FIRST TIME USERS OF MEN'S SHELTER SERVICES:

A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

A. Background

To develop a fuller understanding of several key service issues — including how men first come to the SCCM, the nature of their disabilities, and when intervention services should be offered — the Vera Institute undertook a limited survey of a sample of first time users of Shelter services. The survey sought first to learn something about the men's characteristics and background: race, age, length of residence in New York City, referral sources, and disability. It also attempted to measure service use by determining how long first timers depended on Shelter services and, for those men who subsequently left the Shelter, the likelihood of their returning during the following year.

The sample of 200 first timers was drawn as follows. Daily activity forms completed by the 5 X 8 Unit indicate when new Homeless Assistance numbers are issued: that is, when men previously unknown to the Shelter request services. A list of all men who first came to the Shelter from January 1, 1979 through January 14, 1979 was extracted and the records of the first 100 valid cases that could be located were reviewed. Thinking that there might be some seasonal variation in the types of first timers, a second sample of 100 men was selected in a similar fashion from the period beginning June 1, 1979.*

The 5 X 8 records of the full sample of 200 first timers were reviewed and relevant personal and service information available as of July 1, 1980

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* The January sample spanned 164 Homeless Assistance numbers to yield 100 cases: 19 numbers had not been assigned; 23 were "dummy" entries; 17 case records could not be found; 2 cases were underage; and 3 case records were too incomplete to use. The June sample spanned 139 Homeless Assistance numbers: 14 numbers had not been assigned; 15 were dummy entries; 8 case records could not be found; 1 case was underage; and 1 case record was too incomplete to use. (A dummy entry is made when a man previously known to the Shelter is erroneously or for convenience assigned a new number.)

was abstracted. Men who first came to the Shelter in January 1979 thus had approximately 18 months of potential service use; those coming in June 1979, approximately a full year. Because there is no reason to believe that the Shelter has begun to attract a different type of clientele over the past 18 months, this sample of 200 should be fairly representative of current first timers. It also permits some analyses of how first timers use services over a fairly long period of time.

B. Summary of Preliminary Findings

The following material briefly describes some findings relating to the backgrounds and patterns of service use of the 200 first timers under study.[*] (A fuller report will be issued in a few weeks time.) This summary does not distinguish between January and June cohorts, for which no striking differences were identified.

1. Race/Ethnicity

Slightly more than half (52% of the first timers were Black, 38% were White, and 10% were Hispanic. This distribution appears to follow closely that described by Shelter staff for the daily population found at the Shelter.

2. Age

First timers are predominantly young men. Overall, almost three-fourths (72%) of the men are younger than 40, while only 3% are 60 or older. More Black and Hispanic first timers are younger than their White counterparts: approximately 80% are younger than 40, as compared to 63% among the Whites. Conversely, almost a quarter (23%) of the Whites are 50 or older, a level almost

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[*] Due to inadequate records, only 98 cases from the June cohort have been included, thereby reducing the total to 198.

triple that for Blacks (9%). Not surprisingly, the median age for Blacks and Hispanics — 31 years — was somewhat younger than the 34 years found for the White first timers. These data reflect the common perception of the Black population being younger than the White, but they also underscore the relative youth of most first timers at the Shelter.

3. Residence in New York City

Most first timers (65% overall) are not recent arrivals to New York City but have spent at least a year in the city. But a significant proportion of all first timers — 20% — arrived in the city no more than a week prior to coming to the Shelter. In terms of racial-ethnic groups, more Blacks are longer term residents — 69% present for more than a year — than Whites, among whom 58% were in New York for more than a year. As would be expected, more White first-timers are recent arrivals to the city — 25% within the week and 32% within a month of coming to the Shelter — while 18% of the Blacks arrived within a week and 26% within the month.

4. Referral

Many men (38%) report that they were not directly referred to the Shelter but knew about it or were informed by a friend. These self-referrals are somewhat more common among Blacks (43%) than Whites (35%). For men actively referred to the Shelter, Income Maintenance Centers and the Emergency Assistance Unit are the most important sources, respectively referring 24% and 3% overall. Blacks are more likely to come to the Shelter through IM/EAU than Whites: 30% and 18% respectively. And half of the Hispanic first timers for whom data were available (9 of 18 men) came through this route. The NYPD accounts for slightly more than one in 10 referrals (11%): 9% among Blacks and 13% among Whites.

