboard (attached or attachable).
 - C. Printer/scanner to scan documents for sharing and for printing for use as tools for the teams, tracking information and other materials.
4. **Communications:** The ISAHC Coordinator will need phone and data services for the cell phone that includes “tethering” to connect the laptop to the Internet when he or she is not in the office or does not have wifi access. The laptop “tethered” to the call phone can also be used at ISAHC team meetings to provide the Family Assistant access to up-to-date attendance and child school performance data for individual children.
5. **Supplies:** The cost of basic office supplies, such as paper, pens, printer ink, etc., is estimated at \$600 for the year.
6. **Travel:** The ISAHC Coordinator is a position that requires travel at least once per week to each of the three shelters participating in the Pilot Program. Additional travel will likely be required for meetings within New York City. The most efficient and cost-effective mode of travel for the ISAHC Coordinator is via the New York City bus and subway system. The cost of a monthly (30 day) Metrocard is included.
7. **ISAHC Team Training:** A full description of the training courses, to be provided by CUCS and Advocates for Children in New York, are described above. The CUCS course development fee is a cost in year one only.
8. **Project Data:** CIDI fee for assistance with ensuring data on school attendance for children living in shelters is accurate, and to assist with data improvement process where errors occur. Gateway Housing is negotiating a Memo of Understanding with CIDI regarding the ISAHC Pilot Program, to assist in general and help with tracking progress and success.
9. **Program Miscellaneous** (for shelter teams): This cost provides the three Pilot Program teams with a small amount of cash each month to support their efforts to help families solve problems related to improving school attendance of their shelter’s children. For example, if a family needs to purchase a new school

uniform for a child and they do not have the funds, the team can use these ISAHC funds to help make the purchase. The ISACH team can also use these funds to engage families in the goal of good attendance by provide reconition for families whith children who have good attendance The ISAHC Coordinator will track use of these funds at each shelter and provide semi-annual reports describing the expenditures, noting any pronounced patterns.

Budget Table (purposely left blank)

APPENDIX: JOB DESCRIPTION

Coordinator, Improving School Attendance for Homeless Children (ISAHC) Pilot Program

Organization: Gateway Housing

Reports To: Judith Samuels, PhD, Program Manager

Location: Main location is in Manhattan, but travel to all of New York City is required

Gateway Housing seeks a highly motivated, independent program coordinator who is committed to the goals of Improving School Attendance for Homeless Children (ISAHC) Pilot Program: assisting children living in New York City homeless shelters by reducing barriers to school attendance and success.

Gateway Housing is facilitating a pilot program to improve school attendance for children in homeless shelters that includes an independent program evaluation. To achieve transformation of homeless services, Gateway Housing facilitates, coordinates and shares findings as well as provides technical expertise on all aspects of its initiatives to participating providers, government and the affordable housing community at large. Gateway Housing's goal is nothing less than to initiate a fundamental shift away from New York City's current "one-size-fits-all" emergency homeless response to adopt person-centered service programs that employ proven, evidence-based practices and standardized staff members training, credentials, oversight and staff-to-client ratios.

Gateway Housing and its participating service providers have been examining how they might have a positive impact on homeless families while in shelter by implementing a new model of service. Despite primary focus of myriad resources directed to housing stability and exiting shelters, they are not producing system-wide positive results. Gateway Housing has concluded that a more effective and efficient service model in shelters would be to focus on an outcome that can be directly and significantly impacted: school attendance of students in temporary housing school, which has a high likelihood of resulting in other positive family outcomes.

Gateway Housing engaged a nationally known leader in this field, Judith Samuels, PhD, who has extensive experience designing, testing and disseminating evidence-based interventions for homeless families. While Dr. Samuels had defined and designed the ISAHC model to focus on improving school attendance for children living in New York City Tier II homeless family shelters, additional expected outcomes include shorter shelter stays and more useful whole-family assessments while in shelter.

Dr. Samuels has been developing the ISAHC model with the input and assistance of organizations that work with homeless families, especially those who have responsibility for ensuring school attendance of homeless children living in shelters. The model also has benefited from input of policymakers and program experts at the New York City Human Resource Administration (HRA), Department of Homeless Services (DHS), DOE, Advocates for Children of New York, and three shelter provider organizations within New York City.

SUMMARY:

ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

The ISAHC Program Coordinator will assist the ISAHC program teams at three (3) homeless family shelters in New York City participating in the Pilot Program. The ISAHC Coordinator will work with each of the teams, assisting with weekly team meetings to ensure use of the principals of the model, concepts from the training sessions, absentee data report and tools as prescribed. The ISAHC coordinator will also identify solutions to attendance challenges that cannot be solved by a team due to needed system or policy changes. The ISAHC coordinator also will ensure

that schools local to the shelters participating in the pilot program are informed and kept up-to-date on the work and progress of the ISAHC teams. The coordinator will meet with school principals and other school staff members as recommended by the principals. Ongoing communications between the local schools and the ISAHC teams will be enhanced by inclusion of the local school Attendance Teacher as a member. The ISAHC Coordinator will have a “home base” location in Manhattan but will be required to travel throughout New York City to attend meetings and work with shelter staff members.

JOB QUALIFICATIONS:

Educational background: Master’s Degree in social work or related area

Experience: Minimum of three (3) years experience working with homeless families and/or students in temporary housing is required.

Skills required:

- Understanding of the New York City homeless service sector
- Knowledge of education requirements for students in temporary housing and navigating the NY City education system
- Demonstrated leadership within a complex, problem-solving context
- Data analysis and reporting, including use of Microsoft Excel to develop of tracking reports and perform simple data analysis
- Excellent computer skills using software such as Microsoft Word and PowerPoint

ENDNOTES

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