

Elizabeth House



BHI's program is rated according to a number of measures that include incidence of repeat pregnancies, basic life management skills, job readiness, high school completion, parenting skills, health care, employment, and reduced dependence on public assistance. The teen family's progress is measured by assessing skill levels at intake, six months, one year, two years, graduation and during the first year of independent living. Some of the variables tracked include how well teens are able to care for their children, how well they have developed positive support systems, and what their plans are for the future. Data sources include program records, staff observations and interviews, as well as healthcare, school, and child-care records.

The results of our program are promising:

- over 90 percent of program graduates are living independently and have created stable nurturing homes for their children
- zero repeated unplanned pregnancies
- 100 percent school attendance
- 100 percent immunizations
- increased reunification with families
- 100 percent employment
- decreased dependency on TANF, WIC, and food stamps
- 85 percent enrollment in technical/post secondary educational facilities.

BHI provides more than a roof and four walls. We give homeless youth-led families a place to call home. In addition to meeting the basic needs of our residents (shelter, food, clothing), Elizabeth House introduces structure and discipline into their lives. Expectations are high but fair: residents assume responsibility early on and are required to sign a "resident contract" when entering the program. In addition to enrollment in an educational program, residents must abide by program rules that include maintaining curfews, performing assigned household chores, and attending group meetings.

The Elizabeth House program consists of six program elements:

1. Building Blocks (Parenting and Life Skills Curriculum).

Professionally trained staff conduct parenting classes and life skills training. The culturally sensitive curriculum is based on the specific, individual needs of the residents. Parenting classes address such issues as infant health, child development, and appropriate discipline. Life-skills training includes basic household management, securing housing, money management, and leadership skill-building. The Building Blocks program also helps teens prepare for adulthood through assertiveness training, sex education, conflict resolution training, stress management, and substance abuse prevention.

2. FOCUS Project (For Our Children's Understanding and Support). FOCUS is a play therapy program for high-risk children ages 6 and under, created to foster their cognitive, language, social, emotional and physical development and lay the groundwork for later academic success. The program was designed by early-childhood specialists to meet the development needs of our most vulnerable residents. FOCUS includes kindergarten readiness, literacy and language skill-building. The FOCUS program includes our new Toy Lending Library, a Discovery Toys sharing and learning initiative.

3. Case Management. Elizabeth House staff provides case management to our residents and graduates to ensure that they receive all services and benefits for which they are eligible. These include medical care, mental health services, childcare, school programs, and financial assistance.

4. Education. Enrollment in an educational program is required of all Elizabeth House residents. Academic counseling and vocational assessment is provided to foster the skills and habits needed to succeed in school.

5. Job Readiness Training. The Elizabeth House program provides residents and graduates with the skills they need to get a job, stay employed and advance in the workplace. Job readiness training includes work ethic, job search techniques, resume writing, "dress-for-success" workshops, interviewing skills, job retention tips, interpersonal and teamwork skills, and goal setting. Job Readiness Training also addresses clients' goals of post-secondary education. BHI works with residents and graduates of our program to prepare for the SAT, apply to universities and college, register for collegiate-level courses, and plan for life after their degree is earned.

6. Empower a Graduate Project. Elizabeth House often represents the only support system our young mothers have known in their lives. When a resident graduates from the program, we provide the safety net and support that all young adults need when they leave home for the first time. The Elizabeth House program assists graduates in securing permanent housing and provides one year of comprehensive case management that includes home visits, counseling, and mentoring. After a successful transition to independent living, we have found that most graduates continue to stay in touch with Elizabeth House staff and fellow residents. The pride of accomplishment, being independent, and becoming productive members of the community means the world to our residents.