5. Disability

Overall, for half of these first timers no disabling condition was cited on

the 5 X 8 record. This finding was roughly similar for all racial groups: Blacks (53%), Hispanics (55%) and Whites (47%). Alcoholism was listed as a disability for 14% of the full sample: 18% of the Whites and 12% of the Blacks. Psychiatric problems were ascribed to an additional 12% of the sample: 15% of the Whites and 10% of the Blacks.

Because most first timers leave the Shelter within a short time (see below) and very few are seen by staff other than the 5 X 8 Unit, these data on disability must be viewed with some skepticism and used with restraint.

6. Length of First Episode

Due to the episodic fashion in which many men use Shelter services, this analysis uses a strict definition of a service episode: a period in which service is authorized or delivered without an interruption of more than 14 days. Accordingly, if a man was served by the Shelter, then spent at least 14 days with no indication of having received services, and subsequently received services at the Shelter, this analysis would consider two service episodes. The following data describe only the first service episode of the sample group.

Overall, almost half (48%) of the first timers complete their first service episode with 7 days: most of these short term users, in fact, came only once to the 5 X 8 Unit. By the end of two full weeks, 71% of the men had concluded their first episode; 75% did so within three weeks and 82% within four weeks. Only one of 10 (11%) first timers had a first episode lasting longer than three months. White first timers appear to be slightly more transient than Blacks or Hispanics, but differences are not significant. The striking finding is the rapid departure of all but a handful of first timers.

7. Returning Clients

Almost two-thirds (65%) of all first timers leave the Shelter never to reappear in the year after their first arrival at the Shelter: 61% of the

January cohort[#] and 69% of the June cohort. It is readily apparent that the longer a man's first service episode the greater the likelihood that he will experience subsequent episodes. Of those men who stay a week or less, only 23% reappear in the following 51 weeks. Roughly 40% of the men with first episodes of more than a week but less than three months reappear within the year. But 16 of the 21 men with first episodes longer than 3 months (76%) return within the year. The pattern is even more pronounced among Whites for whom the rate of return is 13% for men with one week episodes, 41% for men with episodes of two to four weeks, and 100% for those with first episodes lasting longer than three months. Among Black first timers the extremes are not so great: 32% of the men who stayed a week or less reappear, while 62% of the men with long first episodes (3 months plus) reappear.

C. Next Steps

1. Within a few weeks a full report on the first timer study will be completed. It will review data relating to variables not mentioned by this preliminary report. More important, it will reexamine some of the key variables from perspectives other than age or race. Some special groups that warrant further analysis include NYPD referrals, Income Maintenance/EAU referrals, persons recently arrived in New York City, and long-term users of Shelter services.

2. A review of the Shelter's criteria for and timing of referrals to intervention services could be conducted drawing heavily on these data.

[#]If the return rate during the full 18 months is examined, we find that 57% never returned: i.e., four cases returned after 12 months but before 18 months had elapsed.

3. It might be fruitful to review the welfare histories of the men in this sample of first timers. This would be especially valuable for those men referred by IM. We need to determine the feasibility of such an under-taking.

4. We also need to review the value of a study of a sample of Shelter clients present on a single day which analyzes some of the issues tackled in this study of first timers.

AGE by RACE/ETHNICITY

	BLACK	WHITE	HISPANIC	TOTAL
21-29	39	26	7	72
30-39	40	21	10	71
40-49	14	11	3	28
50-59	7	13	1	21
60+	2	4		6
TOTAL	102	75	21	198
	(52%)	(38%)	(10%)	

RESIDENCE IN NEW YORK CITY

	LESS THAN 1 WEEK	1 WEEK+ TO 1 MONTH	1 MONTH+ TO 1 YEAR	1 YEAR+	UNKNOWN	TOTAL
BLACK						
21-29	8	5		24	2	39
30-39	6	2	4	28		40
40-49		1		11	2	14
50-59	3		1	2	1	7
60+				2		2
TOTAL	17	8	5	67	5	102
WHITE						
21-29	9	2	2	12	1	26
30-39	4	1	3	12	1	21
40-49	1	2	1	5	2	11
50-59	3		1	9		13
60+	1			3		4
TOTAL	18	5	7	41	4	75
HISPANIC						
21-29		1		6		7
30-39	3			6	1	10
40-49		1		2		3
50-59				1		1
60+						
TOTAL	3	2		15	1	21
TOTAL						
#	38	15	12	123	10	198
%	20%	8%	6%	66%	*	100

REFERRAL

	SELF	NYPD	IM	EAU	HOSP	S.SVC.	OTHER	N/A	TOTAL
BLACK									
21-29	18	2	8	2	3	1	1	4	39
30-39	16	5	12	1	1	2	2	1	40
40-49	4		5			3	2		14
50-59	2	2	1		1	1			7
60+	2								2
TOTAL	42	9	26	3	5	7	5	5	102
WHITE									
21-29	10	5	4	1	2	2	1	1	26
30-39	7	2	4		1	3	1	3	21
40-49	2	2	1		5			1	11
50-59	4		2		1	3	2	1	13
60+	1				1	1		1	4
TOTAL	24	9	11	1	10	9	4	7	75
HISPANIC									
21-29	1	2	2	1				1	7
30-39	2		4	1		1	1	1	10
40-49	1		1					1	3
50-59	1								1
60+									
TOTAL	5	2	7	2		1	1	3	21
TOTAL									
#	71	20	44	6	15	17	10	15	198
%	39%	11%	24%	3%	8%	9%	6%	#	100

DISABILITY

BLACK

	None	Alcohol	Psych.	Drug	Phys.	Med.	Mul.	Unknown	TOTAL
21-29	27	2	2	4	1		1	2	39
30-39	17	5	6	1	2	1	7	1	40
40-49	5	4	2		2	1			14
50-59	4	1			2				7
60+					2				2
TOTAL	53	12	10	5	9	2	8	3	102

WHITE

	None	Alcohol	Psych.	Drug	Phys.	Med.	Mul.	Unknown	TOTAL
21-29	16	1	4	1	2	1	1		26
30-39	9	3	4	2	1		2		21
40-49	5	2				1	2	1	11
50-59	4	6	2				1		13
60+	1	1	1				1		4
TOTAL	35	13	11	3	3	4	5	1	75

HISPANIC

	None	Alcohol	Psych.	Drug	Phys.	Med.	Mul.	Unknown	TOTAL
21-29	4		2		1				7
30-39	5	1	1	1			1	1	10
40-49	2						1		3
50-59							1		1
60+									0
TOTAL	11	1	3	1	1		3	1	21

TOTAL

	None	Alcohol	Psych.	Drug	Phys.	Med.	Mul.	Unknown	TOTAL
#	99	26	24	9	13	6	16	5	198
%	51%	14%	12%	5%	7%	3%	8%	*	100

LENGTH OF FIRST EPISODE

	Less than 1 Week		1+-2 weeks	2+-3 weeks	3+- month	1+-2 months	2+-3 months	3+ months	TOTAL
	1 auth.	1+ auth.							
BLACK									
21-29	18	2	10	1	1	3	1	3	39
30-39	14	4	10	2	2	2		6	40
40-49	6		4	1				3	14
50-59	2		1			3		1	7
60+	1				1				2
TOTAL	41	6	25	4	4	8	1	13	102
WHITE									
21-29	13	1	5	1	3	3			26
30-39	10	1	3	2	3	1		1	21
40-49	5		2		1		2	1	11
50-59	7		3	1	1			1	13
60+	2		1		1				4
TOTAL	37	2	14	4	9	4	2	3	75
HISPANIC									
21-29	3	1		1				2	7
30-39	5		2					3	10
40-49	1		2						3
50-59			1						1
60+									0
TOTAL	9	1	5	1				5	21
TOTAL									
#	87	9	44	9	13	12	3	21	198
%	44	4	22	4	7	6	2	11	100

RETURN-NO RETURN by LENGTH OF FIRST EPISODE

	LESS THAN 1 WEEK		1 WEEK-1 MTH		1+-2 MTHS		2+-3 MTHS		3+ MTHS		TOTAL	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
BLACK												
21-29	4	16	4	8	2	1	0	1	2	1	12	27
30-39	9	9	5	9	1	1			4	2	19	21
40-49	1	5	1	4					2	1	4	10
50-59	1	1	0	1	1	2			6	1	2	5
60+	0	1	1	0							1	1
TOTAL	15	32	11	22	4	4	0	1	8	5	38	64
WHITE												
21-29	2	12	3	6	0	3					5	21
30-39	3	8	4	4	1	0			1	0	9	12
40-49	0	5	2	1			1	1	1	0	4	7
50-59	0	7	2	3					1	0	3	10
60+	0	2	0	2							0	4
TOTAL	5	34	11	16	1	3	1	1	3	0	21	54
HISPANIC												
21-29	1	3	1	0					2	0	4	3
30-39	1	4	1	1					3	0	5	5
40-49	0	1	1	1							1	2
50-59			0	1							0	1
60+												
TOTAL	2	8	3	3					5	0	10	11
TOTAL												
#	22	74	25	41	5	7	1	2	16	5	69	129
%	23%	77%	38%	62%	42%	58%	33%	67%	76%	24%	35%	65%